



Research Article

## An Investigation on the Relational Work of Tour Representatives within Customer Orientation and Sales Work<sup>a</sup>

### Müşteri Yönelimlilik ve Satış İşi Kapsamında Seyahat Acentası Temsilcilerinin İlişkisel İşi Üzerine Bir Araştırma

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#### ABSTRACT

*In the contemporary world, service work encompasses more efforts to be customer-oriented and to boost sales. Scholars note that customer orientation and sales work may be contradictory, as the primary aim of capitalist organizations is to earn money rather than please customers. Thus, capitalist organizations demand workers to harmonize customer orientation and sales work. However, we know little about how this is achieved within situated interactions. This study uses the concept of “relational work” to explain how tour representatives (tour reps) harmonize customer orientation and sales work. Based on qualitative data, this study addresses the work of Turkish tour reps for Turkish tour operators. This study reveals how customer orientation and sales work overlap, and how this overlap is enacted within relational work.*

#### ÖZ

*Günümüzde hizmet işi gittikçe hem müşteri yönelimli olma hem de satışları artırma çabalarını daha fazla içermektedir. Araştırmacılar, kapitalist örgütlerin ana amacının müşterileri memnun etmektense para kazanmak olmasından dolayı, müşteri yönelimlilik ve satış işinin çelişebileceğini belirtirler. Bu nedenle kapitalist örgütler çalışanlarından müşteri yönelimlilik ve satış işini bağdaşturmalarını talep etmektedirler. Ancak bu bağdaştırmanın yerleşik etkileşimlerle nasıl başarıldığı konusunda az şey bilinmektedir. Bu çalışma, seyahat acentası (tur operatörü) temsilcilerinin müşteri yönelimlilik ve satış işini nasıl bağdaştırdığını açıklamak için “ilişkisel iş” kavramını kullanmıştır. Bu kapsamda bu çalışma nitel verilere dayanarak, Türk seyahat acentalarının otellerdeki temsilcilerinin işlerini incelemiştir. Bu çalışma, müşteri yönelimlilik ve satış işinin nasıl örtüştüğünü ve bu örtüşmenin ilişkisel iş kapsamında nasıl icra edildiğini ortaya koymuştur.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the Fordist production era the key driver of economic success focused mainly on the “quantitative” aspect of the production; however, in the contemporary world, the “qualitative” aspect of production that refers to the relational aspect of business transactions has become more vital for organizations (Callon, Méadal & Rabeharisoa, 2002). In the contemporary world, most organizations enact the relational aspect of business transactions under the concept of customer orientation. Broadly speaking, customer orientation embraces organizational attempts of ensuring customer sovereignty, customer satisfaction, and service quality (Kandampully, 2006; Korczynski, 2002). For customer orientation, organizations strive to meet customers’ needs by tailoring products and developing trustful relations with them (see Bandelj, 2012; Callon et al., 2002; Korczynski, 2002, 2005; Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008).

The mainstream management and marketing studies portray customer orientation mostly as a linear and smooth-running process and do not adequately highlight its contradictions and problems. One of the inherent problems of customer orientation rely on the entanglement of customer orientation with sales work, as combining customer orientation and sales work can be contradictory (Abiala, 1999; Korczynski, 2005; Korczynski, Shire, Frenkel & Tam, 2000).

The emphasis on sales work forces service workers to enhance consumption and stimulate demand for products, along with customer orientation (Darr & Pinch, 2013; Korczynski, 2002, 2005; Korczynski & Ott, 2005). Korczynski et al. (2000: 681) point out that organizational attempts to increase sales and ensure customer orientation manifest in the rhetoric of “service is sales and sales is service”. In some extreme forms of sales work, workers get commission on sales, and they may face sanctions for not achieving sales targets (Korczynski, 2002).

