

## A THEORETICAL STUDY ON THE MEANING OF TRUST IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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### Abstract

*Trust is one of the most important elements of the relationship between two living things. In the absence of trust, all forms of business, relationship and communication cannot fully achieve their goals. Trust is also very important in the communication of an individual with institutions. Trust is very important both in the communication of institutions with their internal target groups and in their communication with the public. Trust has a very important position in terms of public relations, which is to understand the public closely, to communicate with the public, to carry out planned activities between the institution and the public by analyzing the data obtained about the public. Trust is the basis of the positive image and reputation that will be formed by public relations activities. In this study, the place and relationship of the concept of trust in public relations has been discussed, what the concept of trust means in public relations has been researched, and it has been revealed that public relations is a field of activity based on trust, based on the evaluations presented in the literature.*

**Keywords:** *Trust, Public Relations, Corporate Reputation, Corporate Communication, Corporate İmage.*

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## HALKLA İLİŞKİLERDE GÜVENİN ANLAMI ÜZERİNE TEORİK BİR ÇALIŞMA

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### Özet

*Güven, iki canlı arasındaki ilişkinin en önemli unsurlarından biridir. Güvenin yokluğunda, her türlü iş, ilişki ve iletişim hedeflerine tam olarak ulaşamaz. Bireyin kurumlarla olan iletişiminde ve kurumların hem kendi iç hedef gruplarıyla iletişiminde hem de halkla iletişiminde güven çok önemlidir. Halkı yakından anlamak, halkla iletişim kurmak, halk hakkında elde edilen verileri analiz ederek kurum ve halk arasında planlı faaliyetler yürütmek olan halkla ilişkiler açısından güven çok önemli bir konuma sahiptir. Halkla ilişkiler faaliyetlerinin oluşturacağı olumlu imaj ve itibarın temeli güvendir. Bu çalışmada halkla ilişkilerde güven kavramının yeri ve ilişkisi tartışılmış, halkla ilişkilerde güven kavramının ne anlama geldiği araştırılmış ve literatürde sunulan değerlendirmelere göre halkla ilişkilerin güvene dayalı bir faaliyet alanı olduğu ortaya konmuştur.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Güven, Halkla İlişkiler, Kurumsal İtibar, Kurumsal İletişim, Kurumsal İmaj

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## Introduction

Due to the diversification of media environments, it has become easier for the individual to access information. In the past, the close friends that the individual consulted to buy a product or prefer an institution have been replaced by the comments that one clicks on the internet.

People have begun to take into account the messages and contents they encounter in the media in their travel preferences, accommodation and holiday preferences, meeting their food and clothing needs, and meeting the needs of many daily lives. The information that the individual can easily access through the internet and the media in general for the supply of any institution and product has an important role in determining the perceptions of the individual towards the institution with which he or she will interact. In particular, various comments about institutions, various media texts and news contents can affect the perceptions of institutions positively or negatively. This situation, on the other hand, can direct the trust in institutions from the very beginning, even before the experience is realized. Thus, any content that is produced at any time, especially in internet environments, draws attention as factors that can affect the trust of the individual to the institution. The diversification of the media at this level and the fact that it has a place in the life of the individual has made the concept of trust more important than ever for institutions.

Issues such as trust in the employee, trust in the service, trust in the product, trust in communication, trust in behavior, trust in hygiene, trust in quality can be expressed as the expectations of the public from an institution under the title of trust.

The most effective way to ensure trust issues, which have such a wide variety and can increase in variety according to the service sector, is through public relations activities. Institutions need to be reliable in order to keep and maintain communications with both their own corporate interests and the public at the best level.

Because being reliable can mean being distinguished and being preferred for institutions. In this study, public relations and trust relations were examined by literature review, and the findings were evaluated in the conclusion part.

## Public Relations

If public relations is defined as the most important sentence of this age, it can be said that both the subject and the object of this sentence are person. Public relations strives to put forward a wide variety of practices in various areas of this world, which naturally belongs to human beings. Since the practices areas of public relations are very diverse and wide, a wide variety of definitions are made.

In its most general definition, public relations is all of the work done to improve and regulate the relations of a person or organization with its environment or public (Onal, 2000, s. 15).

