

Developments in Corporate Social Responsibility Understanding and Practices in Turkey

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Introduction

Businesses are open systems that operate in line with customer demands and needs, resulting in profit. Nowadays, as a result of the increase of competition in the national and international arena, it is not enough for businesses to offer quality products or services. Likewise it is not sufficient to offer this product or service to the market in accordance with the purchasing power of the consumer. Corporate social responsibility aims to comply with social norms and values in order to increase the quality of life of employees, families and society (Kotler & Lee, 2006; Bowen, 2009; Mohr, Webb & Haris, 2001, p. 47). At the same time, it can be expressed as the efforts of companies to reduce or eliminate their harmful effects on society and to maximize their long-term beneficial effects (Mohr and Webb, 2005).

With corporate social responsibility practices, businesses make their lives more sustainable by getting approval from their stakeholders (Vo, 2011, p. 90). While CSR is seen as an important tool in establishing a relationship with the society and giving back to the society what has been taken from the society, it is also an important factor in the formation of corporate reputation (Bear, Rahman, & Post, 2010, p. 208). In a study done by Pfau et al. (2008), it was concluded that CSR ac-

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➔ Sayın, Z. (2021). Türkiye’de Kurumsal Sosyal Sorumluluk Anlayışında ve Uygulamalarında Yaşanan Değişim. İş Ahlakı Dergisi, 14 (1), ss 86-124.

✍ Research Paper

© iGİAD
DOI: 10.12711/tjbe.2021.14.1.0720
Turkish Journal of Business Ethics, 2021
isahlakidergisi.com

tivities have an effect on corporate reputation as a result of the perception created on individuals.

In the literature, there is no study examining the change in the field of CSR in Turkey in recent years. The contribution of this study is that it presents the change in the understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility in Turkey in a holistic framework in the light of published reports. The change experienced by year and subject, the change in the perspective of companies, society and NGOs on CSR has been discussed within the scope of the research. In this study, firstly, corporate social responsibility is discussed conceptually. Then, through the social responsibility studies conducted in Turkey, we examined the changes in the fields of corporate social responsibility activities in Turkey in recent years, the target group of the activities, how the enterprises evaluate CSR.

Conceptual Framework

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility was conceptually included for the first time in Bowen's book "Social Responsibilities of the Businessman" published in 1953. Bowen stated that businessmen should engage in social responsibility studies in accordance with social norms and values (Bowen, 1953, p.6). After Bowen's work, this concept attracted attention after the 1960s, and after the 1980s, the necessity of evaluating businesses with their non-economic activities as well as their economic activities was emphasized (Lantos, 2001, p. 596).

Mohr, Webb and Haris (2001, p.47) explain corporate social responsibility as a company's commitment to minimizing or eliminating its harmful effects on society and maximizing its long-term beneficial impact. Kotler and Lee (2006, p. 201) state that social responsibility practices include psychological and emotional needs as well as welfare, health and safety.

While businesses are making profit, they have to do this by considering environmental and social factors. At this point, the stakeholders of the enterprise emerge as an important element. When the CSR literature is examined, the stakeholder theory comes first among the theories discussed. In the CSR literature, in addition to the stakeholder theory, the new institutional theory can also be used in a way that supports each other (De Villiers & Van Staden, 2006). While the new institutional theory focuses on the corporate environment, social sectors, organi-

zational areas and social institutions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Scott, 1983), it associates the legitimacy and continuity of organizations with the adaptation to the corporate environment formed by social and cultural expectations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

The Methodology of The Study, Data Sources, and Data Analysis

In this study, CSR practices in Turkey were examined by using the qualitative research model over the reports and research published after 2005.

In this research, the documents in Table 1 were examined within the scope of document analysis.

Table 1. The Studies in the Scope of Our study

Name of the Research	Institution Carrying Out the Research	Date of Research
Corporate Social Responsibility of the Private Sector: A Review of 10 Companies in Turkey*	TÜSEV	2005
Corporate Social Responsibility Research	Capital Magazine	2005-2020**
Corporate Social Responsibility in Turkey, Assessment Report	Kurumsal Sosyal Sorumluluk Derneği (The Association for Corporate Social Responsibility)	2008
Corporate Social Responsibility Triangle in Turkey: Companies, Community and Community Organizations	TÜBİTAK project***	2009
Corporate Social Responsibility Case Study: A Study of 5 Companies and 5 NGOs in Turkey	TÜSEV	2011
****	TÜSEV	2011
Corporate Social Responsibility Almanac Study in Turkey	İNGEV	2019

* The research was prepared within the scope of the CIVICUS International Civil Society Index Project (STEP).