To boost sales, service workers try to value the products and ensure customer trust (Korczynski, 2005: 75; see also Callon et al., 2002). These attempts, however, may not always be to the customer’s benefit, as workers may misinform customers and/or overvalue products (Korczynski et al., 2000; Korczynski, 2005). Thus, the co-existence of customer orientation and sales work can cause tensions for service workers (Darr & Pinch, 2013; Korczynski et al., 2000; Korczynski, 2005). For instance, in a study conducted at four call centres in financial services and one in telecommunication services, Korczynski et al. (2000) note that although

some customer service representatives see sales work and customer orientation as compatible, some see customer orientation as instrumental for sales work.

Korczynski and Ott (2005) remark that researchers need to address how sales work relates to diverse relations in the market. In this sense, they analyse the relations of workers with their colleagues, managers, customers, and referees in the mortgage-sales divisions of two financial institutions. Korczynski and Ott (2005: 718) reveal that sales work mostly brings competitive and instrumental relations for workers in market-based networks. For instance, workers see customers as “a resource to be manipulated in order to earn commission earnings”. Furthermore, some workers can have positive relations because they are embedded in trust-based networks. Korczynski and Ott’s (2005) study depends on a network embeddedness perspective. This perspective privileges networks and “congeal relations into networks” (Bandelj, 2012: 177). Because the network embeddedness perspective privileges structural aspects, it cannot give a detailed account of how workers meaningfully and normatively enact their interactions. Bandelj (2012: 191) underlines that network analysis does not pay attention “to the mechanisms that underlie the formation, confirmation, negotiation, reparation, or dissolution of economic relations”.

In recent years scholars acknowledge the significance of “relational work” to address how economic relations are appropriately mingled within situated social relations. Relational work privileges activities and interactions. It does not embed individuals into abstract networks; it focuses on how individuals form, build, and maintain their relations in organizational and economic life. Moreover, the concept of relational work does not see economy and intimacy as separate and provides a robust background to address how economic interests and social relations are harmonized (Alacovska, 2018; Bandelj, 2012; Cederholm & Akerström, 2016; Zelizer, 2012). In this article, drawing on the concept of relational work and qualitative data, we present how tour representatives (tour reps) appropriately unite customer orientation and sales work.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Relational work is compatible with “practice turn” (Schatzki, 2001). Practice theory addresses activities, interactions, and material arrangements in order to understand institutions, organizations, work (Nicolini, 2012), and markets (Araujo, Kjellberg, &

Spencer, 2008), among others. For practice theory, social life transpires amid interconnected practices and material arrangements. Practice theory does not see the social world within entities but rather within processes. Thus, it does not take relations, individuals, institutions, organizations, and markets for granted; it instead addresses how they are constructed, negotiated, and maintained (Schatzki, 2001, 2010).

In social life every situation comprises distinct social interactions in which certain activities, interactions, affects, and materials are seen as acceptable or unacceptable (Schatzki, 2010). In this sense, relational work addresses how “appropriate” social interactions are enacted within economic lives and business processes (Bandelj, 2012; Zelizer, 2012). Relational work embraces “the effort of establishing, maintaining, negotiating, transforming, and terminating interpersonal relations” (Zelizer, 2012: 151).

Bandelj (2012: 179) underlines that “relational work is not mere sociality. It is an intentional effort or activity directed toward the production or accomplishment of a goal”. For instance, relational work embraces the organizational effort of building trustful relations with stakeholders in order to enter a new market, cementing intimate relations with co-workers for workplace performance, or building intimate and trustful relations with customers to increase sales (Bandelj, 2012).

Although mainstream management and marketing studies do not see a contradiction between customer orientation and sales work, capitalist organizations’ relations with customers are “essentially instrumental” (Korczynski, 2005: 73). Korczynski (2005) notes that capitalist organizations seduce customers with intimate, trustful, and seductive relations. These relations, in most cases, are enacted by workers within their situated interactions with customers. In other words, workers are required to enact relational work that encompasses harmonizing capitalist interests with trust and intimacy (Darr, 2011; Darr & Pinch, 2013; Korczynski, 2005). In this sense, Wiid, Grant, Mills and Pitt (2016: 174) remark that “buyers are more loyal to salespeople than the organizations employing them”. However, as Darr (2011: 507) underlines, we know less on the “micro-foundations of markets, which include the daily negotiations between buyers and sellers over what constitutes legitimate exchange”.

