

PUBLIC RELATIONS NOT ONLY FOR THE ORGANIZATION BUT ALSO FOR SOCIETY: A REVIEW OF UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULA IN TÜRKİYE

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Araştırma Makalesi

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Abstract

The views that public relations prioritizes corporate interests and gains, and that it is evaluated only from a managerial perspective despite having a strong potential to serve the society, represent a critical perspective towards public relations. The critical point of view that the social role and effects of public relations have been neglected underlines that public relations are handled from a managerial perspective rather than a social perspective. In recent years, attention has been drawn to the need for a society-oriented public relations approach. It has become clear that future professionals need to be trained in accordance with the society-oriented understanding of public relations. This study was planned based on the fact that public relations education assumes an important function in the perception and practice of the profession. The study aims to determine the extent to which the social roles and functions of public relations are reflected in public relations undergraduate education in Türkiye. It has been revealed that the rate of courses on the social role and functions of public relations in the curricula is low at 2.34 percent, and in this direction, the need for a reconsideration of public relations education in Türkiye in this respect has been identified.

Keywords: Public Relations, Social Impact, Society Orientation, Public Relations Education, Undergraduate Curricula.

SADECE KURUM İÇİN DEĞİL TOPLUM İÇİN DE HALKLA İLİŞKİLER: TÜRKİYE'DEKİ LİSANS MÜFREDATLARI ÜZERİNE BİR İNCELEME

Özet

Halkla ilişkilerin kurumsal çıkar ve kazanımları önceliklendiren, topluma hizmet edebilecek güçlü bir potansiyele sahip olmasına rağmen sadece yönetsel açıdan değerlendirildiğine yönelik görüşler, halkla ilişkilere yönelik eleştirel bakış açısını temsil etmektedir. Son yıllarda ise literatürde toplum odaklı halkla ilişkiler anlayışına duyulan ihtiyaca dikkat çekilmektedir. Halkla ilişkilerin toplumsal etkilerinin tartışıldığı günümüzde, geleceğin profesyonellerinin halkla ilişkilerin toplum odaklı anlayışına uygun bir eğitime tabi tutulması gerekliliği ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu çalışma halkla ilişkiler eğitiminin mesleğin algılanması ve uygulanmasında önemli bir işlev üstlendiği bilgisi üzerine planlanmıştır. Çalışmanın amacı halkla ilişkilerin toplumsal rol ve işlevlerinin Türkiye'deki halkla ilişkiler lisans eğitimine ne ölçüde yansıtıldığının tespit edilmesidir. Türkiye'de halkla ilişkiler lisans eğitimi verilen program müfredatlarının içerik analizi tekniği ile incelendiği araştırmada, halkla ilişkilerin toplumsal rol ve işlevlerine yönelik derslerin müfredatlarda yer alma oranının yüzde 2,34 ile düşük bir oranda olduğu ve özellikle kurumsal sosyal sorumluluk derslerine odaklanıldığı ortaya konmuştur. Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgular doğrultusunda Türkiye'deki halkla ilişkiler eğitiminin toplum odaklı halkla ilişkiler anlayışı yönünden yeniden ele alınmasına yönelik gereksinim tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal Etki, Toplum Odaklılık, Halkla İlişkiler Eğitimi, Lisans Müfredatları.

Extended Abstract

Throughout its historical development, public relations (PR) has been criticized for being a discipline that is only concerned with corporate interests and is approached from a managerial perspective. Critiques in this vein point out that PR strategies and practices are not community-oriented, despite their strong potential to serve society. Critical perspectives in the literature point out that the social role and impact of public relations are not prioritized, that it is treated as a corporate function and that the public interest remains in the background (Berger, 2005; Holtzhausen, 2000; Ihlen & Van Ruler, 2007; Moloney, 2005; Edwards, 2006; Becerikli, 2005; Artan Özoran, 2020; Özkan, 2017).

The relational paradigm, which has come to the fore in the field of PR in recent years (Watson & Noble, 2005; Ledingham, 2006; Bruning & Ledingham, 2000), draws attention to the society-oriented nature of the field and underlines the importance of community relations for PR (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Hon & Grunig, 1999). In this respect, PR represents strategies and practices that emphasize the society-oriented nature of organizations that are part of the society in which they operate.

Based on this information, this study aims to show whether the perspective on the social role and impact of PR is reflected in PR education. Within the framework of the study, a research has been conducted in which the curricula of PR undergraduate programs in Turkey have been examined using the content analysis technique, one of the qualitative research methods. The basis of this research is that PR education has an important function in the way PR is put into practice and in the way PR is perceived by professionals. The main purpose of the research is to show in which courses and to what extent the perspective of the community-oriented structure of PR is included in the education of future PR practitioners and to determine to what extent the society-oriented understanding of PR is reflected in the education.

In line with this purpose, the research is expected to answer the following questions:

- What is the structure of undergraduate PR education in Türkiye and how is it positioned?
- Which courses are prominent in undergraduate PR education in Türkiye?
- Does undergraduate PR education in Türkiye include courses related to the social role and functions of PR?
- Which courses are related to the social roles and functions of PR in undergraduate PR education in Türkiye and in what intensity?

