

An Evaluation on Public Relations Profession through Online Job Advertisements¹

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Abstract

Nowadays the need of building and maintaining strong ties and relations with the stakeholders has brought more responsibility on public relations practitioners and thus it has increased the need of professionalism of public relations profession. The professionalism of the field is related with the roles of the public relations practitioners taken responsibilities within the organisation. The roles for public relations function are the behaviour patterns of the practitioners and although the individuals differ from one another, the roles provide a model for the process of organisation or the function. The expectations of organisations from public relations function arise through the public relations roles and at the same time it reflects how the organisation adopts its communication approach. While public relations practitioners represent each roles in the organisation, how often they conduct these roles determines the dominant role. Thus it is important to figure out how public relations practitioners carry out their roles and which roles have prioritisation in order to find out the perspective of the organisation for public relations and how public relations profession is described in the organisation. Accordingly, in this paper it is aimed that the public relations roles are identified through online job advertisements and thus the current status of public relations profession is evaluated through the practitioners' roles. The shift from mass communication to interactive digital communication both makes the digital communication basic dynamics of everyday life and also the speed, frequency and accessibility of all the process through digital media have drawn attention of individuals and organisations. So the evaluation of current public relations profession through online job advertisements is congruent with this situation. As a field study, this paper is a descriptive research.

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By searching “public relations” key word, 227 job advertisements in 10 online job advertisement sites which has highest hit rate in Turkey are analysed in the research. Descriptive analysis was used to evaluate the data. Results indicate that public relations practitioner roles do not reflect on job advertisements.

Key words: public relations profession, public relations practitioner roles, online job advertisements

Halkla İlişkiler Mesleği Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme: Online İş İlanları Ne Diyor?

Öz

Günümüzde örgütlerin paydaşlar ile güçlü ilişkiler kurma ve sürdürme gereği halkla ilişkiler uygulayıcılarına daha çok sorumluluk yükleyerek halkla ilişkiler mesleğinin profesyonelleşmesine olan gereksinimi somutlaştırmaktadır. Alanın profesyonelliği halkla ilişkiler uygulayıcılarının örgüt içinde üstlendikleri rollerle bağlantılıdır. Halkla ilişkiler fonksiyonu için roller uygulayıcıların davranış örüntüleridir ve bireyler farklılaşsa da roller örgütün ya da fonksiyonun işleyişine yönelik bir model sunmaktadır. Örgütlerin halkla ilişkiler fonksiyonundan beklentileri halkla ilişkiler uygulayıcı rolleri aracılığı ile ortaya çıkmakta ve aynı zamanda örgütün nasıl bir iletişim yaklaşımını benimsediğini de yansıtmaktadır. Halkla ilişkiler uygulayıcıları örgüt içerisinde her rolü temsil ederken, rollerini hangi sıklıkla yaptıkları baskın rolü belirlemektedir. Nitekim, halkla ilişkiler uygulayıcılarının rollerini nasıl yerine getirdiği, hangi rolü önceliklendirdiği örgütlerin halkla ilişkilere bakış açısını ve halkla ilişkiler mesleğinin örgütlerde nasıl tanımlandığını da ortaya koymasından önemlidir. Bu doğrultuda bu araştırmada da online iş ilanları üzerinden halkla ilişkiler uygulayıcı rollerini tespit ederek; halkla ilişkiler mesleğinin mevcut konumunu uygulayıcı rolleri üzerinden değerlendirmek amaçlanmaktadır. Kitle iletişiminden interaktif dijital iletişime doğru yaşanan değişim dijital iletişimi günlük hayatın temel dinamiklerinden birisi haline getirirken, aynı zamanda dijital ortam üzerinden yapılan tüm işlerin hızlı ilerleyen gelişimi, sıklığı ve bu ortamlara ulaşma kolaylığı, hem bireyler hem kurumlar için bu dijital ortamları dikkat çeker hale getirmiştir. Dolayısıyla, halkla ilişkiler mesleğinin mevcut konumunu online iş ilanları üzerinden değerlendirmek bu durum ile uyumludur. Bu çalışma bir alan araştırması olup betimsel türde bir çalışmadır. Araştırmaya Türkiye’de tıklanma oranı en yüksek 10 online iş başvuru sitesinde yer alan ilanlar içerisinden “halkla ilişkiler” anahtar sözcüğü ile arama yapılarak 227 iş ilanı dahil edilmiştir. Elde edilen verilerin değerlendirilmesinde betimsel analiz kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın sonucunda halkla ilişkiler uygulayıcı rollerinin iş ilanlarına yansımadağı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: halkla ilişkiler mesleği, halkla ilişkiler uygulayıcı rolleri, online iş ilanları