**The research has been repeated every year since 2005 in cooperation with GFK.

*** It was carried out within the body of Akdeniz University Faculty of Communication, Department of Public Relations and was supported by TUBITAK.

**** The research was prepared within the scope of the CIVICUS International Civil Society Index Project (STEP) II.

The contribution of this study is that it presents the change in the understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility in Turkey in a holistic framework. The change experienced by year and subject, the change in the perspective of companies, society and NGOs on CSR has been discussed within the scope of the research. The questions for which answers are sought within the scope of the research are as follows:

1. What kind of a change has occurred in Turkey in terms of corporate social responsibility?
2. What kind of change has occurred in the areas where corporate social responsibility activities are carried out?

Data Analysis

We made content analysis of the documents obtained in this study. With content analysis, it was tried to draw reproducible and valid results from the data obtained (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 25). In this study, the analysis process included the stages of organizing the dataset, pre-reading the resulting data set, annotating the texts, presenting and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2013).

Results

In order to reach the findings, the reports that answered the research question were analyzed. In this analysis phase, it was tried to reach the themes in which especially change was experienced. In this context, the first one reached is the perspective of companies and society on CSR. Others can be listed as sponsorship-public relations, strategy, communication, increase in CSR activities, NGO-company relationship, areas of focus and CSR reporting, respectively.

Companies and society's perspective on CSR

When companies and society's perspective on CSR were examined, the study conducted in 2008 stated that "From the point of view of companies, it can be said that CSR practices are progressing at a slow but steady pace." (Göçenoğlu and Onan, 2008).

By 2020, it is reflected in the research results that the public became more conscious about CSR and they wanted companies to embrace this issue. Within the scope of public research, there has been a significant increase in the rate of those who state that companies have responsibilities for social problems, especially in the last four years. While 58% of the public said “I think companies have responsibilities” in 2016, this ratio increased to 84% in 2020 (Capital, CSR League Last Table, 2020).

Sponsorship-Public Relations

In the research conducted in 2005, it was observed that the sponsorship practices of companies in their cooperation with NGOs in the field of CSR attracted more attention (Özdemir, 2005), and it was observed that NGOs organized CSR trainings for companies (Corporate Social Responsibility Assessment Report in Turkey, 2008). When it comes to 2019, companies also have cooperation with NGOs that are experts in the field of CSR activity (Corporate Social Responsibility Almanac Study in Turkey, 2019).

Strategy

Research shows that the importance given to CSR activities by companies is increasing day by day. Nevertheless, in the study conducted in 2004, it is noteworthy that companies do not have a clear strategy in determining the target audience for CSR, which projects and how to support them (Bikmen, 2004).

In the research conducted in 2015, a significant difference was observed in the views of the companies at the top of the list towards CSR. Company representatives stated that they now look at CSR more strategically. It has been stated that CSR, which has been seen in connection with charitable works for many years, progresses only from the perspective of “company bosses”, but recently, concepts such as new generation CSR and measurement in CSR have emerged. In a sense, now, efforts are made to measure the return of CSR to companies and the results (Capital, 2015).

Communication

Studies have revealed that CSR communication is a weak area (Deren Van Het Hof, 2009). Some companies in our country carry out their social contribution activities without announcing them. In the research conducted by Capital magazine in 2005, the subject of communication was explained as follows (Capital Magazine, 2005):

“Some companies in Turkey prefer to carry out their charitable works and social responsibility projects “quietly”. They regard it as “a shame” to announce these things. However, 75 percent of the public agrees that companies tell what they do about social responsibilities by using communication tools such as television, radio and newspaper. The rate of those who do not find it appropriate to announce these issues remains at the level of 25 percent.”