Content analysis technique, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study in order to reach the findings that can answer the research questions above. The categories and criteria needed during the content analysis were determined in line with the detailed literature review, research questions and the collection of raw data. Within the scope of the research, data were collected between 30 September 2024 and 29 November 2024. During the content analysis process, the collected data were coded and transferred to the SPSS Program and the findings obtained were presented with frequency analyses and percentage tables within the scope of descriptive statistics. The

sample of the research consisted of 59 public relations undergraduate programs whose curricula were accessible and active via their web sites.

The results of the study showed that courses related to communication science and related disciplines such as advertising, journalism, radio-television, cinema, interpersonal communication, etc. constitute the category with the highest share in the curriculum of undergraduate PR education in Türkiye (n=1969, 43.47%). This category is followed by PR courses (n=1327, 29.31 percent), courses related to social sciences (n=724, 15.98 percent), and general university courses (n=509, 11.24 percent). It was found that courses on the social role and functions of PR are included in the curricula as “Corporate Social Responsibility”, “Community Service Practices/Social Support Projects”, “Volunteering Activities”, “PR in Non-Governmental Organizations”, “Sustainability/Sustainability Communication” and “Social Marketing” (total n=106), and the percentage of these courses in the curriculum is low at 2.34 percent among all course categories. The type of courses, whether required or elective, is also indicative in terms of the importance given to the social role and functions of PR in public relations education. As can be seen from the results of the distribution of courses according to whether they are required or elective, there is a concentration in the form of elective courses (n=66) in terms of courses on the social role and functions of PR.

The results of this study, which aims to determine the position of the social roles and functions of PR in the curricula and underlines the need to educate future PR professionals in line with this understanding, reveal the need to rethink PR education in Turkey from this perspective.

GİRİŞ

For years, public relations has been positioned as a discipline that has been subjected to various criticisms due to its managerial approach. In the studies reflecting a critical perspective on PR, it is underlined that despite having a strong potential to serve the society, corporate interests are prioritized in public relations practices, PR is handled from a managerial perspective rather than a social perspective, public relations is evaluated as a corporate function rather than its social role and effects, and the public interest, which expresses the basic mission of the field, remains in the background

(Artan Özoran, 2020; Becerikli, 2005; Berger, 2005; Edwards, 2006; Holtzhausen, 2000; Ihlen & Van Ruler, 2007; Moloney, 2005; Özkan, 2017). These perspectives, which are prominent in critical studies that consider PR from a managerial perspective and evaluate it only in terms of corporate gains and corporate success, bring the risk of ignoring the social impact and social roles of public relations. The fact that organizations act in a society-oriented manner as a part of the society in which they operate brings about a society-oriented understanding of PR that exists not only for the organization but also for the community and guarantees the social impact and contributions of public relations.

With the relationship paradigm, which made the social roles and functions of PR more visible and attracted increasing attention in the field of public relations, the aim of establishing, maintaining and managing positive and long-term relationships with publics (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000; Ledingham, 2006; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Watson & Noble, 2005) came to the forefront and the necessity of addressing PR with a target audience and society-oriented approach began to be emphasized. In the relational paradigm, it is underlined that PR should be evaluated with a public and society-oriented structure by moving away from the narrow scope of that is compressed only within the organizational field and the understanding of handling it from a managerial perspective. In line with the relational paradigm, the importance of examining PR in a society-oriented manner and in terms of social relations has also emerged. The prominence of communal relations in the classifications of relations between organizations and publics within the scope of relationship management (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Hon & Grunig, 1999) necessitates public relations to work towards the expectations, needs and benefits of the society in which the organization operates.

Based on this information, this study aims to reveal whether the perspective on the social role and effects of public relations is reflected in education in the structuring of undergraduate PR curricula in Türkiye. PR education has an important function in the way PR is put into practice and the way public relations is perceived by professionals. The main purpose of this study is to reveal in which courses and in which intensity the perspective on the society-oriented structure of public relations is included

in the education of future PR practitioners and to determine to what extent the society-oriented understanding of public relations is reflected in education.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Public Relations for the Organization Versus Public Relations for Society?

Considering PR as a corporate function within the organizational field and only from a managerial perspective brings with it the perception of a profession that aims to maximize corporate interests, keeps the public interest in the background and does not take into account the social role and effects of the field. It would not be wrong to say that the criticisms that have been going on for many years stem from a basic argument that PR does not have a society-oriented structure. In the critical perspective the assumption comes to the fore that public relations represents institutions and groups with different values, interests and with different behaviors that aim to maximize their own gains within the capitalist system (Moloney, 2005, p. 551) and that it creates influence and domination in society for the benefit of the institution by acting in the interests of the institution (Edwards, 2006, p. 229). The views that public relations can manipulate the facts for corporate gains (Mickey, 1997) and that PR professionals play a critical role to gain more advantage for their organizations or the clients they serve (Roper, 2011, p. 83) lead to the perception of PR as a set of strategies and practices that prioritize only corporate gains and neglect the community and social good. In the context of these criticisms, PR is perceived as a discipline that puts the public interest second (Becerikli, 2008: 21) and the PR profession and practitioners in this field are often characterized with various adjectives with negative connotations (Sayımer, 2007, p. 83).