In our study, we address the aforementioned “daily negotiations” as relational work. Depending on contextual circumstances, the contents of relational work can vary considerably. Drawing on the call of Bandelj (2012: 194) to explore relational work in

diverse contexts, in the next section, we address the relational work of tour reps in which they harmonize customer orientation and sales work.

## 2.1. The Work of Tour Reps

Tour reps mediate between the tourist and the tour operator (Andrews, 2000; Guerrier & Adib, 2003). Although tour reps are crucial for ensuring tourist satisfaction, there are few studies on the work of tour reps. Guerrier and Adib’s (2003) and Andrews’ (2000) studies are notable exceptions. To the best of our knowledge, there is no specific study that addresses the work of tour reps in Turkey drawing on relational work.

Guerrier and Adib (2003) examine the work of tour reps within the dichotomy of work and leisure by collecting data from tour reps working in Mallorca for a British tour operator. Andrews (2000) analyses welcome meetings and bar crawls in Mallorca conducted by British tour operators. These studies show that the work of tour reps embraces relational work within customer orientation and sales work.

Tour reps start their relations with tourists at welcoming meetings, which are mostly scheduled for the day after the tourists arrive (Andrews, 2000). Since tour reps work in hotels, they interact frequently with tourists to cement their relations with them. These relations are paramount for tourist satisfaction; within the scope of these relations tour reps solve tourists’ problems, inform them about the destination and the hotel, and explain what to do and what to avoid (Guerrier & Adib, 2003, 2004). Tour reps are supposed to deal with all circumstances of the tourists’ holidays, encompassing the enjoyments, dissatisfactions, and problems of the tourists. Thus, tour reps can have problematic and/or pleasurable relations with tourists (Guerrier & Adib, 2003; see also Andrews, 2000). Guerrier and Adib (2003) note that tour reps sometimes try not to perceive abuse by tourists personally, but rather see it as part of their work. Moreover, tour reps can intentionally befriend tourists in order to govern them and shape the company’s image.

Tour reps also do sales work. The management sets sales targets for tour reps, and they get commissions on sales (Andrews, 2000; Guerrier & Adib, 2003). Tour reps sell most of the excursions at welcome meetings, but even after the welcome meetings, tour reps are “encouraged to chase up customers, by approaching them at the pool-side or knocking on their doors to get a sale” (Guerrier & Adib, 2003: 1406). When tour reps do not reach the sales targets, they can be reprimanded by managers and encouraged to learn from good sellers (Guerrier &

Adib, 2003: 1406). Moreover, Andrews (2000: 244) notes that management can withdraw the tour rep's only day off during the week for not achieving the sales targets.

Although Guerrier and Adib (2003) state that the work of tour reps embraces sales work, they do not give a detailed account of how sales work is enacted; for instance, they do not address how tour reps mingle sales work with customer orientation or whether tour reps see sales work and customer orientation as contradictory. Andrews (2000) addresses the contradiction of sales work and being hospitable (or customer orientation) within the work of tour reps. That study shows how tour reps value their products at welcome meetings by emphasizing the enjoyment of participating in excursions and warning tourists not to participate in excursions alone and/or by other means – e.g., those offered by local providers – as that could be risky or difficult (pp. 242-244). For Andrews (2000: 241), “the motives behind welcome meetings are governed by a desire to facilitate a commercial transaction rather than a warm friendly gesture”. However, the relations of tour reps and tourists can also be “reciprocal and friendly” (Andrews, 2000: 251; see also Guerrier & Adib, 2003). Within this context, though, Andrews (2000) does not give a detailed account of how tour reps enact their relational work within customer orientation and sales work.