The concept of public relations is also expressed by some associations as follows:

According to the German Public Relations Association, “conscious and legitimate efforts to gain and maintain the trust of the public and to gain understanding of the public, based on systematic research”. According to Denmark Public Relations Association, Public relations is the totally administrative efforts systematically spent by the private sector and public institutions in order to create the existing or expected dialogue and understanding, sympathy and support with the people they are in contact with (Yalçındağ, 1996, s. 4).

In Seitel's definition, public relations serves as an early warning system to help predict trends; uses deep research, reliable and ethical communication techniques as its main tools (Seitel, 2004, s. 4). Asna (1998, s. 11) defines public relations as a planned management art that creates and maintains strong bonds based on trust between institutions and their publics. Kılıçkaya (1992, s. 31-32) draws attention to the principle of creating trust and sympathy in the society while listing the common principles that should be in public relations practices. Tortop (1990, s. 10-11), on the other hand, states that public relations is especially important for public institutions. According to him, public relations is a field of study that will turn the feelings and attitudes of distrust about public institutions into positive.

In the historical process of public relations, there have been examples that explain the relationship of trust and public relations. Among these examples, the well-known

practices of Ivy Lee in the 1902 Anthracite Coal strike and for the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1906, are listed as activities that prioritize trust in public relations.

By associating the concept of trust with public relations, it can be evaluated that public relations can be built on trust, and public relations can be maintained efficiently as trust is established. Thus, including the concept of trust in some definitions of public relations might tell us that public relations is a discipline of building trust.

### **Concept of Trust**

The term of trust has been among people from the beginning of human history. All good relations and surely communication types are related with and supported by trust. When the term of trust announced or told, a positive feelings and ideas can appear in the minds of people. Thus, if trust and its elements are managed and controlled in a right way, like people relationships, corporates can have important achievements. For this reason, trust and its components should be understood well, and the necessities should be defined, designed and done. At that point, the definition of trust would be tried to present accordingly public relations literature. Surely, trust definitions are varied according to the literature.

Alesina and Ferrara (2000, s. 2-3) try to understand what determines trust. According to them, there can be a some probable factors. It is stated that the source of trust might be related with a moral and cultural attitudes. In this regard, trust can be affected by personal characteristics like educational varieties and religious beliefs; past experiences about someone or something; similarities or relationships such as same social, racial or ethnic group; longer interactions with someone or something; legal institutions.

Wang and Emurian (2005, s. 108) try to summarize with the reasons why the multiple definitions are in the literature. Firstly, trust is an abstract term, and is generally used with some similar concepts like credibility, reliability and confidence. Secondly, trust is versatile term that include the cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions. Thus, its meaning can be changed according to each discipline.

Trust is both a sensitive human feeling and a strong expectance related with the something that we wish others will support us in the future because they done in the past

(Moloney, 2005, s. 552). Lewicki, McAllister and Bies (1998, s. 439) define trust "in terms of confidants positive expectations regarding an other's conduct". When the sides trust each other, they assume that their interests are shared or care about the others' interests. When the threats and risks are not high, occurring trust is supposed. Thus, individuals do not think much about how the others are or act and they feel no need to worry anything (Schul, Mayo and Burnstein, 2008, s. 1293).

Keh and Zie (2009, s. 737) found some factors in their research to measure the trust to an organization. These are listed as being competent at what it is doing, being responsive to the public, being trustworthy and being integrity. Researchers define some qualities involved in evaluate trust as confidence, reliability, caring, goodwill intention, altruism, honesty, fairness and etc. (Cho, 2006, s. 27).

Park, Lee and Kim (2014, s. 296) define trust as the target groups' belief on a corporations' performance related with its expertise, integrity and goodwill. In other words, to represent trust, three dimensions are stated which are expertise, integrity and social benevolence (Mayer et all.,1995, s. 709-734). Expertise trust is defined as people's belief that a company has the proficiency and technical effectivity to produce and distribute its products, and that it is able to perform necessary service functions effectively. Integrity trust is defined as the people's belief on a corporate of which consistency between its corporate values and behaviours, and adherence to the ethical factors. Social benevolence or goodwill trust is defined as people's belief about how a corporate protects and support of its environment and society.

### **Public Relations and Trust**

When evaluated in terms of public relations, trust is one of the important results of public relations. According to Hon and Grunig, trust is defined as the level of confidence of one side to the other side. They state several underlying elements of trust as integrity, dependability and competence. According to them, integrity is defined as a belief on a corporate that it can be fair and just; dependability is defined the belief of a corporate might achieve on what it says before or in the process; competence is also defined as the belief on its talent to be able to achieve what it says (Hon and Grunig, 1999, s. 19). Hung et all. (2016, s. 593) stated that these three elements of trust were identified and have adopted in public relations.