It can be said that these criticisms of public relations are caused by the fact that PR, despite having a strong capacity to serve stakeholders and society, has effectively served strong economic producers and capitalism for many years (Berger, 2005, p. 6). In order to eliminate these criticisms, it is necessary to study PR, which are usually considered from an institution-oriented perspective and from a managerial point of view, from a social point of view (Ihlen & Van Ruler, 2007). The management paradigm, which has been dominant in the field of public relations for many years, defines and limits public relations within the framework of the organizational field and

also evaluates public relations in a functional manner (Artan Özoran, 2020), causing public relations to be evaluated solely by the criterion of corporate success and failure (Özkan, 2017, p. 78). PR as a discipline with significant effects on society, beyond being defined from a narrow point of view only as an institutional function, it is necessary to study and understand it in a social, cultural and political context from a broader point of view (Holtzhausen, 2000, p. 95). Today, in order to eliminate the conditions that form the basis for these criticisms of the field, it is important to consider public relations from a social perspective and study it in a society-oriented manner. PR has a structure focused on bringing about the changes that are foreseen between human groups, organizations or society in the broadest sense (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2012) and this structure underlines the necessity of studying public relations not only from a managerial perspective, but also from the point of view of their social roles.

From a managerial perspective, PR is a management function that focuses on establishing relationships with publics who have the power to determine the behavior of the organization and who are affected by the results of corporate behavior. Public relations ensures that the target audiences with whom it develops relations are represented in management decisions affecting them and adds value to the organization in this respect (Grunig, 2006). The positioning of PR as a managerial function stems from its contribution to the policy-making and decision-making processes of senior management. As a managerial function, PR can ensure that the expectations, interests and concerns of the target audience are represented in the corporate structure and corporate strategies are shaped accordingly. In this respect, public relations, which is positioned as a bridge between the organizations and target audiences, provides consultancy to the management in shaping corporate strategies that will enable the achievement of corporate goals (Boztepe, 2014: 72). At the same time, PR is accepted as a managerial task due to its impact on important managerial decisions such as the formation of the corporate philosophy, determination of corporate objectives, and adaptation of the organization to changing environmental conditions (Peltekoğlu, 2007: 5). From a managerial point of view, although PR is subjected to criticism due to its managerial function, it is considered in terms of the contributions it can make to the organization and it is considered as a management task.

Historically, public relations has privileged an organizational perspective when compared to actors (publics/stakeholders/community members) within the organization's social environment (Hurst & Johnston, 2021). However, it can be said that this situation has been eliminated by addressing public relations in line with the relational paradigm and evolving towards a society-oriented understanding. The ultimate goal of public relations is to establish relationships between organizations and publics and to ensure the continuity of existing relationships (Watson & Noble, 2005, p. 185); the basic criterion for success is the existence of positive and long-term relationships between organizations and their publics (Ledingham, 2006). The relationship paradigm positions PR as a function responsible for the management of relationships between organizations and publics (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000), while at the same time emphasizing the long-term and sustainable nature of these relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999). In recent academic studies on public relations, it has been observed that the relationship between organizations and the public has received increasing attention (Cheng, 2018). It is noteworthy that PR strategies and practices that will be shaped in line with the relational paradigm tend to have a social orientation. Communal relationships, which emerge through institutional activities focused on the benefit of society without expecting any direct reward (Hon & Grunig, 1999), are shaped towards the purpose of engaging in activities that will ensure the social and economic development of society, contributing to the level of social development, and engaging in activities that address social interests and concerns (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999). When considered from this perspective, PR moves away from the narrow scope of its managerial perspective. The contributions that can be made to society through public relations are highlighted by focusing on the functions and roles that public relations can undertake within society.

The fact that organizations, whether they realize it or not, have a significant social impact on the communities in which they operate and on society more broadly, whether positive or negative, points to the imperative for organizations - and PR - to respond to societal expectations (Hurst & Johnson, 2021).

1.2. Public Relations Education and Current Situation in Türkiye

It is known that the inclusion of PR as an academic discipline in university education was on the agenda in the first two decades of the 20th century. The first university-level course in public relations, "Publicity Techniques," was taught at the University of Illinois in the United States in 1920. The first course named "Public Relations" was taught by Edward L. Bernays in 1923 and 1924 at the New York University Journalism Department (Cutlip, 1994, as cited in Wright, 2011, p. 238).

In Türkiye, the first PR course was taught at the university level with a delay of about 50 years compared to the USA. The first course in PR was held in 1966 at the School of Press and Broadcasting of the Faculty of Political Sciences of Ankara University (Geylan, 1994). When the School of Press and Broadcasting was transformed into the Faculty of Communication in July 1992, it gained a three-department structure as Journalism, Public Relations and Publicity, Radio, Television and Cinema; PR education was started under a department affiliated to the Faculty of Communication (History of the Faculty of Communication of Ankara University, <http://www.ilef.ankara.edu.tr/hakkinda/>. Accessed August 10, 2024). Following Ankara University, PR education began to be given at state universities such as Istanbul University, Marmara University and Ege University. The Institute of Journalism, founded in 1950 under the Faculty of Economics of Istanbul University, was renamed the Institute of Journalism and Public Relations in the early 1970s. In 1982, the institute was renamed as the School of Press and Broadcasting, and from 1989 onwards, PR education began to be taught under the department of "Publicity and Public Relations". Today, Istanbul University Faculty of Communication provides education with a structure consisting of three separate departments: Journalism, Public Relations and Publicity, Radio and Television and Cinema (History of Istanbul University Faculty of Communication, <https://iletisim.istanbul.edu.tr/tr/content/fakulte-hakkinda/fakulte-tarihi>. Accessed August 11, 2024). Marmara University Faculty of Communication, which has its roots in the Istanbul Journalism School founded in 1948, continued its activities as the School of Press and Broadcasting in 1982 and was renamed the Faculty of Communication in 1992. There are three departments in the faculty: Journalism, Public Relations and Publicity, Radio Television and Cinema (History of Marmara University Faculty of Communication, <https://iletisim.marmara.edu.tr/fakulte/genel->