Furthermore, Andrews' (2000) and Guerrier and Adib's (2003) studies do not analyse how tour reps' relations with hotel workers mediate tour reps' relations with tourists. Tour reps interact with hotel workers to ensure tourist satisfaction. Thus, the relations of tour reps with hotel workers can also mediate tour reps' work and their relations with tourists. Hence, in this study, we aim to fill the aforementioned gaps in the literature by addressing the following questions:

- How do tour reps form, maintain, and negotiate their relations with customers within customer orientation and sales work (relational work)?
- How does tour reps' relations with customers relate to tour reps' relations with hotel workers?

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1. Data sources

**Interviews and Focused Group Interviews.** Since the nature of our study is exploratory, we chose the qualitative design. We conducted the first 22 semi-

structured interviews in November and December 2014; the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> interviews were conducted in April 2015. Moreover, we conducted 2 focused group interviews with different interviewees in October 2018 to update our findings. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. As indicated in Table 1, 33 undergraduate students who worked as tour reps for Turkish tour operators and two tour operator managers (interviews 23 and 24) participated in our study (see Table 1).

Our interviewees worked with Turkish tourists in diverse hotels ranging from 3 to 5 stars. In our courses, we announced that we were planning an academic study on the work of tour reps and requested the students to contact us if they wanted to participate. Although we recruited undergraduate students, we were aware of the pitfalls of this choice. Guerrier and Adib (2003: 1406) note that in their study most tour reps “did not consider repping as a career but rather as seasonal temporary employment and a way of living abroad”. In line with this, the interviewees did not think of being tour reps as a choice for their long-term careers. Although there are some older and non-student workers in foreign tour operators, all of our interviewees stated that almost all of the tour reps working for Turkish tour operators are young undergraduate intern students. Thus, we think that our sample represents the population of tour reps working for Turkish tour operators.

Most of the interviews were conducted by the second author. We tried to conduct interviews within an informal atmosphere to eliminate the power imbalance between the researcher and the interviewees and to help interviewees better reveal their opinions and experiences. We avoided structuring interviews with standard questions, which may hinder the unfolding of the interviews. We aimed to structure the interviews as conversations with certain themes (Kvale, 1996; Smith, 2002). Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The first and second focus group interviews lasted 110 minutes and 100 minutes, respectively.

**Table 1:** Interviews and Focus Group Interviews

Interviews	Interviewees	Tour operators (pseudonym)	Experience as a tour rep	Gender	Age
Interview 1	Tour rep	A	1 season	Female	21
Interview 2	Tour rep	A	1 season	Male	22
Interview 3	Tour rep	A	2 seasons	Male	22
Interview 4	Tour rep	A	2 seasons	Male	21
Interview 5	Tour rep	B	2 seasons	Male	22
Interview 6	Tour rep	A	1 season	Female	20
Interview 7	Tour rep	A	1 season	Male	20
Interview 8	Tour rep	C	1 season	Male	22
Interview 9	Tour rep	B	2 seasons	Male	21
Interview 10	Tour rep	A	2 seasons	Male	23
Interview 11	Tour rep	A	1 season	Female	20
Interview 12	Tour rep	A	2 seasons	Male	21
Interview 13	Tour rep	B	1 season	Female	21
Interview 14	Tour rep	D	1 season	Male	21
Interview 15	Tour rep	A	1 season	Male	23
Interview 16	Tour rep	A	1 season	Female	19
Interview 17	Tour rep	A	4 seasons	Male	24
Interview 18	Tour rep	A	2 seasons	Female	22
Interview 19	Tour rep	A	2 seasons	Female	22
Interview 20	Tour rep	C	1 season	Female	21
Interview 21	Tour rep	B	1 season	Male	23
Interview 22	Tour rep	C	3 seasons	Female	24
Interview 23	Manager	A	11 seasons	Male	35
Interview 24	Manager	B	7 seasons	Male	30
Focus Group Interview 1	Tour rep	A	1 season	Male	22
	Tour rep	A	2 seasons	Male	21
	Tour rep	A	1 season	Female	20
	Tour rep	A	1 season	Female	20
Focus Group Interview 2	Tour rep	A	2 seasons	Male	21
	Tour rep	A	1 season	Female	20
	Tour rep	A	3 seasons	Male	22
	Tour rep	A	7 seasons	Male	22
	Tour rep	A	2 seasons	Female	21
	Tour rep	B	5 seasons	Male	26

