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## **SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE OF GSM OPERATORS IN TERMS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS**

### **Abstract:**

Requests of individuals in order to access to information is increasing day by day with the expansion of communication fields and networks. While the desire of people to express themselves are increasing, the number of corporations preparing this environment shows a significant raise as well. All of the changes affecting social life are included with communication world and particular sectors are influenced directly. Innovations and changes particularly in communication technologies, conveniences and benefits which those offer to target audience inspire specialization at communication. Currently, the number of corporations trying to realize this specialization in the best way and proving themselves both in national and international areas by slipping from localization are increasing. Especially by the opportunities offered to users via mobile communication and making those more attractive by social media influences the success of GSM operators. It is thought that the leading GSM providers of the world care about this inference and make effort in parallel among the competitive communication environment.

Since public relations which aims to take the essential messages to the target audiences at the right time and in the right way maintaining its efficiency, it prefers the social media as a new application field by developing technologies at last years. Social media causing many organizations to change or renew the advertisement and marketing strategies, is seen advantageous in terms of public relations and been used actively as well. That is why GSM operators are using this field intensely for its advantages as easy access, continuous messages and low costs.

In this study social media usage of three leading GSM operators of Turkey providing mobile communication, Avea, Turkcell and Vodafone are examined. Corporational social media accounts of GSM operators analyzed by content analysis method and the obtained data and information evaluated in terms of public relations. Efficient usage level of this platform of GSM operators, announced applications via this way and whether they answer to the demands, complaints and questions of customer or not are some of the issues obtained from the study

### **Keywords:**

Social Media, GSM Operators, Public Relations, Technology

## Introduction

The today's technology that allows individuals easily to communicate with their environment advances day by day and continues its efficiency institutionally. It is an important indicator how the development is significant in terms of keeping up with the age because the organizations want to be dominant in this changing and evolving technology. With the social media platforms that individuals spend the most times and share things attract the attention of the organizations to access their target masses. This case is important in terms of the companies to give place to the public relations activities particularly and make these activities more visible to their customers.

Especially by the increase of the current smartphone use, GSM operators, which enable the more accessibility of social media, use social media intensively because of such reasons as informing the masses about the activities done, announcing the campaigns, and meeting the requests of customers quickly. GSM organizations make an effort to present corporate social media accounts that can be satisfactory as both visual and the content of message and dominant over its competitors to the appreciation of users. It also reveals that social media has become an indispensable medium in terms of public relations.

### 1. GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications)

Global System for Mobile Communications or shortly "GSM" is a mobile communication protocol. GSM, which carries the name of subsidiary called "Groupe Spéciale Mobile" of the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) before, was started to know for its new name later by the system became a global actor (<http://tr.wikipedia.org>). In the mobile phone use in the world, a very rapid increase is seen. Across the world, while the number of mobile phone subscribers is observed over 7 million in the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter Report of 2014, it is estimated that it will exceed the world's population in 2015 (Ericsson, 2015). Mobile phones in Turkey were used in 1993 for the first time. Despite the Turkish GSM sector is a very young sector, it grew much more quickly than expected (Ünlü and Tolon, 2012, p.274). When the quarterly market data of Information Technologies and Communications Authority in Turkey is analyzed, an intense competition in the GSM sector is experienced with 71,89 million subscribers according to the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter Report of 2014 (BTK, 2015). This figure shows that it is almost in a level that approaches Turkey's population.

The sector of GSM and mobile phone is one of the sectors that show the most rapid technological development. These organizations that become indispensable for individuals in their working and social lives and enable to mobile communications are greatly sought by the masses. By 2015, the biggest three operators in the GSM sector are seen as the businesses of Turkcell, Avea, and Vodafone in Turkey. Because mobile communications is used by different sectors having different demographic characteristics, the operators in this sector are obliged to attach importance to the strategies of public relations.

Developments in technology and the opportunities that are offered show that the types of services of the GSM operators will span a wide range in the near future. This also

means the competition will be further hardened between the GSM operators that will have the opportunity of presenting a wide, various range of opportunities for their customers (Nasir, 2003, p.217). The GSM operators do not only concentrate on advertising campaigns but also announce their names with social responsibility projects and sponsorships. The GSM businesses, besides their commercial activities, support such areas as education, culture-art, sports, environmental protection, and technology with the social responsibility projects (Ünlü and Tolon, 2012, p.276). It is another important issue to inform the target masses in true place and time in addition to realize these projects made.

