

## The Perception of Public Relation Profession in The Society: Example of Elazığ City

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### Abstract

*A profession plays a vital role in the functioning of society. Profession connects people and produces a social hierarchy. A person's self is constructed from social and role identities. The concept of public relations has shown many changes and developments since its first emergence. In every period, public relations have come up to date with different definitions. Turkish people in this region don't generally know what is the public relations. Even today, this problem persists. This study focuses on how people in society perceive the concept of public relations in Elazığ. Elazığ is a city in eastern Turkey. The aim of the study is to reveal the perception of the term in public relations in society and its recognition. Survey method was used within the scope of the aim and survey questions were prepared. The survey consisting of 15 questions related to the public relations profession was applied to 400 people in the Elazığ, which is more than 18 years old, determined by the random method. As a result of the analysis, the findings of the public relations profession in the community in Elazığ have different findings.*

**Keywords:** *Public Relations, Perception, Profession, Society.*

## Halkla İlişkiler Mesleğinin Toplumdaki Algısı: Elazığ İli Örneği

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### Öz

Meslek toplumun işleyişinde hayati bir rol oynamaktadır. Meslek insanları birbirine bağlamakta ve sosyal bir hiyerarşi oluşturmaktadır. İnsanı sosyal ve rol kimlikleri şekillendirmektedir. Halkla ilişkiler kavramı ilk ortaya çıktığı dönemlerden bugüne birçok değişim ve gelişim göstermiştir. Her dönemde halkla ilişkiler mesleği farklı tanımlamalarla ifade edilmiştir. Bu mesleğin toplumdaki algısı da farklı şekillerde olabilmektedir. Bugün bile bu sorun hâlâ devam etmektedir. Bu çalışmada Elazığ'da yaşayan bireylerin halkla ilişkiler mesleğini nasıl algıladığı üzerinde durulmaktadır. Elazığ Türkiye'nin doğusundaki bir ildir. Çalışmanın amacı ise 'halkla ilişkiler' teriminin toplumdaki algısının ve bilinirliğini ne olduğunu ortaya çıkarmaktır. Amaç kapsamında Survey yöntemi kullanılmış ve anket soruları hazırlanmıştır. Halkla ilişkiler mesleği ile ilgili 15 sorudan oluşan anket, Elazığ ilinde tesadüfi örnekleme ile seçilmiş 18 yaşını aşmış olan 400 kişiye uygulanmıştır. Analiz sonucunda Elazığ ilinde halkla ilişkiler mesleğinin toplumdaki algısı üzerine farklı bulgulara ulaşılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Halkla İlişkiler, Algı, Meslek, Toplum

## Introduction

Professions have important roles in terms of division of labor, social stability, integration, socialization, economy and culture. Profession connects people and produces a social hierarchy (İlhan, 2008, p.314-315). The concept of profession also appears as a phenomenon that has social value that enables the individual to be respected and related with others (Yılmaz & Tanrıverdi, 2017, p.622; Kuzgun, 2000). A person's self is constructed from social and role identities (Oyserman et al., 2012; Mirzashvili& Hickerson, 2014 ). Belonging to a group can influence the selection of behavior and influences the construction, not only of identities, but the self. Therefore, group membership in organizations and the role of organizational and work identities are important (Mirzashvili & Hickerson, 2014).

Perception is the differentiation of the stimuli or events that are present in the environment and the process of interpreting these stimuli (Mutlu, 1994, p.3). It is possible to say that a profession is interpreted by individuals who form a society by the concept of perception of the profession. When the public relations profession is examined, it is seen that there are discussions about whether public relations is a profession. In addition to those who think that public relations is not yet a profession; there are those who think that public relations is in the process of professionalization (Öksüz, 2015, p.251).

The concept of public relations has shown many changes and developments since its first emergence. In every period, public relations have come up to date with different definitions. However, public relations in general, people's mind is not fully established on a clear basis. Even today, this problem persists. This study focuses on how people in society perceive the concept of public relations. The aim of the study is to reveal the perception of the term in public relations in in society and its recognition. Survey method was used within the scope of the aim and survey questions were prepared. The sample was applied within the sample of Elazığ province.

## Literature Review

The profession is seen as an occupational term that describes a domain of

expertise. This term has developed over hundreds of years to refer to a rigorous occupational system in our society. Although many public relations scholars acknowledge the importance of professionalism in public relations (Cameron et al., 1996; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008). Public relations are still seen as a “common occupation” for a number of reasons (Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008).

Individual perception of the profession; expresses the feelings of the individual against the profession, attitude towards the profession, behavior and world view (Eke, 1987, p.378-379). The perception of a profession with the society can be expressed as the feelings of the individuals who make up the society, attitude behavior and world views. Professional perception is very important because it is a reference to the perception of individuals by society as well as perceptions of individuals towards their own professions (Macit, 2007, p.37). A number of factors, such as the functionality of a profession's dignity in the society, affect the perception of that profession by society (Yılmaz & Tanrıverdi, 2017, p.625).