We talked with interviewees about the working conditions of being a tour rep, tour reps' relations with tourists and hotel workers, how tour reps try to sell excursions to tourists, and how they mingle sales work and customer orientation. In our interviews, we assured the interviewees of their confidentiality. We did not feel their uneasiness.

We believe that our interviewees' comfort was also assured by the familiarity between them and us. However, as in all interview-based studies, they might still have performed impression management (Alvesson, 2003).

Table 1 shows the work experiences and demographics of our interviewees. Since tour reps can work at different hotels in the same season, our interviewees have experience in different 3 to 5 star hotels. Most of our interviewees have work experience of 1 season—approximately 5 months, mostly between June to October—or 2 seasons.

**Observation.** The second author also participated in 4-day training sessions held at our university. The training session was held to recruit undergraduate students as tour reps and was open to all students who wanted to participate. For the first 3 days, the instructor introduced the operator and explained the work of tour reps. On the last day, the instructor assessed the skills of students for being tour reps. The second author took notes of the training sessions and expanded the notes on the day of the observations.

### 3.2. Data Analysis

We used grounded theory to analyse our data (see Charmaz, 2000, 2008). First, each of us (the three authors) read the transcripts several times to familiarise ourselves with our data. Then we arranged weekly meetings to analyse the data. Within these meetings, we first coded all the data line by line to address the perspectives of our interviewees. During this open coding process, we took memos on the emergent issues. We grouped these detailed codes into categories with focused coding. Then we explored the relations of categories. Within the focused coding process, we drew on theoretical constructs of customer orientation, sales work, and relational work to interpret the data.

**Trustworthiness of the Data.** The trustworthiness of qualitative research cannot be restricted to methodological standardizations. It embraces the overall research process and depends on craftsmanship (Kvale, 1996; Pratt, 2008). Moreover, it pertains to how the knowledge claims are “defensible” (Kvale, 1996: 240-241). To enhance the trustworthiness of our study, we aimed to conduct our research dialogically (Kvale, 1996). First, we conducted interviews with a dialogic approach in which we built an informal atmosphere to encourage our interviewees to reveal their opinions comfortably. Furthermore, for each interview, we arranged the interview questions to adequately address the emergent research issues (see Kvale, 1996). In the coding process, we coded and interpreted our data together to prevent individual biases. We could also triangulate the interview data with the observations of the training session. Moreover, we qualified the adequacy of different theoretical concepts for interpreting our

findings. Finally, we avoided selective representations of the findings and we presented the explanatory quotes for our findings (see Kvale, 1996; Pratt, 2008).

### 3.3. Findings

**Customer Orientation and Sales Work.** Tour reps start their work at hotels at approximately 8:30 am. In the high tourist season, they work until 8:00 pm or 10:00 pm. The work of tour reps does not change across hotels or tour operators, as all of them are supposed to sell excursions and please customers. An on-site manager does not control tour reps at hotels. Thanks to this, tour reps can work freely to some degree (see also Guerrier & Adib, 2004). However, the managerial gaze materializes in the workspaces of tour reps in service (customer orientation) questionnaires and sales records.