bilgiler. Accessed August 11, 2024). Ege University, which has a history dating back to the School of Journalism founded in 1968 and where public relations education began at the higher education level, gained the status of Faculty of Communication in 1992. Ege University Faculty of Communication consists of the Department of Public Relations and Publicity, as well as the departments of Journalism, Radio-Television and Cinema, Advertising, New Media and Communication (History of Ege University Faculty of Communication, <https://iletisim.ege.edu.tr/tr-1039/tarihce.html>. Accessed August 12, 2024).

Today, there are 73 Communication Faculties affiliated with state and foundation universities in Türkiye, where the main focus is on four-year public relations and publicity undergraduate education. However, it is seen that PR undergraduate education is also provided within the scope of different faculties such as the Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Applied Sciences, etc., apart from the Faculty of Communication (Higher Education Council, <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>. Accessed September 5, 2024). More detailed information about the structure of PR undergraduate education in Türkiye will be included in the findings section of the study. When the evaluations and criticisms of PR education in Türkiye and around the world are considered today, it is seen that the criticisms conveyed in the previous parts of the study regarding the perception and implementation of public relations are also valid in terms of criticisms towards PR education. It has been conveyed in the previous parts of the study that the criticisms in the literature mainly stem from the management perspective of the field; information on the reasons for these criticisms and their basic arguments is included. In response to these criticisms, views on the necessity of considering public relations as a strategy and a set of practices that aim to create a balance between the organizations, its target audiences and social expectations come to the fore in the PR literature. In this context, attention is drawn to the social role that public relations undertake in carrying out activities that will provide both organizational and social benefits. However, the fact that the social role of public relations is not given enough space in the literature may cause deficiencies in PR education (Yılmaz Sert & Çevik Ergin, 2019). At this point, attention should be drawn to the need for a field-specific training curriculum in order for public relations to provide better service to both institutions and society (Kruckeberg, 1998: 245).

According to the Report on PR Education for the 21st Century, the courses that should be included in an ideal undergraduate PR curriculum are as follows (The Report of the Commission on Public Relations Education, 2006):

- Introduction to PR
- Case studies reviewing professional practice in PR
- PR research, measurement, and evaluation
- PR law and ethics
- PR writing and production
- PR planning and management
- PR campaigns
- Supervised experience (internship) in public relations
- Directed electives (The report lists the recommended elective courses as follows: business management, marketing, accounting, finance, economics, consumer behavior, political science and political system, public administration, social psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, English and English writing, governmental and political campaigns, intercultural communication, ethnic and feminist studies, and international business and communication.)

In the above-mentioned report, which proposes a framework for the courses that contemporary PR education should cover, it is seen that PR education includes courses directly related to the field as well as courses aimed at ensuring the contact of public relations with other disciplines. However, it is noteworthy that the proposed course list does not focus directly on the social role of PR, its social impact and the functions it can perform within society. It is also important to note that studies seeking an answer to the question of how PR education should be structured have found that it needs to focus solely on meeting the expectations of the PR sector. However, it can be said that this situation may result in the neglect of social roles in PR education. For example, in a study conducted by Conrad (2020), interviews were conducted with 45 public relations trainers to determine the objectives of PR education in Australia. The results of this research suggest that Australian PR educators are mostly teaching the professional skills that their students will use when they graduate and find work in the

public relations industry. In this respect, it can be said that the way the profession is perceived in the PR sector is effective in shaping public relations education.

2. Methodology

In the literature, it is noteworthy that public relations has been subjected to various criticisms due to its structure focusing on corporate gains and its acceptance as a set of strategies and practices that are handled from a managerial perspective, and that the social roles and functions of public relations have been neglected. Based on the fact that public relations education plays an important role in the perception and practice of the public relations profession, this study aims to determine the extent to which the societal roles and functions of public relations are reflected in undergraduate public relations education. In line with this purpose, the research is expected to answer the following questions:

- What is the structure of undergraduate PR education in Türkiye and how is it positioned?
- Which courses are prominent in undergraduate PR education in Türkiye?
- Does undergraduate PR education in Türkiye include courses related to the social role and functions of public relations?
- Which courses are related to the social roles and functions of public relations in undergraduate public relations education in Türkiye and in what intensity?

Content analysis technique, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study in order to reach the findings that can answer the research questions above. Content analysis, which provides social scientists with a systematic method for examining raw data obtained from archives, documents and mass media and analyzing them within a framework of meaning (Demirci and Köseli, 2011: 332), is an objective and systematic research technique that aims to transform content into quantitative data (Jensen, 2011). In the content analysis process of the study, the data collected were coded into meaningful sets in the context of categories and criteria by acting in line

with Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach, and the results were reviewed by going back to the raw data and checking the coding again in order to verify the findings obtained. The categories and criteria needed during the content analysis were determined in line with the detailed literature review, research questions and the collection of raw data. Within the scope of the research, data were collected between 30 September 2024 and 29 November 2024. During the content analysis process, the collected data were coded and transferred to the SPSS Program and the findings obtained were presented with frequency analyses and percentage tables within the scope of descriptive statistics.