In short, trust can be defined as one of the most important components of all corporations. It is a valuable factor in long-term relations between corporations and its target groups (Ki ve Hon, 2007, s. 421).

According to Karatepe (2008, s. 84) being reliable means being reputable. Thus, a corporation which achieve being reliable in the eyes of its public, it has already behaved, worked, produced, communicated trustfully. It is also important for corporate reputation (Walsh et all., 2009, s. 197). It has also an important role customer loyalty (Sirdeshmukh at all., 2002:15). Because trust is among the reputation components such as social responsibility, service quality and relations with stakeholders and constitutes the source of corporate skills of public relations (Sykes, 2002, s. 79). Corporations should be in the minds of consumers or their public with behaviors that will gain trust. For this, actions should be taken rather than words. Thus, an institution/organization that gains trust also gains a positive reputation. However, all kinds of corporate activities and behaviors should be sustainable in a way that supports and strengthens the reputation and trust gained. As a result, the words of the institution, the ideas and views of the institution gain a respectable and remarkable quality in the eyes of public institutions and organizations, the media and the society (Karapınar, 2018, s. 133).

While Cheng and Shen (2020, s. 2) defines the term of trust related with crisis situations, they state the stakeholders' trust in a corporate at the time of crises and the level of confidence how the corporate can resolve the crises. Accordingly, it can be stated that the reputation created as a result of trust provides benefits to institutions in crisis situations.

While trying to understand the concept of trust, the concept of distrust should be understood. Distrust generally occurs others interests conflict with ours. Eventhough we are sometimes unaware of any clear conflict of interest, we can feel uneasy, sense that the situation or event is abnormal and we can think others might act unpredictably or they can cause something unexpected to happen (Schul, Mayo and Burnstein, 2008, s. 1293). If there is a problem of trust or distrust towards institutions, this is a factor that can cause various threats to occur for institutions. The threat can bring crisis or crises. Crises, on the other hand, are events that no corporations wants to face. Therefore, institutions

should attach great importance to the concept of trust in order to close the paths to crises. Public relations has a very important function in building trust.

Trust is related with safety and transparency. Thus, individuals know and believe there is not anything to be afraid of the actions or services between them and others. Contrary to this, distrust is connected with the lack or less of transparency. Establishing and maintaining trust in the institution among the target audiences are among the most basic objectives of public relations. Contemporary public relations practices suitable for two-way symmetrical communication based on mutual harmony and dialogue; With its structures that support the principles of transparency, accountability and participation, it plays an effective role in building trust in institutions in target audiences (Boztepe, 2013, s. 54). Trust in institutions can contribute to the formation of positive images and strengthening of reputation. There may be various elements in the formation of trust, but communication and corporate communication are very important among these elements (Jefkins, 1992, s. 155).

Karatepe (2008, s. 84) expresses that trust gives power to institutions as well as individuals. According to her, being reliable is a fragile value, which can be acquired over a long period of time, on the other hand, can be lost in a very short time, and involves the risk of being mistaken and deceived. Just at this point, public relations practices play an important role in developing long-term relationships based on dialogue, goodwill and understanding and gaining the trust of their target audiences.

According to Kent and Taylor (2007, s. 15) trust, as a basic element in public relations, is seen as an important factor that should be established and maintained in the all communication processes. This can be seen between the employee and the customer communication in an organization and in the communication of the organization with its public. Rawlins (2008, s. 3) lists certain criteria for institutions to establish trust. Accordingly, institutions should be open and honest in all their activities and practices; communicate directly, clearly and effectively, and organizations should show a distinct concern for their employees. According to the results of Rawlins' study (2008, s. 16), when an organization become more transparent it will also become more trusted. Similar to Rowlins, Yıldırım's (2021, s. 63) study also revealed that transparent communication is positively associated with organizational trust of employees.



## RESULT

According to the evaluations on the relationship between trust and public relations in the literature, firstly it is said that trust is one of the important results of public relations. Also, trust is related with safety and transparency. Thus, individuals know and believe there is not anything to be afraid of the actions or services between them and others. Accountability and participation are also other elements of trust for all corporations.