## 2. Public Relations and Social Media

Internet has become a communication medium that serves for all purposes in order to interact with stakeholders in a very wide area. Organizations have gradually begun to use Internet more to market their products and services for their customers, deal with suppliers and brokers, communicate with employees, make an agreement with the state, and inform investors (Güçdemir, 2012, p.92). Additionally, while Web 2.0 and social media era constitute new communication methods, new methods of sharing, new media, types of consumption, and new kinds of social stakeholder, institutions and brands form new methods of communicating with new types of stakeholder and they try not to remain behind the online age (Alikılıç, 2011, p.154).

Social media emerges as a medium that people's reactions can be instantly measured and have almost zero cost. Moreover, it is a field that the effects of the relations ongoing with traditional methods are instantly measured (Gündüz, 2013, p.140). While many organizations and brands adapt to the online era and the social media platforms coming with it, some brands, which can read the spirit of online mediums well and decipher how will be communicated with new groups of stakeholder, launch the most successful applications of public relations (Alikılıç, 2011, p.154).

As social media tools enable organizations to develop all applications of public relations, the organizations increase their value and awareness as an alternative of traditional media tools by the social media tools that enable bidirectional communication (Güçdemir, 2012, p.157). From this perspective, it is possible to say that social media assumes an important catalyzer in terms of public relations, brings the concept of "value generation" in the foreground, and increases its efficiency (Solis, 2008).

## 3. Social Media Use of GSM Organizations

Social media constitutes chat medium between individuals, encourages talk, and humanizes the communication process. Social media enables the target mass to talk with each other about institutions and brands, and the institutions to participate in these talks actively instead of the institutions to arrange campaigns of public relations towards their target mass. In fact, this situation can be summarized as follows: "The institutions can make *monolog* while they plan campaigns using the traditional media; they can make *dialog* while planning campaigns using social media" (Alikılıç, 2011: 154).

It is suggested that the easiest access to this wide mass can be realized via social media because the GSM operators have millions of subscribers. The GSM companies, which are aware of how important this medium is to reach the target masses, aim at communicating with these masses in a short time and with an effective way, using corporate social media accounts. At this point, we have the assumption that the more people follow an institution, the more people will be aware of the studies made in relation with the institution (launch of new products, a social responsibility campaign to a new start, change of management, etc.) (Alikılıç, 2011: 179). When looked particularly in terms of the delivery of the performed and planned activities of public relations to the masses by social media and in terms of their feedbacks, social media has become an indispensable shared space for the GSM operators.

#### 4. Methodology

The study aims to examine social media usage of the biggest three GSM operators in Turkey in terms of public relations. Common social media platforms located at the main page of GSM operators considered during determination of social media platforms via content analyze method.

These platforms are Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. Worldwide largest numbers of users of these platforms, were effective at preferences. Study has been held via examination of corporate social media accounts of GSM operators between 1-31 March 2015. It was examined the Facebook accounts of the GSM operators, their information of general use, the message contents shared during March, and the features of these messages. In addition, it is another subject that is examined what kind of applications it is given a place to Facebook in terms of public relations. With regards to Twitter and YouTube accounts; it was treated the message contents that were shared during March of 2015 and the characteristic of these messages in terms of public relations besides the information of general use.

#### 5. Findings

Turkcell is the most preferred GSM operator in Turkey with a ratio of 48,18%. Vodafone is the second with 29,11% and Avea is the third with a ratio of 22,71%. Considering with the users of comparatively small GSM suppliers this number is almost the population of Turkey (Table 1). There are totally 71.900.000 users and considering the little age people so some of the users have more than a subscription or from different GSM suppliers. The larger numbers of users of Turkcell would be because of its older establishment date as well.

**Table 1: Numbers of User of GSM Operators**

	Date of establishment	Users	User of ratio
<b>AVEA</b>	2004	16.33 Million	22,71 %
<b>TURKCELL</b>	1994	34.64 Million	48,18 %
<b>VODAFONE</b>	2006	20.93 Million	29,11 %
<b>Total</b>		71.90 Million	100.0 %

## 5.1. Usages of Facebook

**Table 2: Facebook Usage Informations**

	Liked	User of ratio	Talking about	Visit
<b>AVEA</b>	2.531.366	% 15,5	24.870	36.820
<b>TURKCELL</b>	2.876.108	% 8,3	28.916	3.540
<b>VODAFONE</b>	2.287.934	% 10,9	11.579	-

According to data obtained from Facebook Corporate Page the most liked GSM supplier is respectively Turkcell, Avea and Vodafone (Table 2). In terms of ratio of being liked the ranking from most to least is respectively Avea, Vodafone and Turkcell. So this shows us that all of the users didn't like the Facebook Corporate page. It can be seen that while almost 1% of Turkcell and Avea users participate in the issues about GSM operators actively, 0,5% of Vodafone users share things about their GSM operator.