Introduction

Nowadays the need of societal approval from the stakeholders for the sustainability of the organisations has brought the responsibility on public relations to identify the environment of the organisation and manage the interdependence between the environment and the organisation. This point of view has directed public relations to a strategic position. Public relations have no longer been described as traditional support function which manages just communication campaigns, rather it has transformed as a strategic and autonomous function that focuses on the balance between organisation's financial commitment and stakeholder-focused social behaviour (ŞatırKarakaya et al., 2017: 6; Vercicet al., 1996). This transformation supports the value of the function of the public relations (Gruniget al., 1992). The need of building and maintaining strong ties and relations with the stakeholders has brought more responsibility on public relations practitioners (Bowen 2006) and thus it has increased the need of professionalism of public relations profession (Ehlinget al., 1992). As a matter of fact, while the public relations function carries the responsibility of establishing a positive corporate reputation for the organization by managing the relationship between the organization and its stakeholders and gaining trust and support of the stakeholders, the reputation of the current occupational status of the practitioners concerned with this process is still being discussed in the literature (Meintjes and Niemann-Struweg, 2009; Sriramesh and Hornaman, 2006; Ehlinget al., 1992; Öksüz, 2015). Although there is a consensus in the literature that professionalism is a prerequisite for the development of the field of public relations; it is declared that the profession of public relations is often misunderstood and the profession criteria of public relations are not clear compared to other professions (Ehlinget al., 1992).

The concept of the profession, defined as work done by obeying certain rules through knowledge and skills gained after a certain learning and experience (Ertekin, 1987), is also a social contract between the profession executives and the public (Welie, 2004: 532). Different researchers have often addressed in the literature that there should be certain preconditions for an area of activity to become a profession. The preconditions for an occupational field to become a profession in these studies are given in Table 1:

Table 1: Expected Standards For Public Relations Profession

Writer	Year	Expected Standards
Wright	1981	intellectuality ethical codes comprehensive autonomy focus more on public service than personal interests carry out specific and essential services based on the basic knowledge structure orientation of practitioners for altruism
Gruning & Hunt	1984	professional values membership of professional organizations comply with professional norms intellectual tradition, technical skills acquired through professional training
Cutlip, Center & Broom	1985	theoretical based education significant and unique service production protecting the public interest practitioner autonomy code of ethical behaviour defined by professional organizations
Christensen	1987	a commitment to ethical standards a prevailing attitude of altruism mandatory educational preparation and training prior to entry into the profession mandatory continuing education a formal association or society independence public recognition as a profession
Cameron, Sallot & Lariscy	1996	technical skills salary levels research competency organizational status ethical performance. education gender and racial equity accreditation
Baskin, Aranoffve & Lattimore	1997	expertise autonomy commitment responsibility
Kalender	1999	identification of the field of activity of the profession and identification of the job undertaking an indispensable role education ethical standards for hiring organization of professional staff

Sager	2003	specialized knowledge continuing education codes of ethical conduct ability to enforce those codes (i.e., accountability)
Abdullah & Threadgold	2008	knowledge and personal competencies; research and education ethical codes accreditation and license
Sha	2011	standardized education grounded in a theory-based body of knowledge professional associations codes of ethics accountability and public recognition accreditation or certification
Picciotto	2011	to comply with ethical codes to learn a certain knowledge of information loyalty to colleagues to obtain quality standards in the execution of their own crafts
Görpe	2013	explanation of what it is contribution to other communication disciplines and demonstration of how to complete them proof of working at managerial level prove that you are not just equal to media relations and event management demonstrate the need to start research demonstrate why the research is necessary emphasizing that public interest is extremely important use information in the field and in the related fields considering professional standards
Ilıcak Aydınalp	2013	identification of the area the role of the employee recruitment education processes the existence of ethical standards
Wilensky	1964	occurrence of a full-time occupation area the existence of an educational institution formation of a professional body formation of ethical rules creating a claim and demand for its workplace

Cutlip et al. (2000) stated that public relations is one of the occupations that fulfilled the conditions listed in Table 1 during the vocational process; the existence of large organizations such as the PRSA and the IABC which embodies the strong specialized association embodies, clear ethical rules, legal rules, acceptance standards for full membership to field associations, undergraduate and postgraduate education, academic literature and the rising status of practitioners in organizations. Ehling et al. (1992) has linked the professionalism of the field of public relations with the necessity

of meeting the professional criteria mentioned here. While L'etang and Pieztca (2002) emphasize the importance of professionalism in public relations; Choi (2007) states the professionalism of the field is related with the roles of the public relations practitioners taken responsibilities within the organisation. As a matter of fact, the expectations of organisations from public relations function arise through the public relations roles and at the same time it reflects how the organisation adopts communication approach (Dozier, 1992). In other words, the roles of the public relations practitioners play in the organisation are the indicator of the degree of sensitivity of the organization to its environment, and its adaptability to the environment (Dozier, 1992, DeSanto and Moss, 2004).

