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## **THOUGHTS OF SHOPPING CENTER MANAGERS ABOUT CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

### **Abstract:**

Corporate social responsibility is one of the the main themes of public relations field. There are a lot of scientific studies about corporate social responsibility in public relations literature. Social responsibility can be considered as a very important concept also for corporations. Many companies are interested in corporate social responsibility because of various reasons. They can contribute their corporate image by conducting social responsibility activities. It is important to understand the views of the managers from private sector about corporate social responsibility. In this study interview method was used. Interviews were conducted with two shopping center managers from Konya in Turkey, and the data was analyzed. As a general result, it is determined that both of the managers of the shopping centers are sensitive about CSR activities. The managers attach big importance on the subject of CSR.

### **Keywords:**

Public relations, corporate social responsibility, shopping center managers,

## Introduction

The responsibilities of organizations are not limited with the production of goods and services. As well as the economical purposes of the organizations, they also have social responsibilities to their employees, customers, partners, competitors, suppliers, and its own environment. The organizations, which have this sensation and obey business ethic, are accepted in society (Nalbant, 2005: 193).

The organizations show to their stakeholders that they are aware towards their societies and have purposes except its economical benefit via social responsibility activities. Thus the organization meets the social expectaitons of their stakeholders. As a result of this, the organizations have a good impression in the minds of their stakeholders. Corporate social responsibility communication is accepted as a basic necessity to announce the social responsibility activities to the stakeholders (Gümüş and Öksüz, 2009: 2144).

In Turkey, especially in recent years social responsibility campaigns have been conducted in various issues. Many campaigns, which are conducted by the partnership of the firms, non-governmental organisations and government, increase the reputation of the firms and the results of these campaigns are valuable for society (Uslu et al., 2008: 2).

The shopping centers in Konya have wide target audiences. It can be said that corporate social responsibility activities are important for these organizations. The aim of this study is to determine the thoughts of the shopping center managers about corporate social responsibility in Konya.

## Literature

Over the decades, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has continued to grow in importance and significance. It has been regarded as the subject of considerable debate, commentary, theory building and research. In spite of the ongoing deliberations as to what it means and what it embraces, it has developed and evolved in the academic and practitioner communities worldwide (Carroll and Shabana, 2010: 85).

Some scholars have examined consumer responses to CSR initiatives (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Nan and Heo, 2007; Tian et al., 2011; Nanda, 2015), the perceived importance of ethics and social responsibility among marketing practitioners, along with the marketing benefits resulting from corporate actions with a social dimension. Some studies have also focused on specific dimensions of CSR such as the support of charitable causes or the protection of the environment (Maignan and Ferrell, 2004: 3).

CSR has emerged as an important theme in the literature of communication and public relations. During the recent years, both scholars and managers have paid

greater attention to the notion of CSR. Especially, there seems to be a growing interest of CSR in the fields of corporate communication and marketing (Podnar, 2008: 75).

CSR has been defined in several ways. Definitions include the notions that CSR involves (1) benefiting society in ways that might not directly benefit the company's financial position and (2) attending to the needs of a variety of organizational stakeholders (Basil and Erlandson, 2008: 126).

CSR requires the responsibility of the leaders, individuals, organizations, stakeholders, customers and the members of society (D'Amato et al., 2009: 7). Organizations and firms conduct many different CSR activities to their different stakeholders. Besides, social reports, web sites, internal communication efforts, advertisements may be used as tools to announce CSR. The choice of communication tool may differ according to the kind and quality of CSR, expectations and tendencies of stakeholders. Corporate social responsibility communication (CSRC) has an important role for the reputation of firms and organizations. Because without effective communication efforts, it is very difficult to reach the goals of CSR activities. CSRC has a key role to learn the expectations of the stakeholders, conduct its activities according to these expectations, tell its activities and itself, get the support of stakeholders, make the stakeholders a partner of CSR activities, and finally form positive impressions in the minds of stakeholder (Gümüş and Öksüz, 2009: 2144).