2.1. Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of public relations undergraduate curricula in Türkiye. It is known that PR education at undergraduate level in Türkiye takes place as a department in Communication Faculties and in some other faculties other than Communication Faculties. In this study, it was aimed to examine the PR curricula of all universities and faculties providing public relations undergraduate education in Türkiye and to reach the entire population. However, 36 public relations departments, whose curricula could not be accessed through the website and were not active, were excluded from the scope. Accordingly, 59 PR curricula were analyzed in this study.

2.2. Limitations

The main limitation of the research is that the curricula of associate degree or postgraduate programs that include public relations education other than undergraduate level education are not subjected to analysis. In this study, only undergraduate curricula were focused on by excluding associate degree and graduate programs within the scope of PR education at higher education level in Türkiye and the research was limited to the analysis of undergraduate curricula. The main reason for this limitation is that public relations undergraduate departments in Türkiye have a high density in terms of both unit-based and student numbers.

3. Findings

In the research, firstly, it was determined in the search engine on the statistical web page of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK, <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>. Accessed October 02, 2024) in which universities public relations undergraduate education is provided. The table below provides an answer to research question 1 by conveying the findings on the structure and position of PR undergraduate education in Türkiye:

Type of Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
Faculty of Communication/Faculty of Communication Sciences	64	67,35%
Faculty of Business Administration	4	4,22%
Faculty of Applied Sciences/School of Applied Sciences	14	14,72%
Faculty of Art and Design/Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture	2	2,11%
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences	2	2,11%
Faculty of Economics, Administrative Sciences/Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences	6	6,33%
Faculty of Open Education/Faculty of Open and Distance Education	2	2,11%
Faculty of Social Sciences	1	1,05%
Total	95	100%

Table 1: Faculties Offering Undergraduate Public Relations Education

As can be seen from the table, it has been determined that public relations education at the undergraduate level in Türkiye is mostly located within the faculties of communication as a department (n=64, 67.35 percent). Faculties of communication are followed by faculties/schools of applied sciences (n=14, 14,72 percent), faculties of economics, administrative and social sciences (n=6, 6,33 percent) and faculties of business administration (n=4, 4,22 percent).

Department Name	Frequency	Percentage
Department of Public Relations and Publicity	40	42,10%
Department of Public Relations and Advertising	55	57,90%
Total	95	100%

Table 2: Name of the Departments Where Public Relations Education Is Given

As presented in Table 2, public relations undergraduate education in Türkiye is mostly offered under the department of “Public Relations and Advertising”; another department where education is carried out is “Public Relations and Publicity”.

University Type	Frequency	Percentage
State University	61	64,21%
Foundation University	34	35,79%
Total	95	100%

Table 3: Type of University Where Public Relations Education Is Offered

In Türkiye, PR education at the undergraduate level is mostly provided by state universities (n=61, 64.21%). The rate of foundation universities is slightly more than half of the state universities (n=34, 35,79%).

In the content analysis, in order to reach the findings that will answer the second research question ‘Which courses are prominent in PR undergraduate education in Türkiye?’, a review was conducted on the institutional web pages of universities, faculties and departments where PR undergraduate education is provided. The departments whose curricula could not be accessed during the coding process conducted on the websites of the departments could not be included in the analysis. Table 4, Table 5, Table 6, Table 7 and Table 8 below show the course distributions of PR departments (n=59) whose current curricula could be accessed. Table 4 shows the common courses recommended by the Council of Higher Education in Türkiye for undergraduate programs, which are also included in PR undergraduate curricula:

Common Courses for Universities	Frequency	Percentage
Atatürk's Principles and History of Revolution	115	22,62%
Turkish Language	117	23,00%
Foreign Language	135	26,52%
Career Planning	40	7,85%
Entrepreneurship	43	8,44%
Sign Language	11	2,16%
Introduction to University Life/University Culture	15	2,94%
Physical Education	2	0,39%
Occupational Health and Safety	26	5,10%
Fine Arts	5	0,98%
Total	509	100%

Table 4: Table Showing the Distribution of Common Courses for Universities in PR Department Curricula

As presented in Table 4, among the courses common to universities in PR undergraduate curricula, those related to foreign language education come to the fore (n=135, 26.52%). Foreign language courses are followed by Turkish Language (n=117, 23 percent) and Atatürk's Principles and History of Revolution (n=115, 22.62%). Other courses are entrepreneurship, career planning, occupational health and safety, introduction to university life/university culture and sign language courses.

Table 5 below shows the courses related to social sciences in PR curricula:

Courses Related to Social Sciences	Frequency	Percentage
Business	32	4,42%
Political Sciences	77	10,63%
Law	91	12,57%
Economy	53	7,32%
Sociology	97	13,40%

Psychology	82	11,32%
Marketing	47	6,50%
Research Methods	77	10,63%
Statistics	24	3,31%
Literature	7	0,96%
Administration and Organization	23	3,17%
Behavioral Science	26	3,61%
Philosophy	28	3,87%
Art	42	5,81%
History of Civilization	18	2,48%
Total	724	100%

Table 5: Table Showing the Distribution of Courses Related to Social Sciences

As can be seen from Table 4, which presents the findings on the basic courses directly linked to social sciences in PR undergraduate education in Türkiye, sociology courses (n=97, 13.40%) come to the forefront in the field of social sciences in PR education. Sociology courses are followed by law (n=91, 12.57%), psychology (n=82, 11.32%), political science (n=77, 10.63%) and research methods (n=77, 10.63%).