**Table 3: Facebook Applications of GSM Operators**

AVEA	TURKCELL	VODAFONE
<b>COMMON APPLICATIONS</b>		
Likers	Likers	Likers
Notes	Notes	Notes
Videos (165)	Videos (132)	Videos (96)
Photographs	Photographs	Photographs
<b>ABOUT</b>		
Baseline Information	Baseline Information	Baseline Information
Short description	Short description	Short description
Company Overview	Company Overview	Company Overview
Long description	General Information	-
Telephone	Telephone	Telephone
Website	Website	Website, twitter,
<b>OTHER APPLICATIONS</b>		
Support	"Kardelenler" (Snowdrops)	Help
Avea Winter Festival	Smart Women Clup	Vodafone Freezone
If you touch becomes a	Turkcell Customer	Advantages
Avea BNA ALL		Vodafone Forum
Events		Page Rules
		Events
		Facebook Self Service

When examined corporate facebook accounts of GSM operators; Although all three operators have common applications, it is seen that they have different section at Facebook applications. Likers, Notes, Videos, Photos and About pages are common for the three GSM operators (table 3). The other applications are specified for the GSM supplier. These specified applications of Avea sponsored prize competition (Avea BNA ALL), campaign to win goods from partner institutions with a sale (Avea

Winter Festival), Competitions among the people who has Facebook profile (It's A Gift If You Touch It). Avea Support is a page considering online processes in order to meet requests and complaints.

There are sponsorship activities such as sports, concerts and signing day at the entertainment part. There are Kardelenler Project section as a social responsibility project of Turkcell, Smart Women Application for active women users and Turkcell Customer Support page in order to meet requests and complaints.

There is Vodafone Free Zone application for young users at the other GSM operator's Vodafone's page (Table 3). Also the Facebook Self Service application of Vodafone lets users to do things about their phones without it. While Vodafone Forum answers the mostly asked questions of users, Vodafone Entertainment is consisting of sponsorship activities such as theater.

All these above shows us that GSM operators consider Facebook as a usage area in terms of public relations.

**Table 4: Message Shares On Facebook Between 1-31 March**

	Shared Messages				Total Liked	Total Shares
	Photos	Text	Video	Total		
<b>AVEA</b>	20	2	5	27	51.561	1.818
<b>TURKCELL</b>	15	0	5	20	57.989	25.037
<b>VODAFONE</b>	17	0	7	24	24.734	1.550

Avea have totally 27 sharings as 20 photos, 2 articles and 5 videos and totally 51.561 people liked those between 1-31 March. Vodafone has totally 24 sharings as 17 photos and 7 videos and 24.734 likes. Despite Turkcell has least shares as 15 photos and 5 videos it has taken the most like from 57.989 people (Table 4).

**Table 5: Comments To Facebook Shares Between 1-31 March**

	Shared Messages	Corporate comments	Users comments	Total Comments	Corporate Comments %
<b>AVEA</b>	27	565	2.833	3.398	16,6%
<b>TURKCELL</b>	20	416	1.940	2.356	17,7%
<b>VODAFONE</b>	24	1.396	6.043	7.439	18,8%

2833 people commented about 27 shares of Avea and the supplier replied 565 or in other words 16,6% of those. Turkcell have 216 comments for 1940 user comments about its 20 share and the ratio is 17,7%. Vodafone has 1396 comments for 6043 user comments about its 24 share and the ratio is 18,8% (Table 5). Thus we can obtain the result that the most user comment number of Vodafone pushed the supplier to make more comments in order to give answers of users and can analyze them.