The concept of role, which is regarded as the abstraction of the behavioural patterns of the people in organizations, leads to the actions of the practitioners by revealing predictable outcomes by combining repetitive actions (Dozier, 1992). Although the individuals differ from one another, the roles provide a model for the process of organisation or the function (Bauman, 2009). Roles for public relations functions are behavioural patterns of practitioners and reflect strategies developed for repetitive actions. The research on the concept of role in the field of public relations has begun with Broom and Smith in 1978 (Ehling et al., 1992). In this study, authors defined public relations practitioners as consultants who serve to the senior management of the organization, and they evaluated roles as services offered by practitioners. The four main roles that Broom and Smith provide to the field and later studies has referred frequently: the expert prescribers who identify the problems of public relations and answer these problems; communication facilitators who are interested in the flow of information between the organization and its stakeholders, the problem-solving process facilitators who aim to systematically solve communication problems with their stakeholders, and technicians who provide technical services for the organization. Dozier (1984) conceptualized these first three roles as a role of public relations manager, by presenting the manager-technician typology to the field. Because he argues that practitioners alternately use the first three of these roles as a common role includes different responsibilities. Manager-technician typology is also used as the basis for role researches (Grunig et al., 1992; Moss and Green, 2001; Baskin et al., 1997: 63-64; Kelleher, 2001: 304; Algren and Eichorn, 2007: 78). While Dozier (1984) classified manager and technician roles as a dominant role for public relations practitioners; he classified communication liaison and the media relations specialist as minor roles.

This situation also reflects the transformation of public relations from a crafty occupation to a professional occupation (Ehling et al., 1992). In addition, while the responsibilities taken by the public relations practitioners have shown their sensitivities to the environment (Dozier, 1992), the intensification of their interactions with the environments of the organizations and the necessity of different needs have also required specialization and professionalization in each sub function (Weber, 1995). Therefore, there is a transformation of public relations practitioners from technicians who practice routine decisions to managers who develop relationships with stakeholders.

This transformation also reflects the transformation of the field considered as crafty into the professional field.

Managers make political decisions and are held responsible for the results of public relations programs. They provide guidance to the management of the organization in the problem-solving process while providing communication between the organization and stakeholders. The technician role performs tasks about communication products that the dominant coalition decide within these two dominant roles, while the manager is a senior role, the technician is in the lower level. The media relations expert is similar to technician in terms of salary and organizational status, while the area of responsibility is purely media relations. The communication liaison is similar to the manager in terms of salary and organizational status, but does not provide guidance when organizational politics are formed, and mediates communication between the organization and stakeholders (Dozier, 1992).

While public relations practitioners represent each roles in the organisation, how often they conduct these roles determines the dominant role (Lauzen and Dozier, 1992: 209). Hong (2003: 8) emphasizes that public relations practitioners are characterized by the role they represent more frequently. Indeed, it is important to understand how practitioners fulfil their roles and which role they prioritize in order to find out how organizations view public relations, and how the profession of public relations is defined in the organizations (Cutlip et al., 2000). In this respect, in this paper it is aimed that the public relations roles are identified via online job advertisement and thus the current status of public relations profession is evaluated through the practitioners' roles. The shift from mass communication to interactive digital communication both makes the digital communication basic dynamics of everyday life and also the speed, frequency and accessibility of all the process through digital media have drawn attention of individuals and organisations. So the evaluation of current public relations profession through online job advertisement is congruent with this situation.

Method

The aim of the research is to identify public relations practitioner's roles through online job advertisement, thus to find out the current status of public relations profession through the practitioners' roles. In this respect, the research questions are:

Which public relations practitioner role is prioritized in job advertisements?

In which position is it expected that public relations practitioner will work in job advertisements?