Integrity, dependability and competence are stated as other elements of trust. So all corporations should be aware of their capabilities, try to behave and service by all organizations in all situations with its all equitable and try to maintain on all occasions what it has already said and promised by means of variety of vehicles.

Trust is among the fundamental elements of the long-term relationship of institutions with the public. Thus, it can be suggested to aim a sustainable relationship for the benefit of both the institution and the public, with public relations activities carried out in order to ensure the effectiveness of communication between the public and the institution. It can be stated that a sustainable relationship and communication environment will play an important role in ensuring the trust of the public to institutions.

Trust also means reputation. Therefore, institutions should work to fulfill the sense of trust and requirements to be reputable. Trust brings with it the loyalty of the public and customers. Therefore, the more trustworthy an institution is, the more loyal public it will have. In possible crisis situations loyal customers and public will be able to stand by institutions. For this reason, it can be stated that trust is a preventive element in crisis management and crisis communication processes, which are one of the important fields of activity of public relations.

As a result, communication and corporate communication, which are the basis of public relations, might be said the necessity elements of trust, too. So communication might be thought the basic source of trust. For this reason, communication is very important both to ensure the trust of the internal target audience and to ensure the trust of the external public.

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## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Bu çağın en önemli cümlesi “halkla ilişkiler” olarak tanımlanırsa bu cümlenin hem öznesi hem de nesnesi “kişidir” denilebilir. Halkla ilişkiler, doğal olarak insana ait olan bu dünyanın çeşitli alanlarında çok çeşitli uygulamalar ortaya koyma çabası içindedir. Halkla ilişkilerin uygulama alanları çok çeşitli ve geniş olduğu için çok çeşitli tanımlar yapılmaktadır.

Halkla ilişkilerin tarihsel sürecinde güven ve halkla ilişkiler ilişkisini açıklayan örnekler olmuştur. Bu örnekler arasında, Ivy Lee'nin 1902 Antrasit Kömür grevinde ve 1906'da Pennsylvania Demiryolu için iyi bilinen uygulamaları, halkla ilişkilerde güveni ön planda tutan faaliyetler olarak sıralanmaktadır.

Güven kavramı halkla ilişkiler ile ilişkilendirilerek halkla ilişkilerin güven üzerine kurulabileceği ve güven oluştuğunda halkla ilişkilerin etkin bir şekilde sürdürülebileceği değerlendirilebilir. Bu nedenle, halkla ilişkilerin bazı tanımlarında güven kavramına yer vermek, halkla ilişkilerin güven oluşturma disiplini olduğunu bize söyleyebilir.

Güven kavramı, insanlık tarihinin başlangıcından beri insanlar arasında gerçekleşen her türlü iletişim ve etkileşimde var olmuştur. Tüm iyi ilişkiler ve elbette iletişim türleri güvenle ilişkilidir ve güven ile desteklenir. Güven terimi telaffuz edildiğinde ya da söylendiğinde insanların zihninde olumlu bir duygu ve düşünce oluşabilmektedir. Dolayısıyla güven ve unsurları, insan ilişkileri gibi doğru bir şekilde yönetilir ve kontrol edilirse, kurumlar önemli kazanımlar elde edebilir. Bu nedenle güven ve bileşenleri iyi anlaşılmalı, ihtiyaçlar tanımlanmalı, tasarlanmalı ve yapılmalıdır. Bu noktada güvene dayalı gerçekleşen halkla ilişkiler faaliyetlerinde güvenin tanımı halkla ilişkiler literatürüne uygun olarak anlaşılması gerekmektedir.

Uzmanlar güveni, bir şirketin ürünlerini üretmek ve dağıtmak için yeterliliğe ve teknik etkinliğe sahip olduğuna ve gerekli hizmet fonksiyonlarını etkin bir şekilde yerine getirebileceğine dair insanların inancı olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Dürüstlük güveni, insanların kurumsal değerleri ve davranışları arasında tutarlılık olan bir kuruma olan inancı ve etik faktörlere bağlılığı olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Sosyal yardımseverlik veya iyi niyet güveni, insanların bir şirketin çevresini ve toplumu nasıl koruduğuna ve desteklediğine dair inancı olarak tanımlanır.

Kurumlara karşı bir güven veya güvensizlik sorunu varsa bu kurumlar için çeşitli tehditlerin oluşmasına neden olabilecek bir faktördür. Tehdit kriz veya krizler getirebilir.