While employers conduct CSR activities, if they take into consideration the views and expectations of their employees, customers, and stakeholders and inform them about these activities, this will provide to form impressions about CSR activities (Erkman and Şahinoğlu, 2012: 289).

It was determined that when organizations attach importance to CSR activities, the loyalty of employees increase to their organization. It can be said that CSR is important for employees as well as external stakeholders. The more the firms wish to have loyal employees, the more they attach importance to CSR activities (Erkman and Şahinoğlu, 2012: 289).

According to Maignan and Ferrell (2004:17) the implementation of CSR does not only consist of the launching of a few benevolent initiatives such as philanthropy programs, environmental protection policies, or employee-friendly practices. Instead, to enact their commitment to CSR, businesses must embrace some principles and processes that can help to systematically address stakeholder demands and secure stakeholder support.

Several studies have examined whether CSR is related to company success,. The results demonstrate that internal CSR activities are more strongly indicative of company success than external CSR activities (Basil and Erlandson, 2008: 134-135).

Carroll (1991) suggests that CSR includes four kind of responsibilities or dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. In his model, each dimension of CSR can

be examined in relation to the various stakeholders of organization (e.g., owners, customers, employees, the community, and the public at large).

The dimensions of CSR specify important areas of responsibility, such as obeying laws and ethical norms, treating employees fairly, protecting the environment, and contributing charities (Mohr et al., 2001: 47).

Sen and his friends investigated the impact of CSR initiative on stakeholders who have the potential to be affiliated with a firm in multiple ways: as employees, customers, and investors. In this study it can be suggested that CSR activity has the potential to increase not only CSR associations, attitudes, and identification but also the intent of stakeholders to commit personal resources (e.g., money, labor, etc.) to the benefit of the company (Sen et al., 2006: 164).

Results of a study indicate that, on average, marketers generally believe that ethics and social responsibility are important components of organizational effectiveness. The findings of this study suggest that managers do not need to fear that they are sacrificing profit when they stress ethical and socially responsible behaviors. The results of the survey partly indicate that there is a positive relationship between a marketer's corporate ethical values and his or her perceptions regarding the importance of ethics and social responsibility (Singhapakdi et al., 1995: 54-55).

It is known that some studies have been carried out to determine the thoughts of several groups on CSR. In this context, the views of the managers, who work in private sector, are important.

A study has been conducted to determine the thoughts and viewpoints on CSR of the managers who work in food, textile and transportation sectors. As a result of this study it has been understood that the female managers attach more importance to the profit priority and the corporate image than male managers. In the same study, it was found that middle aged and above managers value more than the others (Ünsar and Alpertonga, 2013: 12).

The views of shopping center managers on CSR are important. Because these shopping centers are not only the places to do shopping but also the people go there to meet the other people, spend time, and socialize. For this reason, it is supposed to conduct various CSR activities from the shopping centers that have a social key role in Konya.

CSR is one of the most important studying and practicing areas in public relations. There have been many academic studies on CSR. However there are few studies to determine the thoughts of managers about CSR.

In this study, the thoughts of the shopping center managers about CSR have been determined in Konya. Also, whether the shopping centers conduct CSR activities or not, if they conduct, in which areas and for which aim has been stated.

## Methodology

In the study interview technique, which is one of qualitative methods, was used. Generally interviews are classified as structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Yıkılmış and Pınar, 2005: 11). In this study, semi-structured interview technique was preferred. Semi-structured interview technique is more flexible than structured interview. In this technique researcher prepares the questionnaire before the interview. However, the interviewer can effect the interview process by using different questions and make the interviewee tell the reasons of his/her answers and details (Türnüklü, 2000: 547).

Within the context of the study the interviews that took 45-60 minutes have been conducted with two shopping center managers between the date of 10 April-10 June 2016 in Konya. The managers are Funda Olgun who is the manager of Kent Plaza Shopping Center and Sönmez Tozlu who is the manager of Makro Shopping Center. In the study, the names of the shopping center managers have been sorted alphabetically.

In the interviews, the questionnaire, which was prepared before the interview, was used. The questionnaire contains 12 questions. During the period of the face to face interviews, the data was recorded by the way of taking notes. There is no time limitation during the interviews and probable time of the interview was told to interviewees before.