As a field study, this paper is a descriptive research. Kariyer.net, Eleman.net and Yenibiris.com, which have highest hit rate online job application⁵ sites in Turkey, were analysed in the research. By searching "public relations" key word in search button in the main pages of these sites in 04.02.2017, the first 100 job advertisements in each site were included to the research. After excluding job advertisements which

⁵ Hit rate are found from www.alexa.com

have title but no content of the advertisement and repeating advertisements, 227 job advertisements are analysed in the research.

Descriptive analysis was used to evaluate the data. In the descriptive analysis used in the research where the conceptual structure of the research has already clearly defined, the data are summarized and interpreted according to the predefined themes (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013: 255-256). In this study, role typology of Dozier (1984) for public relations practitioners role are employed, and the roles of manager, technician, communication liaison and media relations specialist are the themes for descriptive analysis.

Findings

10 different positions have been identified as consultant, staff, personnel, manager, responsible, expert, coordinator, administer, assistant manager and assistant for the titles of public relations practitioners in 227 online job advertisements. It can be said that seven of these positions are senior positions (manager, administer, assistant manager, coordinator, expert, responsible, consultant); and the other three is the lower level position (staff, personnel, assistant).

Four themes consisting of managers, technicians, communication liaison and media relations specialists are regarded in the scope of dominant and minor role classification of Dozier (1984). Findings of managerial and technician roles in the dominant role classification are given in Table 2:

Table 2: Dominant Roles

Manager	Yes	No	Total
should take the responsibility for the success or failure of the organisation's communication or public relations program	2 %1	225 %99	227 %100
should make decisions about communication policies.	11 %5	216 %95	227 %100
the success or failure of communication or public relations programs should be asked of him /her.	3 %2	224 %98	227 %100
should give advice to the top management in the field of communication and public relations	3 %2	224 %98	227 %100
s/he is seen as an expert in communication or public relations issues due to his/her experience and education	3 %2	224 %98	227 %100
planning, implementing, budgeting and evaluating communication strategies.	30 %14	197 %86	227 %100
manage communication processes and make appointments.	21 %10	206 %90	227 %100

collaborate with other departments	24 %11	203 %89	227 %100
to keep up with current events and to have a good knowledge of general culture.	44 %20	183 %80	227 %100
Technician			
preparing brochures, flyers and other publications.	22 %10	205 %90	227 %100
writing the communication materials.	33 %15	194 %85	227 %100
taking photographs and designing graphics for communication and public relations materials.	42 %19	185 %81	227 %100
spelling checks on materials written by others.	-	227 %100	227 %100
organizing organizations such as seminars, meetings, excursions.	49 %22	178 %78	227 %100
taking part in the communication campaigns in the implementation process	6 %3	221 %97	227 %100
preparing content texts.	2 %1	225 %99	227 %100
Welcome and hospitality.	14 %17	213 %93	227 %100
full knowledge of the new communication technologies	108 %48	119 %52	227 %100
Report preparing	30 %14	197 %86	227 %100

According to Table 2, the most frequently cited qualification in the dominant roles is that the public relations practitioners have a “full knowledge of the new communication technologies” (%48). This finding is followed by the “organization of events such as seminars, meetings, trips” (%22) and “taking photographs and graphics for communication and public relations materials” (%19). It is remarkable that all three of these qualifications refer to the technician role. The most repeated qualification in the manager role in only %44 job advertisement is to “keep up with current events and to have a good knowledge of general culture”. It is clearly seen that within the dominant roles, predominantly the role of technician role is prioritized.

The findings of the roles of communication liaison and media relations specialists in the minor role classification are given in Table 3:

Table 3: Minor Roles

Media relations	Yes	No	Total
establishing media relations for the organization	23 %10	204 %90	227 %100
informing how the organization is represented in the media and informing organisation about important issues.	4 %2	223 %98	227 %100
responsible for press releases.	6 %3	221 %97	227 %100
using the journalistic skills to determine what the media will value the news about the organization.	5 %3	222 %97	227 %100
organizing press organizations and meetings.	3 %2	224 %98	227 %100
media planning	7 %3	220 %97	227 %100
ensuring that the organisation's activities are covered in the media	5 %3	222 %97	227 %100
Communication Liaison			
create opportunities to present the views/expectations of various internal and external stakeholders to the management	2 %1	225 %99	227 %100
representing the organization at events and meetings.	8 %4	219 %96	227 %100
supporting decision-makers with recommendations, suggestions and plans although s/he does not decide on the communication policies.	-	227 %100	227 %100
contribution to decision making and strategic planning processes.	3 %2	224 %98	227 %100
conducting public opinion research	7 %3	220 %97	227 %100
ability to communicate with diverse stakeholders	14 %6	213 %94	227 %100
identify messages to be coded in relation to the public and stakeholders.	2 %1	225 %99	227 %100

According to the findings in Table 3, it is seen that both minor roles are not prioritized as dominant roles. Nevertheless, the qualification that “establishing media relations for the organization”, taking place in %10 job advertisement, has been the most sought qualification for media relations minor role. This situation is also congruent with the finding that the role of technician has been found as prominent among dominant roles. Because the role of media relations is the minor role of the technician role.