Krizler ise hiçbir kurumun yüzleşmek istemediği olaylardır. Bu nedenle kurumlar, krizlerin yollarını kapatmak için güven kavramına büyük önem vermelidir. Halkla ilişkilerin güven oluşturmada çok önemli bir işlevi vardır.

Literatürde güven ve halkla ilişkiler ilişkisine ilişkin değerlendirmelere göre öncelikle güvenin halkla ilişkilerin önemli sonuçlarından biri olduğu söylenmektedir. Bu bağlamda ortaya konan genel yargılar değerlendirildiğinde, halkla ilişkilerin güven tesisi yapıcı özelliği ortaya çıkmaktadır. Ayrıca güven, güvenlik ve şeffaflık ile ilişkilidir. Böylece bireyler, kendileri ile başkaları arasındaki eylemlerden veya hizmetlerden korkulacak bir şey olmadığını bilir ve inanırlar. Bunun aksine, güvensizlik şeffaflığın olmaması veya daha az olması ile bağlantılıdır. Hedef kitleler arasında kuruma duyulan güvenin sağlanması ve sürdürülmesi halkla ilişkilerin en temel amaçları arasındadır. Hesap verebilirlik ve katılım, tüm şirketler için diğer güven unsurlarıdır.

Dürüstlük, güvenilirlik ve yeterlilik, güvenin diğer unsurları olarak belirtilmiştir. Bu nedenle tüm kurumlar yeteneklerinin farkında olmalı, her durumda tüm kuruluşlara tüm hakkaniyeti ile davranmaya ve hizmet etmeye çalışmalı ve daha önce söylediklerini ve vaat ettiklerini her durumda çeşitli araçlarla sürdürmeye çalışmalıdır.

Güven, kurumların halkla uzun vadeli ilişkisinin temel unsurlarından biridir. Böylece halk ile kurum arasındaki iletişimin etkinliğini sağlamak için yürütülen halkla ilişkiler faaliyetleri ile hem kurum hem de kamu yararına sürdürülebilir bir ilişkinin hedeflenmesi önerilebilir. Sürdürülebilir bir ilişki ve iletişim ortamının halkın kurumlara olan güveninin sağlanmasında önemli rol oynayacağı ifade edilebilir.

Günümüz bireyleri ve kurumları için itibar her zamankinden daha da fazla önemli olan bir yaşamsal değer olarak görülmektedir. Hem insanlar hem de kurumlar itibarlı olabilmek ve bunu sürdürülebilir yapabilmek adına halkla ilişkilerin sunduğu çeşitli olanaklardan ve uygulamalardan yararlanabilmektedir. Bunların başında da itibara giden yolun izlenim ve izlenimlerin toplamı olan imajlardan geçtiği bilgisinin de tekrarlanması yerinde olacaktır. Bu açıdan değerlendirildiğinde birey ve kurumlar karşındakilerde olumlu izlenimler bırakabilmek için çabalar ve bu çabalarını da inşasını güven duygusu üzerine gerçekleştirileceğini de bilir. Ancak bu bilginin olmadığı ya da uygulanmadığı zamanlarda ise kurumları içinde yaşadıkları çevrede ciddi itibar tehditleri bekleyecektir. Bu noktada itibar güven ve halkla ilişkiler ilişkisi ortaya çıkmaktadır.

Çünkü, güven aynı zamanda itibar demektir. Bu nedenle kurumlar itibarlı olmanın gereklerini ve güven duygusunu yerine getirmek için çalışmalıdır. Güven, beraberinde halkın ve müşterilerin sadakatini getirir. Dolayısıyla bir kurum ne kadar güvenilirse, o kadar sadık bir kitleye sahip olacaktır. Olası kriz durumlarında sadık müşteriler ve halk, kurumların yanında yer alabilecektir. Bu nedenle halkla ilişkilerin önemli faaliyet alanlarından biri olan kriz yönetimi ve kriz iletişimi süreçlerinde güvenin önleyici bir unsur olduğu ifade edilebilir.

Sonuç olarak halkla ilişkilerin temelini oluşturan iletişim ve kurumsal iletişimin de güvenin olmazsa olmaz unsurlarından olduğu söylenebilir. Dolayısıyla iletişim, güvenin temel kaynağı olarak düşünülebilir. Bu nedenle iletişim hem iç hedef kitlenin güvenini sağlamak hem de dış kamuoyunun güvenini sağlamak için çok önemlidir.