Tour operators demand that tour reps be customer-oriented. For instance, “tour operator A” assesses the customer orientation of tour reps by measuring customer satisfaction. To do this, tourists are telephoned and asked to assess the performance of their tour reps on a scale from 1 to 5. High scores are earned by caring for tourists during the entire holiday:

*The tour rep accompanies the guest from the start to the end of the guest’s holiday. The tour rep helps the guest, solves his or her problems. The tour rep is a bridge between the guest, hotel, and tour operator. We [tour reps] deal with all the problems of guests. Even if a guest’s head itches, we scratch it. (Observation, 27.04.2015)*

In line with customer orientation, tour reps mostly refer to tourists as “guests”. The following quotes also demonstrate how customer orientation is one of the main aspects of the work of tour reps:

*Imagine that tourists are your guests in your home. Do your best for their ease and comfort. (Interview 23)*

*Researcher: What is the work of a tour rep?*

*Interviewee: Welcoming the guest ... informing her or him that the room is ready and accompanying them to the room. We are always the first contact person whom they contact when they have a problem. (Interview 3)*

Tour operators also demand that tour reps perform sales work. Tour reps sell excursions—rafting, jeep safaris, boat tours, night club tours, etc.—and receive commissions from the excursions they sell. Managers constantly underline the significance of sales work; as one interviewee notes, his managers

emphasize that tour reps' essential work is "selling excursions by ensuring tourist satisfaction" (Interview 5).

Our manager interviewee also underlines the entanglement of customer satisfaction and sales success. He notes that tourists evaluate sales work according to the customer orientation they get. The more they get customer orientation, the more they tend to buy excursions. Our interviewee also notes that throughout the season they allow tour reps to participate in most excursions, to make them aware of what they are selling. Thanks to this, tour reps can explain what they sell in clear and vivid details:

*For instance, we take our friends [the tour reps] on the boat trip. We say, "This is the boat you sell. This is the food you sell. This is the sea you sell. This is the bay you sell. Here is the captain. Here is the cabin boy". When the tour rep sells the boat trip, he or she should have something in mind. They should present the tour by adding something personal.* (Interview 23)

Their managers constantly warn tour reps to sell excursions. Managers also compare the sales success of the tour reps. As one interviewee remarks, the company rewards successful tour reps in sales work by letting them participate in excursions (Interview 5). Moreover, most of our interviewees note that the emphasis on sales work is heavier than that on customer orientation:

*Actually, we were not tour reps, we were peddlers.* (Focus Group Interview 1, Interviewee 3)

*When you sell, you are the best; when you cannot sell, you are the worst for the management.* (Focus Group Interview 1, Interviewee 5)

*We try to satisfy guests for sales. When guests are satisfied, they trust us.* (Focus Group Interview 2, Interviewee 3)

Being unsuccessful in sales work brings uneasiness and stress for tour reps. When they cannot sell enough excursions, management forces them to work in hotels with less sales capacity. Moreover, when tour reps' sales decrease, they may be assigned to transfer work. Transfer work involves accompanying tourists on their bus rides to excursions, hotels, and airports; it is not preferred by tour reps. Managerial decisions to arrange tour reps' hotels and work according to their sales records may push tour reps to engage in more sales work. For instance, one interviewee notes that since she knows that she may be assigned to transfer work if her sales decrease, she puts much effort into

boosting her sales (Interview 13), and boosting sales is entangled with relational work.

**Relational Work of Tour Reps.** The concept of relational work does not see intimacy and economy as separate spheres. Relational work emphasizes that economic transactions can be enacted within intimate and sincere relations (Bandelj, 2012). In our study, relational work embraces the harmonizing of customer orientation and sales work. In this sense, most of our interviewees see customer orientation and sales work as complementary. Tour reps' relations with tourists should be trustful, close, and sincere. On the first day of the training, the instructor underlined that the most essential element of the relation between tour reps and tourists is "trust" (Observation, 27.04.2015). One interviewee remarked that if the tour rep is not sincere, the tourists understand that (Interview 17). Another interviewee also remarked that when a tourist perceives the insincerity of a tour rep, the tourist does not interact with him or her and will not participate in excursions; when we asked this interviewee what she recommends to a beginner tour rep, she stressed "being sincere to tourists" (Interview 20).