Table 6 below shows the distribution of courses in communication science and related disciplines in PR curricula:

Courses in Communication Science and Related Disciplines	Frequency	Percentage	Courses in Communication Science and Related Disciplines	Frequency	Percentage
Communication Science/Introduction to Communication	105	5,33%	Consumer Behavior	50	2,52%
Communication Theories	64	3,25%	Political Communication/Political Campaigns	83	4,20%

Advertising	374	18,98%	Information and Communication Technology/Computer and Internet Applications	93	4,71%
Journalism	74	3,74%	International Communication/Intercultural Communication	51	2,58%
Radio and Television	35	1,77%	Multimedia/Transmedia Storytelling	13	0,66%
Cinema	54	2,73%	Marketing Communications	64	3,25%
Animation	12	0,61%	Communication Ethics	37	1,87%
Interpersonal Communication	44	2,23%	Propaganda	17	0,86%
Grafic Design/Visual Communication Design	75	3,80%	Photography	76	3,85%
Publishing/Digital Publishing	12	0,61%	Persuasive Communication	47	2,38%
Human Resources Management	29	1,46%	Globalization	14	0,71%
Media Literacy/Digital Literacy	52	2,64%	Media and Gender	28	1,42%
Body Language and Diction	44	2,22%	Media Management/Media Planning	54	2,74%
Human Rights/Democracy	21	1,06%	Artificial Intelligence/Big Data	23	1,16%
Ideology, Discourse and Media	13	0,66%	Social Network Marketing/Digital and Mobile Marketing	23	1,16%
Digital Games/Gamification	10	0,51%	Media and Culture/Media and Society	30	1,53%

Public Opinion Research/Market Research	31	1,57%	Semiotics	37	1,88%
Customer Relationship Management	24	1,21%	Total Quality Management	10	0,51%
Popular Culture/Consumer Culture	58	2,94%	Other	88	4,69%
Total	n= 1969 100%				

Table 6: Table Showing the Distribution of Courses Related to Communication Science and Related Disciplines

As shown in Table 6, advertising (n=374, 18.98 percent) stands out in PR curricula in terms of courses related to communication science and related disciplines. The fact that the departments in which PR education is provided in faculties are mostly structured under the name of “Public Relations and Advertising” (see Table 2) explains the prominence of the advertising discipline in the curricula. Advertising-related courses are followed by communication science (n=105, 5.33%), information and communication technologies/computer and internet applications (n=93, 4.71%), political communication/political campaigns (n=83, 4.20%), photography (n=76, 3.85%), graphic design/visual communication design (n=75, 3.80%) and journalism (n=74, 3.74%). Courses with a frequency of less than 10 in the curricula were coded as other. Some of the courses in the other category are as follows; cultural heritage management, leadership, new social movements, science communication, digital activism, emotional intelligence, neuromarketing, dramaturgy, communication and migration, communication and religion, political economy of communication, disaster communication, cultural anthropology, social capital management, family and communication, etc.

Table 7 below shows the distribution of courses coded as other in the content analysis:

Courses Coded as Other	Frequency	Percentage
Tourism Management/Promotion	9	10,23 %
Cultural Heritage Management	3	3,41 %
Leadership	9	10,23 %
New Social Movements	7	7,97 %
Science Communication	2	2,27 %
Digital Activism	3	3,41 %
Podcasting	4	4,54 %
Emotional Intelligence	8	9,08 %
Neuromarketing	6	6,82 %
Dramaturgy	4	4,54 %
Communication and Migration	3	3,41 %
Communication and Religion	3	3,41 %
Communication Seminars	2	2,27 %
Media and Politics	5	5,68 %
Political Economy of Communication	6	6,82 %
Disaster Communication	3	3,41 %
Cultural Anthropology	6	6,82 %
Social Capital Management	3	3,41 %
Family and Communication	2	2,27 %
Total	88	100 %

Table 7: Table Showing the Distribution of Courses Coded in the Other Category

As can be seen in Table 7, among the courses in the other category, tourism management/promotion and leadership courses have the highest weight (n=9, 10.23 percent). These courses are followed by emotional intelligence, new social movements, neuromarketing, political economy of communication and cultural anthropology. Courses such as science communication, digital activism, cultural anthropology, disaster communication, media and politics, communication and migration, communication and religion, tourism, cultural heritage management, etc. are considered to be important in terms of providing future professionals with an interdisciplinary approach that can support the social functions of public relations.