The main purpose of the study is to determine the thoughts of shopping center managers on corporate social responsibility. By related with the aim of the study, the answers of the questions which are: "In which areas the shopping centers conduct CSR?", "Do the shopping centers need to conduct CSR?", "Should the shopping centers give priority to a specific area by conducting CSR?", "Are the CSR costs wasted?", "Should the CSR activities be announced?", "What are the purposes of shopping centers' CSR activities?", "Have any researches been made to determine the expectations of target audiences before CSR activities and their impressions after CSR activities?", "Do the shopping centers conduct the CSR activities by themselves or by cooperating with the other organizations?", "Are there any links in the websites of shopping centers about CSR?", "Are the employees got involved in CSR activities?", "Do CSR activities form positive images in the eyes of employees?" have been searched.

## Findings

In this part of the study the answers of the both shopping center managers at the end of the interviews in Konya are presented. The managers who are interviewed are coded as interviewee A and interviewee B. Interviewee A refers to the shopping center manager of Kent Plaza, Funda Olgun and interviewee B refers to the shopping center manager of Makro, Sönmez Tozlu.

1-When they are asked in which areas they conduct CSR activities of their shopping centers, the answers are:

Interviewee A: "Kent Plaza Shopping Center mostly support society and provide welfare benefits. Generally it supports to the students and needers financially. Besides it provides venues to the CSR activities of non governmental organizations in many different areas"

Interviewee B: "Makro Shopping Center conducts CSR activities in the fields of health, special days, informing and consciousness raising, education and environment. Besides it provides welfare benefits".

2-When asked if the shopping centers need to conduct CSR or not, the answers are:

Interviewee A: "I believe that CSR activities are necessary for shopping centers"

Interviewee B: "I believe that CSR activities are necessary for shopping centers. Because the issues of our environment are also the issues of us, our employees' and customers'. I believe the importance of contributing to solve these problems. In my opinion, the target audiences should perceive our organization as a sensitive organization for their problems".

3-When asked if the shopping centers should give priority to a specific area by conducting CSR or not, the answers are:

Interviewee A: "We do not give priority to a specific area in our CSR activities. We have been conducting our CSR activities related with the agenda".

Interviewee B: "I think that the prior issue is to extend the usage of recyclable shopping bags as CSR activities. Secondly I believe the importance to encourage the conscious water consumption practices".

4-When asked if the CSR costs wasted or not, the answers are:

Interviewee A: "I think these costs are not wasted. I consider CSR as a strategy which provide benefit for organization in the long term. By this way we can gain trust of the people and change their perceptions. CSR may form customer loyalty".

Interviewee B: "I don't think CSR costs are wasted. I believe that these costs can change the views of target audiences to organization and effect the organization positively in the long term".

5- When asked if the CSR activities should be announced or not, the answers are:

Interviewee A: "CSR activities should be announced to target audiences. Otherwise the activities is known only by the staff. But if the target audiences are wanted to get involved in CSR activities we should announce them. Likewise to encourage and provide the participation of the people who wants to support the projects and others, CSR should be announced".

Interviewee B: "CSR activities should be announced to target audiences. By this way the CSR activities can be a model for other people and this may make a domino effect".

6- When asked the main purposes of their CSR activities, the answers are:

Interviewee A: "Our prior purpose is to support the society. The other purposes may be ordered as to form corporate image, customer loyalty and finally to increase profit in a long term".

Interviewee B: "We can order our purposes as the following: to form customer sympathy, social sensitivity, increase the number of customers by forming customer loyalty in a long term and support public interest".

7- When asked if they have conducted any researches to determine the expectations of target audiences before CSR activities or not, the answers are:

Interviewee A: "We have never conducted any research to determine the expectations of target audiences before CSR activities. But the CSR activities are planned according to the demands of target audiences. "

Interviewee B: "We have conducted researches to determine the expectations of target audiences before our CSR activities".