Bernays (1992, 1993) has been the most vocal proponent for licensing of practitioners in public relations as a way to enhance credibility in the practice and to elevate the practice for a profession (Cameron et al. , 1996). It is possible to say that there are some problems with the perception of the public relations profession as a society. Public relations are a communication discipline implementing strategic communication processes with target audiences about constituting, preserving and strengthening of image and reputation of the corporations represented. However, it can be considered an irony that public relations profession, which undertakes significant tasks and responsibilities related to the image and reputation of companies and organizations, cannot preserve the image and reputation of their profession accurately (Yıldırım & Akbulut, 2017). There are several reasons why public relations are seen as “common occupation”. These are as follows: First, there is no clear area of expertise in public relations or communication management (Cornelissen, 2004; Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008). Johnson and L’Etang emphasised said that the importance of an exclusive jurisdiction in establishing unique professional standards. Second, there is no universal standard of accreditation and licensing by PR professional bodies throughout the world. Third, public relations are not seen as a ‘terminal’ occupation (full-time occupation), one

of the key criteria of professionalism (Abbott, 1988; Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008). Fourth, there is a need to develop a rigorous body of PR knowledge, which requires the establishment of exclusive training schools (Johnson, 1972; Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008).

The many studies about public relations are reached in literature, but studies on how the public relations profession is perceived by individuals living in the community are limited. Yıldırım and Akbulut investigated the Attitudes and Perceptions on Public Relations Profession of The Relatives of Students in Turkey. White and Park (2010) asserted that public relations are portrayed in a negative way throughout the years by providing images that can be a part of the public's perceptions.

The article of Yıldırım and Akbulut (2017) has been reached regarding the perception of public relations profession. Name of the article is "A Research On Attitudes and Perceptions On Public Relations Profession of The Relatives of Students Who Study Public Relations and Publicity Programs". The opinions of the article families changed during the students studying period in the related departments; and yet, they have not completely perceived the extent of the profession yet. Some articles related to the perception, training and development of the profession by professionals and academicians (Cameron et al., 1996; L'Etang, 2002; Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008; Wright, 2011; Mirzashvili & Hickerson, 2014). The public relations community in the east of Turkey aims to determine how perceived and awareness of the profession. The reason for the selection of the sample as a province of eastern Turkey more than Turkey in the West this profession encountered, the East is still not considered to be known widely. It is important because it is a first in the field of study.

## **Methodology**

The aim of this study was that the people living in the provinces of eastern Turkey's perception of the public relations profession and know how to identify. The basic hypothesis of the research and awareness of the public relations profession's perception that it is not adequate in Turkey's eastern provinces. In addition, the public relations profession is mixed with different fields, the necessity of education in the public relations profession

and the gender gap in professional workers are the side hypotheses of the study.

For this reason, a survey consisting of 15 questions related to the public relations profession was applied to 400 people in the Elazığ, which is more than 18 years old, determined by the random method. The questions relate to how the public relations profession is generally perceived. The questionnaire was limited to questions that the participants could answer in a short time.

The questionnaire forms were applied by the researchers. The answers were given to the questionnaires. The data obtained by this technique were analyzed with the help of SPSS 20 program and interpreted by taking the frequency and percentage distributions. The Croanbach Alpha number of the study was 0,856.

## Findings

In this study, 51.5% of the participants in the survey were male and 48.5% were female. Since there were 206 male and 194 female participants, the questionnaire was balanced in terms of gender. If the age range of the participants were examined, 10.6% of the respondents were 18-24 years old, 15.1% were 24-30 years old, 23.2% were 36-42 years, 22.1% were 42-48 years old. While 10.3% is older than 48 years.

*Table 1. Data on How The Participants Were First Heard About The Public Relations Profession*

	Frequency	Percent
From the television	185	46,25
Institutions from	55	13,75
From friends	58	14,5
Activities from	31	7,75
From social media	18	4,5
School	50	12,5
Other	3	0,75
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

The participants were selected as high school graduates, university graduates, primary school graduates and graduate students. The percentage of participants in the survey is 30.1, 38.5, 26.8%, 4.6, respectively.

When the participants were asked about where they first heard the concept of public relations, it was found that nearly 50% of the participants heard the television for the first time. The other participants stated that they heard from friends, institutions, schools, public relations activities and social media, respectively. The other 3 people gave the answer to the newspaper and radio. According to these data, it is possible to say that the public relations profession of television has a great effect in Eastern Anatolia.