The table below shows the distribution of PR courses, which constitute the main focus of PR education, in the curricula:

PR Courses	Frequency	Percentage
Basic PR Courses	303	22,84%
Courses for Digital PR Management	121	9,12%
Media Relations	11	0,84%
Public Relations Writing	54	4,07%
Presentation Techniques in PR	34	2,57%
Professional Foreign Language	96	7,24%
Corporate Communications	58	4,38%
Perception Management	18	%1,36
Public Relations Creativity	11	0,83%
Event Management	37	2,80%
Crisis Communication/Risk Communication	59	4,45%
Image Management	37	2,80%
PR in Public Institutions	21	1,58%
Internal Public Relations	10	0,75%
Corporate Culture	9	0,67%
Corporate Advertising	7	0,52%
Reputation Management	29	2,18%
Critical Approaches in PR	19	1,43%
Corporate Identity	18	1,36%
Political Public Relations	8	0,60%
PR Ethics	21	1,58%
Sponsorship	29	2,18%
International Public Relations	32	2,41%
Public Diplomacy	18	1,36%
Protocol Management	21	1,58%

Health Communication	31	2,34%
Brand Communication Management	68	5,12%
Lobbying	24	1,80%
Corporate Social Responsibility	42	3,16%
Community Service Practices/Social Support Projects	8	0,60%
Volunteering Activities	16	1,20%
PR in Non-Governmental Organizations	14	1,05%
Sustainability/Sustainability Communication	21	1,58%
Social Marketing	5	0,37%
Other	17	1,28%
Total	1327	100%

Table 8: Table Showing the Distribution of PR Courses

Table 8 above shows the distribution of courses directly related to public relations in PR undergraduate curricula. In line with the findings, it is noteworthy that the curricula focus on PR management, PR strategy and practices, and PR campaigns, which can be defined as the basic courses of public relations (n=303, 22.84%). After the basic courses of public relations, the second focus of the curricula is digital PR management. Digital public relations courses, which cover digital content production, new media and social media management in public relations, make up 9.12 percent of the curricula. These courses are followed by courses on specific application areas of public relations. In the data analysis phase, the other category was opened for courses with a frequency of less than 5 in the curricula. The courses under the other category are public relations literacy, urban communication, agenda management, leader communication, PR media and tools, measurement and evaluation in PR, target audience/stakeholder analysis and financial PR.

The findings presented in Table 8 are also important in terms of answering the third research question “Are there any courses related to the social roles and functions of public relations within the scope of public relations undergraduate education in Türkiye?” and the fourth research question “Which courses focus on the social roles

and functions of public relations in PR undergraduate education in Türkiye and in what intensity?”. In the analysis, it was determined that there are courses on the social roles and functions of public relations within the scope of PR undergraduate education in Türkiye, and it was revealed that these courses are included in the curricula under the names of “Corporate Social Responsibility”, “Community Service Practices / Social Support Projects”, “Volunteering Studies”, “Public Relations in Non-Governmental Organizations”, “Sustainability / Sustainability Communication” and “Social Marketing”. It should be noted that the Volunteering Activities course is a common course recommended by the Council of Higher Education for all universities. The rate of courses on the social roles and functions of public relations in the curriculum within the scope of public relations courses is 7.96 percent. This finding from the research indicates that PR undergraduate education includes courses on the social roles and functions of public relations, and at the same time, it shows that the courses on the social roles and functions of public relations remain at a low level with a rate of approximately 8 percent among the total PR courses.

Table 9 below shows the weight of all course categories in PR undergraduate curricula in Türkiye:

Course Categories	Frequency	Percentage
University Common Courses	509	11,24%
Courses Linked to Social Sciences	724	15,98%
Courses in Communication Science and Related Disciplines	1969	43,47%
Public Relations Courses	1327	29,31%
Total	4529	100%

Table 9: Distribution of Course Categories in Curricula

As can be seen from Table 9, in PR undergraduate education in Türkiye, courses related to communication science and related disciplines such as advertising, journalism, radio-television, cinema, interpersonal communication, etc. constitute the category with the highest percentage (n=1969, 43.47%). This category is followed by public relations courses (n=1327, 29.31%), courses related to social sciences (n=724,

15.98%) and university common courses (n=509, 11.24%). The ratio of courses on the social roles and functions of public relations (total n=106) in the curriculum among all course categories is 2.34 percent.

The grade and type of courses on the social role and functions of PR in the curriculum also differ across departments. The table below presents findings on the grade and type of courses in the curriculum:

Name of the Course	First Grade	Second Grade	Third Grade	Fourth Grade	Grade Information Inaccessible	Required Course	Elective Course
Corporate Social Responsibility	1	5	22	13	1	17	25
Community Service Practices/Social Support Projects	2	2	3	1	-	5	3
Volunteering Activities	-	1	10	5	-	-	16
Public Relations in Non-Governmental Organizations	-	2	4	7	1	2	12
Sustainability/Sustainability Communication	1	5	5	10	-	16	5
Social Marketing	-	-	1	4	-	-	5
Total	4	15	45	40	2	40	66

Table 10: The Position of Courses on the Social Role and Functions of Public Relations in the Curricula

As indicated by the findings in Table 10 regarding the positioning of the courses on the social roles and functions of public relations in the curricula, the majority of the courses are included in the curricula as third grade courses (n=45), followed by fourth grade (n=40), second grade (n=15) and first grade (n=4), respectively. When we look at the distribution of courses according to whether they are required or elective, it is revealed that there is a concentration of elective courses (n=66).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The views that public relations prioritizes corporate interests and gains and that it is considered as a corporate function by evaluating it only from a managerial perspective, despite its strong potential to serve the society, point out that the public interest, which expresses the basic mission of public relations, is ignored in strategies and practices.