Except for the roles of manager, technician, communication liaison and media relations specialist in Dozier's (1984) dominant and minor role classification, the most frequently repeated qualifications in the job the advertisements investigated in the research are listed in Table 4:

Table 4: Qualifications Except For Dominant and Minor Roles

	Yes	No	Total
Presentable	128 %56	99 %44	227 %100
communication skill	136 %60	91 %40	227 %100
team work	63 %28	164 %72	227 %100
solution oriented	32 %14	195 %86	227 %100
analytical thinking	30 %13	197 %87	227 %100
creative technician	35 %15	192 %85	227 %100

According to the findings in Table 4, public relations practitioners are expected mostly to have high communication skills (%60) and to be presentable (%56).

Evaluation and conclusion

Nowadays, while defining macro and micro environments in which the organizations are located and the responsibility for managing interdependence between the organization and its environment are changing the definition of public relations; with the development in communication technologies the need of public relations for organizations has become more critical. The need to establish and maintain strong relationships with stakeholders loads more responsibility to the public relations practitioners and embodies the need for the professionalization of the public relations profession. Despite the increasing importance of public relations and the need to professionalize the profession, the current occupational status of practitioners involved in this profession is still discussed in the literature. As a matter of fact, although the role of public relations practitioners is clearly defined in the literature, these practitioners are undertaking many ambiguous tasks in organizations. The public relations practitioner roles provide a basic framework for public relations practices. Moreover, they are important for understanding the functioning of public relations within the organization. Yıldırım and Akbulut (2017) emphasize how the current position of public relations perceives the public relations profession in the organizations and that this will be demonstrated by the demand of the qualified staff performing the profession.

By identifying the role of the practitioners in relation with the public through the online public relations job advertisements, this study aims to reveal the current position of the public relations profession through its practitioner roles in Turkey. The results have indicated that public relations practitioner roles do not reflect on job advertisements. There are only a handful of content announcements for the areas of responsibility for the four roles defined in the literature, which are managers, technicians, and communication liaisons or media relations specialists. While this reveals that the areas of responsibility of public relations practitioners are still unknown by advertisers (presumably human resource managers) in organizations, it is also important that it will show why profession has lagged behind in the professionalization process. Thus, although the relationship with the public develops according to the needs of the field of role literature and the role of strategist is added to the literature, it is remarkable that in this research which excludes this role and which is based on the basic roles, the responsibility areas for the basic roles do not even take place or are reflected in the advertisements to a lesser extent. This situation fuels the debate over the vocationalization of the field. As Ehling et al. (1992) points out, the perception of the area in this way has a negative effect on the profession, causing the field to remain as crafty and unable to complete the professionalization process.

Another finding that emerged in the research is that technician role is the prioritized role in advertisements compared to other roles. Along with this role, it can be said that organizations have expectations towards traditional and routine functions of public relations and public relations is following traditional processes. Also, finding that technician role is the primary role, is also contradictory to the desired practitioner positions in the advertisements. In the advertisements evaluated within the scope of the research, while senior positions such as administrator, manager, assistant manager, coordinator, expert, responsible, consultant are preferred for public relations practitioners, for these positions it is remarkable to see that it is expected to have responsibilities for the technician role instead of responsibilities related to managerial role.

Another remarkable finding that emerged in the research is; except for themes and codes related that 4 roles, "being presentable" and "having high communication skills" concepts are predominantly reflected in the advertisements. This finding also supports the opinion that public relations is a profession in which the process of transition from craftsmanship to professionalism is difficult and it also shows that the definition of public relations is often evaluated by daily definitions, rather than academic definitions.

For other researchers who will work on public relations practitioner roles, a qualitative study on the advertisements related to public relations practitioners with senior executives of organizations and with human resources managers and evaluation of the process can be recommended with in-depth interviews. This is the researchers' initial study on this subject, in the next study, public relations practitioner roles will be discussed with a strategic perspective.

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