**Table 6: Facebook Message Categories Between 1-31 March**

	AVEA		TURKCELL		VODAFONE		Total	
General	3	11,1%	3	15,0%	3	12,5%	9	12,7%
Campaign Declares	12	44,4%	3	15,0%	10	41,7%	25	35,2%
Special day celebration	2	7,4%	3	15,0%	2	8,3%	7	9,9%
Advertising film	1	3,7%	3	15,0%	1	4,2%	4	5,6%
Sponsorships	1	3,7%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	1	1,4%
Social Responsibilities	0	0,0%	2	10,0%	0	0,0%	2	2,8%
Tariffs Definitions	3	11,1%	0	0,0%	5	20,8%	8	11,3%
Phone adds	5	18,5%	6	30,0%	3	12,5%	14	19,7%
<b>Total messages</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

Specific categories were identified in order to evaluate the shares of GSM operators on Facebook between 1-31 March in terms of public relations. According to these categories 44,4% of Avea's shares were about campaign declares, 18,5 % about mobile phone adds and 11,1% were general and tariff definition (Table 6). Vodafone has ratios as 41,7 %for campaign declares and 20,8 % for tariff definition. Similarly the most of Turkcell's shares (35 %) were about campaign declares and tariff definitions. Additionally, during the month Turkcell considered social responsibility activities more than the others. Only Avea had a share about sponsorship activities. There were 2 greeting messages of Avea, 3 of Turkcell and 2 of Vodafone about the important days in the Month March, 8th March Women's Day, 14th March Feast of Medicine and 18th March Çanakkale day anniversaries.

## 5.2. Usages of Twitter

**Table 7: Twitter Usage Information**

	Date of Join	Tweets	Following	Foto-Video	Followers	Favorite
<b>AVEA</b>	November-2011	1.891	51.024	590	288.942	24
<b>TURKCELL</b>	August-2007	4.036	16	785	582.022	-
<b>VODAFONE</b>	December-2008	35.235	3	449	532.964	9

It can be seen that Vodafone use Twitter most when the general Twitter information of three operators are examined (Table 7). And in terms of followers Turkcell has the most followers. The latest access of Avea to Twitter world would be helpful to explain its less follower number.

**Table 8: Evaluation of Tweets Between 1-31 March**

	AVEA		TURKCELL		VODAFONE		Total	
Informative	1	2,90%	16	35,60%	11	19,60%	28	20,70%
Phone adds	10	29,40%	9	20,00%	12	21,40%	31	23,00%
Social responsibility	0	0,00%	10	22,20%	11	19,60%	21	15,60%
Campaign Declares	9	26,50%	2	4,40%	7	12,50%	18	13,30%
Special day celebration	4	11,80%	3	6,70%	2	3,60%	9	6,70%
General	1	2,90%	3	6,70%	3	5,40%	7	5,20%
Tariff Adds	2	5,90%	0	0,00%	5	8,90%	7	5,20%
Sponsorships	2	5,90%	0	0,00%	4	7,10%	6	4,40%
Competition announcements	5	14,70%	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	5	3,70%
Adevertising film	0	0,00%	2	4,40%	1	1,80%	3	2,20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100,0</b>

It is seen from the twitter messages of Avea that mobile phone adds are at the top with a ratio of 29,4 % and the following topics are campaign declares (26,5 %) and competition (14,7 %) announcements. Informative tweets are at the top of the list with a ratio of 35,5 % at Turkcell and attentionally social responsibility activities are the second with 22,2 %. Message density of Vodafone is at mobile phone adds with a ratio of 23% (Table 8). It can be observed that Vodafone is the only supplier that shares both social responsibility and sponsorship messages. Avea shared messages only about sponsorship while Turkcell sharing only social responsibility tweets.

**Table 9: Contents of Tweets Between 1-31 March**

	Tweets							Retweet	Favorite
	Photos		Text		Video		Total		
<b>AVEA</b>	20	58,8%	8	23,5%	6	17,6%	34	492	<b>4.557</b>
<b>TURKCELL</b>	6	13,3%	34	75,6%	5	11,1%	45	1.223	<b>6.364</b>
<b>VODAFONE</b>	30	53,6%	20	35,7%	6	10,7%	56	506	<b>1.593</b>
<b>Total</b>	56	41,5%	62	45,9%	17	12,6%	135	2.221	<b>12.514</b>

It would be seen that while more than half of the messages of Avea (58,8 %) and Vodafone (53,6 %) were consisting of photos, three quarters (75,6 %) of the messages shared by Turkcell had a textual content (Table 9). The other important issue here is that all of the operators used messages containig videos at least. It could be said that Avea and Vodafone tries to stick in the minds via using visual elements.