Trust and sincerity bring about close relations. However, tour reps do not seek trustful and sincere relations for the sake of close relations with tourists. They seek more sales, and almost all interviewees note that their close relations bring increased sales. One interviewee underlines that because of his close relations with tourists, his customer orientation scores are high; thus, he can sell more (Interview 10). Another interviewee also explains that it is easy to sell excursions to guests who are satisfied with the customer orientation (Interview 17). The trustful, sincere, and close relations of tour reps do not pre-exist. They are engendered by the relational work of the tour reps, encompassing practices of welcoming tourists, being in touch with tourists, solving tourists' problems, being close with hotel workers, avoiding aggressive sales work, and valuing the excursions. In what follows, we will present the aforementioned practices of relational work.

**Welcoming Tourists.** The essential part of tour reps' work is developing relations with tourists. Tour reps start their relational work with tourists by welcoming them. However, most of the tour reps do not arrange welcoming meetings, since Turkish tourists do not prefer to attend them. Thus, tour reps try to welcome every tourist personally. As one interviewee remarks, welcoming tourists is a kind of a rule for tour reps (Interview 4). Another interviewee explains that he calls tourists if they are late in arriving to the hotel to learn if they have a

problem. By this, he can impress his guests (Interview 10). Another interviewee states that if tourists do not arrive until the end of his shift, he calls them to inquire where they are, and he tells them that he needs to leave the hotel and hopes to meet them at breakfast the following day (Interview 7).

Welcoming activities establish familiarity and trust between tour reps and tourists. One interviewee states that if tour reps cannot welcome tourists, tourists may not know the tour reps and instead may contact hotel workers to solve their problems (Interview 11). Another interviewee also remarks that if the guests like the tour reps on the first day and do not have any problems, they will constantly contact the tour reps (Interview 8).

To welcome tourists, tour reps introduce themselves to the tourists, facilitate the check-in process, offer free drinks, inform the tourists about hotel facilities, accompany them to their rooms, and provide their phone numbers and brochures about excursions. Moreover, tour reps also ask the tourists to contact them whenever they need anything:

*Whenever they step into the hotel, we welcome them. [For instance] I say 'welcome, my name is [his/her name], I am your tour rep. I will care for you throughout your holiday. Let me take your identity cards and vouchers, and I will start your check-in. (Interview 15)*

If tourists arrive to the hotel before check-in time, which is usually at 12:00 or 2:00 pm, the tour reps encourage them to use the hotel facilities until their rooms are ready. When tour reps are responsible for one hotel, they can welcome all tourists. However, when they are not, they may not be able to welcome all tourists. One interviewee notes that when she is responsible for more than one hotel, she tries to be at the hotels in which there are more check-ins (Interview 8). When tour reps are not able to welcome tourists, they phone the tourists' rooms, introduce themselves, and ask to meet.

All interviewees remark that they avoid talking about excursions explicitly during welcoming activities. However, at the end of the welcoming activities, the tour reps give their phone numbers and brochures about excursions. Most interviewees state that after giving the brochures, they remark that they can help tourists participate in the excursions, but some do not. One interviewee explains that informing them about excursions during check-in can make tourists suspicious that the tour rep just aims to earn money rather than caring about tourist satisfaction (Interview 6). However, the tour reps are required to give the

excursion brochures to tourists at this time. The timing of giving the brochures is important; as the instructor underlines, tourists may throw the brochures away if the brochures are given at reception, and thus the brochures should be given when the tourists enter their rooms (Observation, 29.04.2015). Within this context, one interviewee stresses that he gives the brochures at the moment when tourists enter their rooms (Interview 6). Another interviewee remarks that since tourists are tired until they enter their rooms, he does not give the brochures earlier (Interview 8).

***Being in Touch with Tourists: Seeing them and being seen by them.*** After welcoming tourists, tour reps try to cement their relations with them. Since the tour reps work in hotels, they interact with tourists constantly. Tour reps often ask tourists if they have a problem, if they need anything, and if they are enjoying their holidays. The tour reps stress that seeing tourists and being seen by them—being in touch with tourists—is essential for their work; in the words of one interviewee, “the biggest problem, for tour reps, occurs when the customer says ‘I did not see the rep’” in the customer orientation questionnaire (Interview 3).