*Table 2. Data Regarding Participation of Public Relations as an Occupation*

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	268	67
No	96	24
No idea	36	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

When the participants were asked whether public relations are a profession, approximately 70% of the answers are considered as a yes. While 24% of the participants did not see public relations as a profession, 9% stated that they did not have any ideas about this issue. 70% of the respondents view public relations as a profession. Those who do not see as a profession constitute 1/4 of the respondents. It is possible to say that this ratio is high in terms of not accepting a profession.

*Table 3. Data on the Public Relations Profession by Participants*

	Frequency	Percent
Yes known	142	35,5
No unknown	237	59,25
No idea	21	5,25
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

When the participants were asked if the public relations were known enough as a profession, almost 60% of the participants answered as Unknown. According to these data, it is possible to say that the public relations profession is largely unknown to the public.

**Table 4. Data on the First Arrival of the Participants in Public Relations**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Human resources	27	6,75
Promotion	37	9,25
Contact	99	24,75
Advertisement	22	5,5
Empathy	17	4,25
Consultant	41	10,25
To be the voice of the people	28	7
The relationship between the institution and the public	31	7,75
Other	12	3
No idea	86	21,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

When the participants were asked about the first thing that comes to their minds when they talked about the profession of public relations, about 25% of the respondents answered as “communication”. Then, the consultant, publicity, the relationship between the people and the public, human resources, the voice of the people, empathy, etc. are given. The most remarkable point here is that 21% of the participants have no idea about this issue. According to the results of this analysis, public relations are less known to the public.

**Table 5. Data Regarding How Attendees Detect Public Relations Profession**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very good	52	13
Good	141	35,25
Central	173	43,25
Bad	24	6
Very bad	10	2,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

In order to measure how the public relations profession is perceived by the public, the majority of the participants answered the question. The proportion of those who say good is higher than those who say bad. According to this, the perceptions of the individuals in the society against the public relations profession have a moderate value.



*Table 6. Data on the Expression of Facts in the Public Relations Profession by Participants*

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	178	44,5
No	118	29,5
No idea	104	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

When the public relations profession is always asked whether the facts are expressed or not; 44.5% of the respondents answered yes. The ratio of those who answered “No” and “non-idea” was close to one.

*Table 7. Data on the Reliability of Public Relations Professionals by Participants*

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	225	56,25
No	97	24,25
No idea	78	19,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

When the participants were asked if the public relations profession gave confidence, 56% of the participants stated that public relations was a profession that gave confidence. 44% of the remaining participants stated that the public relations profession was not reliable or that they had no ideas about it. Considering the data in Table 6, it is possible to say that public relations profession is found reliable by the society.

*Table 8. Data on the Necessity of Education to Make Public Relations Profession According to Participants*

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	282	70,5
No	65	16,25
No idea	53	13,25
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

When participants were asked about the necessity of education in the public relations profession, 70% of the participants answered as “yes”. According to these data, training is necessary to be a public relations profession

*Table 9. According to the participants in the Public Relations Profession by Persons in the Personal Properties Needed for Education*

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	266	66,5
No	76	19
No idea	58	14,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

When the participants were asked about the necessity of personal characteristics in the public relations profession, 66% of the respondents agreed that personal development was necessary, 19% disagreed, and 14% stated that they were unstable.

*Table 10. Data on whether the Public Relations Profession of the Participants is Only for Women*

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	67	16,75
No	299	74,75
No idea	34	8,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

When the public relations profession for the participants is investigated as a profession for women only; Approximately 17% of the participants stated that the public relations profession was a profession for women and about 75% of the participants did not. According to these data, the public relations profession is a profession that can be done in men.

*Table 11. Data of the Public Relations Profession According to Participants According to the Ethics and Ethics Acts*

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	186	46,5
No	98	24,5
No idea	116	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

In order to find out whether the public relations profession is acting in accordance with ethical and moral rules, 46.5% of the participants stated that public relations is an ethical profession. 24.5% of the participants did

not participate and 29% said that they did not have any idea about this issue. According to these data, the employees in the public relations profession follow the ethical rules of the profession.

*Table 12. Data on the Necessity of the Public Relations Profession According to Participants*

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	271	67,75
No	54	13,5
No idea	75	18,75
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

In order to determine whether the profession of public relations is a necessary profession, approximately 70% of the participants answered yes . About 14% of the remaining respondents answered% no ", while about 19% said it was not an idea. According to these data, the majority of the participants expressed the necessity of the public relations profession.

## Conclusion

The results of this study are given below:

- This study showed that the public relations profession is not well known. Furthermore, public relations are mixed with different professions.
- Participants said that public relations are seen as a profession, but the perception in society is not a good profession.
- Those who work in this profession must have graduated from the Public Relations Department. It has been found that the public relations profession is not only a profession for women.
- The most of the participants have heard about this profession on television for the first time. In general, they are said that the profession is necessary, although the level of awareness about the public relations profession and the perception of the profession by the public are low.

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