**Table 10: Tweet Comments Between 1-31 March**

	Tweets	Corporate comments	Users comments	Total comments	Corporate comment %
<b>AVEA</b>	34	70	234	304	%23,0
<b>TURKCELL</b>	45	114	434	548	%20,8
<b>VODAFONE</b>	56	148	392	540	%27,4
<b>Total</b>	135	332	1060	1392	%23,9

Turkcell is the operator getting comments from customers most so doing the least feedback (20,8 %). The most replying supplier to customer comments is Vodafone (27,4 %) (Table 10). The study proved that the GSM operators can not manage these feed backs good enough while the social media is seen as a great advantage by supplying double sided and fast communication opportunities in terms of public relations.

**Table 11: General Youtube Analyze of GSM Operators**

	Date of Join	Number of subscribers	Access of other social media platforms	Number of views
<b>AVEA</b>	03.06.2006	6.759	Web,Google Plus,Facebook, Twitter.	6.622.068
<b>TURKCELL</b>	02.03.2006	14.699	Web,Google Plus, Twitter.	26.081.699
<b>VODAFONE</b>	23.11.2011	3.795	Web,Google Plus,Facebook, Twitter.	11.655.405

The first company showed itself at Youtube video sharing site was Turkcell and then Avea. Vodafone existed at Youtube 5 years later than the others. Turkcell is at the top of the list in terms of user numbers at 14.699, Avea is the second with 6759 and Vodafone is the last with 3795 subscribers (Table 11). The number of video views is much more than the numbers of subscribers and this shows us that these videos been watched by people out of subscribers as well. This can offer advantages for operators to reach to potential users. At this point of view, companies put links of social media areas such as Facebook, Twitter and Google Plus into their own web sites.

### 5.3. Usages of Youtube

**Table12: Youtube Analyze Between 1-31 March**

	Number of shared videos	Video views	Total videos
<b>AVEA</b>	7	473.784	339
<b>TURKCELL</b>	14	1.648.292	866
<b>VODAFONE</b>	6	233.378	336

Turkcell shared most video at Youtube corporate page with a number of 14, Avea is the second with 7 videos and Vodafone is the third with 6 videos. It is observed that video view amount is much more than video share amount. While the ranking doesn't change there are huge differences between numbers of video view and it takes us to analyze the message content of the videos.

**Table 13: Message Contents of Videos Uploaded to Youtube**

	AVEA	TURKCELL	VODAFONE	Total
Social Responsibility	-	5	-	5
Service Introduction	6	5	5	17
Corporate Adds	-	1	-	1
Products Adds	1	1	1	3
Celebration Message	-	2	-	1
<b>Total message</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>27</b>

Avea had 6 service introduction videos and a product add video, Turkcell had 5 social responsibility, 5 service introduction, a corporate add, a product add and 2 greeting videos. Vodafone had 5 service introduction videos and a product add video.

## Conclusion and Discussion

Since the most Youtube user company is Turkcell, it is important to announce activities to target audience in terms of public relations. All the three operators use social media intensely when Twitter and Facebook usages are examined. But there would be differences between participation of subscribers in terms of content and density of the activity.

It is seen that the social media accounts are being used for public relation activities but when considering the recent efficiency of social media it is observed that these efforts would not be enough. It is observed that social media is used by GSM operators mostly for advertisement, marketing and sales based purposes, while purposes such as sponsorship, social responsibility and reputation management is limited.

The technology sector at the first; especially the obligation of differentiation of the companies in the mobile communication sector against the expectations of the target masses are gradually increasing. Its reason is that the consumers' expectation and desires show the rapid change, depending on technology. Social media is one of the most effective mediums in which this rapid change is raised and expressed. Therefore, it is considered that the GSM companies have to give more places to public relations activities on social media to acquire the loyalty of their current customers and reach potential customers.

When we view the number of subscriber and the corporate social media accounts of the GSM companies, it is seen that these companies make shares on social media with their limited subscribers. Thus, they should make their social media accounts more active to realize their public relations strategies by organizing studies and campaigns to communicate with their current customers on social media. Moreover, the GSM operators can perform their public relations activities in a digital milieu on behalf of the institution by intensively using social media in such cases as the consolidation of institutional image, the strengthening of reputation, and the emergency response to possible crises. The GSM operators, which transform these

sharing mediums that enable a broad participation into an advantageous case, will become *preferable* among their competitors.

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