Today, changing social expectations and agenda issues also have an impact on the corporate agenda. The fact that organizations face requirements such as stakeholder expectations, competitive conditions, etc. that require them to act in a society-oriented manner as a part of the society in which they operate day by day brings along a society-oriented public relations approach that exists not only for the organization but also for the society, focusing on the social impact and roles of public relations. As stated by Bıçakçı and Aktaş Kuyucu (2024: 21), the understanding of society-oriented public relations has emerged with the need to move away from the understanding of public relations that focuses only on corporate goals and interests in today's conditions where concerns about the future have emerged. The new understanding, in which social impact and benefit are at the forefront in public relations, makes it necessary for public relations students who will put this understanding into practice to be trained according to the values of society-oriented public relations understanding.

This study, which was planned based on the fact that public relations education plays an important role in the perception and application of the public relations profession, aimed to determine to what extent the social roles and functions of public relations are reflected in public relations undergraduate education in Türkiye. The results of the research are considered important in terms of examining whether future professionals are being educated in line with the values that will enable them to put into practice the society-oriented understanding of public relations. The emergence of the society-oriented approach in public relations, which came to the fore in various research and reports focusing on identifying trends and predictions for the future of public relations, formed the basis for this study.

One of these studies is PR2025. Conducted with the participation of PR practitioners, representatives of PR/communications professional organizations, PR/communications consultants and academic experts, PR2025 aims to shed light on the future of public relations, identify the competencies required for public relations in the future and present the solutions needed to meet them. In the PR2025 report, the institutional trends in terms of public relations were identified as market fragmentation, sustainability, and new consumption patterns, while the societal trends were identified as the decline of trust in institutions, the demand for sustainability, and transparency (Adi, 2019, p. 6). The increasing interest in agenda topics such as sustainability makes the need for a society-oriented approach to public relations even more visible.

According to the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management Approaching The Future 2023 Report (2023, p. 11), which aims to identify global trends in reputation and intangible asset management that will have the greatest impact on the management of institutions, compliance with sustainability and ESG (environmental, social and governance) criteria has emerged as the trend that has increased the most and is of most interest to professionals in the field compared to the trends of 2022. This and similar studies, which point out that public relations should not be considered from a managerial perspective as a mere corporate management function, but rather should be evaluated in accordance with its social roles and functions, put on the agenda the need for future professionals to be trained from this perspective, in order to develop strategies and implement practices that meet these expectations and demands.

In this study, which aims to reveal the extent to which undergraduate public relations education in Türkiye focuses on the social role and functions of public relations, a research was conducted on 59 public relations programs whose current curriculum lists were accessed. The results of the study showed that courses related to communication science and related disciplines such as advertising, journalism, radio-television, cinema, interpersonal communication, etc. constitute the category with the highest share in the curriculum of undergraduate public relations education in Türkiye (n=1969, 43.47%). This category is followed by public relations courses (n=1327, 29.31 percent), courses related to social sciences (n=724, 15.98 percent), and general

university courses (n=509, 11.24 percent). At this point, it should be emphasized that the weight of courses related to communication science and related disciplines such as journalism, radio and television, cinema, and advertising in PR education should be balanced with the weight of PR courses. While it is known that these courses are important for students to gain the scientific knowledge that can form the basis for public relations education, it should also be emphasized that it is important to keep the balance in a way that does not lead to inadequacies in terms of providing students with the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies for the basic purpose and mission of public relations education.

It was found that courses on the social role and functions of PR are included in the curricula as “Corporate Social Responsibility”, “Community Service Practices/Social Support Projects”, “Volunteering Activities”, “Public Relations in Non-Governmental Organizations”, “Sustainability/Sustainability Communication” and “Social Marketing” (total n=106), and the percentage of these courses in the curriculum is low at 2.34 percent among all course categories. The type of courses, whether required or elective, is also indicative in terms of the importance given to the social role and functions of public relations in PR education. As can be seen from the results of the distribution of courses according to whether they are required or elective, there is a concentration in the form of elective courses (n=66) in terms of courses on the social role and functions of public relations.

As a result of the research planned to determine the educational outcomes of an international project titled “Public Relations/Future of Communication and Social Impact” specific to Türkiye, which included 26 participants from three groups as public relations academicians, public relations practitioners and public relations educators from Türkiye, Bıçakçı and Aktaş Kuyucu (2024, p.22) determined that the views on the necessity of balancing institutional and social focus in public relations education came to the fore. The importance of including the institutional practices of public relations as well as the roles, responsibilities and functions that public relations performs or can perform in society in public relations education has also been revealed by the research results. Despite this importance, it is also clear that courses on the social roles and

functions of public relations are still at a very low level in undergraduate public relations education in Türkiye.

In a study aiming to reveal the general structure of the sustainability phenomenon in undergraduate programs providing public relations education in Türkiye, Şardağı (2022) found that sustainability courses were included in the curricula at a very low level. Since sustainability is a prominent topic in terms of the social role and functions of public relations, the findings of the research conducted by Şardağı also support the findings of this research, which found that the social role and functions of public relations were not adequately reflected in the curricula in public relations undergraduate education in Türkiye.

This study, which draws attention to the need to reflect the social roles and functions of public relations in PR curricula and to educate future professionals in line with this new understanding, and all the findings revealed by this study and the results of other reports and researches shared, reveal the need to reconsider PR education in Türkiye from this perspective. In future studies, it is recommended that research be conducted to reveal the perspective of undergraduate public relations education in other countries and to compare it with the education in Türkiye.

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