8- When asked if they have conducted any researches to determine the perceptions of target audiences after CSR activities or not, the answers are:

Interviewee A: "We have never conducted any research to determine the perceptions of target audiences after CSR activities"

Interviewee B: "There have never been any research to determine the perceptions of target audiences after CSR activities. But we can understand their impressions from their feedback".

9-When asked if the shopping centers conduct the CSR activities by themselves or by cooperating with the other organizations, the answers are:

Interviewee A: "The CSR activities are generally conducted with the other organizations. Sometimes our shopping center plans CSR activities by itself and we support the CSR activities of other organizations out of the campaign".

Interviewee B: "If the budget is big we conduct the CSR activities in cooperation with other organizations. But if the budget is low we conduct CSR activities by ourselves".

10-When asked if there are any links in the websites of shopping centers about CSR or not, the answers are:

Interviewee A: "There is no link in the websites of our organization about CSR. CSR announcements are shared on social media. It is more effective than the other ways. It will be true that the announcement of CSR is made through the social media. Because the people spend their most of the time on social media"

Interviewee B: "There is a link titled as "Social responsibility" in our website. I accept that the announcement of CSR through websites is important".

11-When asked if the employees got involved in CSR activities or not, the answers are:

Interviewee A: "The employees are got involved in our CSR activities. I believe this participation is beneficial".

Interviewee B: "The employees are got involved in our CSR activities".

12-When asked if CSR activities form positive images in the eyes of employees or not, the answers are:

Interviewee A: "I think that CSR activities are positive examples for employees because when we form CSR activities we brainstorm with our employees"

Interviewee B: "The CSR activities form a positive image in the eyes of employees. I believe that the CSR activities motivate the employees and form their loyalty to our organization".

## Conclusion

In this study the thoughts of shopping center managers about CSR and the CSR activities of their own organization are determined by using interview technique.

Both Kent Plaza and Makro shopping centers conduct CSR activities. Besides they conduct their CSR activities by cooperating with other organizations and providing venues for them. Kent Plaza Shopping Center support society financially and the other organizations' CSR activities. Makro Shopping Center conduct CSR activities in the fields of health, special days, informing and consciousness raising, education and environment. Also it provides welfare benefits.

The manager of Kent Plaza ordered their purposes with CSR activities are to support the society, to form corporate image, customer loyalty and finally to increase profit in a long term.

The prior purpose of CSR activities conducting by the manager of Kent Plaza Shopping Center is differentiated from the findings of Ünsar and Alpertonga (2013: 12). In their study they found that the female managers attach more importance to increase profit and corporate image more than male managers. In this study the female manager who was interviewed attach more importance to support the society as a priority. The other purposes are listed as to form corporate image, form customer loyalty and lastly to increase profit in a long term.

The managers who were interviewed, believe that the CSR activities should be done by the shopping centers. They also think the budget that is for CSR activities are not wasted and reflect credit upon the organization in the long term.



The manager of Makro Shopping Centre thinks that the prior issues are to extend the usage of recyclable shopping bags as CSR activities and the conscious water consumption practices in Konya. The manager of Kent Plaza remarked that which area is prior in CSR activities is determined with the agenda.

The managers, who have been taken part in the interview, think that announcing the CSR activities to the target audiences are important. Thus, it is thought that these CSR activities can be an example for the target audiences and provide their participation and support to CSR activities. Makro Shopping Center announce its CSR activities on its own website. However, Kent Plaza Shopping Center announce its CSR activities by using social media.

The managers who were interviewed stated that they have never done any survey to determine the image of their CSR activities in the eyes of their target audiences. The manager of Makro Shopping Centre indicated that they have been conducting surveys to determine the target audiences' demands before CSR activities.

The managers stated that the employees are got involved in the CSR activities. Both of the managers think that the CSR activities form positive corporate image in the eyes of the employees.

As a general result, it is determined that both of the managers of the shopping centers are sensitive about CSR activities. The managers attach big importance on the subject of CSR. Although their some CSR activities are differentiated by each others, some thoughts of the managers about CSR show similarities. It can be said that both of the managers focus on the philanthropy dimension of CSR.

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