Another finding of the research conducted in 2011 was that companies announced their projects through advertising and promotional campaigns (Capital, 2011). In public voting, those who approve of the ideas about explaining corporate social responsibility activities to the society through communication tools increased from 80% in 2017 to 84% in 2018 (Capital, 2018).s

Increase in CSR activities

There has been an increase in the number of companies that support CSR activities not only on a project basis, but also with “responsible products” such as electric cars and environmentally friendly products in white goods. Companies that lead the way in these issues were ranked first in the “Corporate Social Responsibility Leaders 2011” research (Capital, 2011).

In the study conducted in 2020, it is striking that the public’s sensitivity to CSR is increasing. The following statements were included in the research conducted by Capital magazine in 2020:

“It is observed that the rate of companies launching new CSR projects has increased significantly compared to last year. White-collar workers state that their corporate social responsibility activities will continue to increase in 2020. The rate of those who say “it will increase” has also increased to 50 percent last year. In this context, we can see new projects in the coming years. “ (Capital, 2020).

NGO-Corporate Relations

NGOs generally frown upon cooperations with the private sector. According to 2006 STEP Research data, “The majority of those who participated in the survey conducted within the Civil Society Research in Turkey found the private sector-NGO relations and corporate social responsibility activities of the private sector limited (63% and 62% respectively.)” (TÜSEV, 2006).

While companies carry out CSR activities, they make their own foundations intermediary, and sometimes they can carry out their activities in cooperation with NGOs that are experts in the subject they will deal with (Corporate Social Responsibility Almanac Study in Turkey, 2019).

Activity Areas of Focus

2005 yılında yapılan araştırmada toplumsal konularda katılımcıların %30'u şirketlerin öncelikle "eğitim ve öğretime", %20'si "sağlık ve sağlık hizmetlerine", %12'si ise "çevre ve doğanın korunmasına destek" verilmesi gerektiğini düşünmektedir (Capital Dergisi, 2005). In the research conducted in 2005, 30% of the participants think that companies should primarily support "education and training", 20% think that they should support "health and health services", and 12% are in favor of "the protection of the environment and nature" (Capital Magazine, 2005).

In the research conducted in 2019, CSR project areas were determined as education, environment, social support and culture-art, health, economy, sports, awareness, and violence, respectively. In CSR projects, children took the first place with 33% of the target audience. After children, the target group is expressed respectively as the general population, youth, disabled, women, animal rights, agriculture-livestock breeding, elderly and refugees (Corporate Social Responsibility Almanac Study in Turkey, 2019).

CSR Reports

In the research conducted in 2008, it was stated that there was no reporting on CSR in general, and if information on CSR practices would be given, this issue was mentioned in the annual report. There is no such approach as having companies audit their CSR activities by independent institutions (Corporate Social Responsibility Evaluation Report in Turkey, 2008). As a result of the research conducted in 2011, it was seen that most companies that are at the top of the list of responsible companies prepared a report on CSR (Capital Magazine, 2011).

Discussion

This change, which has been experienced all over the world with globalization, has not affected every country to the same degree. Although the changes experienced with the spread of international businesses in the world have affected every country, basically the social, economic and political conditions of each country have caused these processes to be experienced differently. Therefore, CSR practices differ in each country. Although there are such differences, CSR practices of companies are prominent in the decisions of global investors and in credit and risk assessments (Özturan, 2011). This can be considered as a force that triggers CSR activities in Turkey as in the rest of the world.

While CSR activities led by “bosses” were observed in Turkey in previous years, today studies are carried out within a strategic plan. A change has taken place in a process where it is not clear what kind of projects will be done on which subjects and for which target group (Bikmen, 2004), CSR activities are integrated into corporate strategies and social responsibility principles are regularly included in the agenda of the institution with the ownership of the senior management (Özturan, 2011).

When we look at the process of change in CSR practices in Turkey, the understanding of foundation has shifted to a strategic orientation in general. According to the researches, in the first years, the business world leaders and companies, whom the public found close and sympathetic, were placed in the first place, but this ranking changed in the following years. Arrangements made, stakeholder pressures, developments in the international arena have brought along an important change process in the field of CSR in Turkey in recent years. However, this change is far from the examples in developed countries in terms of both structuring, field of activity and applications.

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