In some hotels, tour reps can walk around freely and eat in the restaurant with the tourists. This mobility of the tour reps provides physical closeness and repeated contact with the tourists. Moreover, the mobility of the tour reps extends the interactions of tour reps and tourists into diverse settings, such as the restaurant, the beach, and the pool:

*Researcher: How were your relations with customers?*

*Interviewee: I behave sincerely with people. ... I ask 'how is your holiday going?', 'do you have a problem?' ... I mostly meet with them at mealtimes. [When] the guests start their meal, I wait for a while. Then I pass in front of them. I say 'bon appetite'. So the guests see me constantly. They do not have any chance for not seeing me. (Interview 7)*

Tour reps also phone tourists to stay in touch with them; they call the tourists' rooms in the evenings to inquire how their holidays are going and if they have any problems (Interview 11). Tour reps can stay in touch constantly with tourists when they are responsible for a single hotel. However, when they are required to visit several hotels in a day, their interactions with the tourists decrease:

*If we are in a single hotel, we can constantly communicate with guests, since we walk around*



*within the hotel. For instance, if I am responsible for more than one hotel, I forget a guest's face. [Thus,] I hesitate to greet my guests, since I may not be sure if they are my guests. (Interview 6)*

*When you are responsible for more than one hotel, you do not have the chance to talk face to face with every tourist. I think that talking face to face is more influential; when you talk with tourists by phone, they do not really care. (Focus Group Interview 1, Interviewee 2)*

However, in some ultra-luxury hotels, tour reps are not allowed to walk around. They are required to work only in assigned spaces. As one interviewee explains, this relative immobility of tour reps obstructs the closeness of the tour reps and the tourists and restricts tour rep/tourist interactions to certain settings; thus, these factors decrease sales (Interview 11).

***Solving Tourists' Problems.*** Being in touch with tourists enables tour reps to deal with the tourists' problems and needs. Solving tourists' problems is an efficient and appropriate way to develop trustful relations with them. Tourists' problems are mostly related to the hotel facilities, but most of the interviewees remark that they try to get the tourists to consult them, rather than hotel staff:

*The tour rep should be the one who helps tourists first; otherwise, the tourists will not contact tour reps. (Interview 16)*

*When the tour rep can solve a tourist's problem, the tourist sees him or her as the first contact person. (Interview 8)*

One interviewee remarks that he advises tourists to call him when they have a problem; when we ask why, he explains that it is for getting high scores from customer orientation questionnaires and to develop close and intimate relations with the tourists (Interview 10). Moreover, solving tourists' problems increases the tour reps' sales. One interviewee states that he can sell more excursions to tourists whose problems he can solve, because those tourists feel that he is there for their satisfaction (Interview 5). Furthermore, another interviewee specifies that he wants tourists to ask him to solve their problems, as satisfied tourists increase his sales (Interview 10).

However, tour reps cannot solve all problems as some hotels have poor physical and organizational arrangements. As one interviewee explains, no matter how hard he tries, when the hotel cannot solve the problem of a tourist, the tourist is not satisfied (Interview 4). Another interviewee also

notes that he has been working in one of the most problematic hotels and so he cannot solve all of the tourists' problems. As an example, he explains that tourists complain about the beds of the hotel, but the hotel does not change the beds (Focus Group Interview 2, Interviewee 2).

***Being Close with Hotel Workers.*** The relational work of tour reps does not merely comprise the efforts of managing relations with tourists. Tour reps must also manage their relations with hotel workers. The findings show that being able to solve tourists' problems determines the quality of the relations of tour reps and tourists. Tour reps need to cooperate with hotel workers, and especially with receptionists, in order to solve tourists' problems. For instance, if tourists arrive at a hotel before the check-in time and their room is not ready, tour reps can arrange to have the room be made ready promptly, or if tourists are not happy with their rooms, tour reps can get the rooms changed thanks to their close relations with receptionists. The following quotes explain the role of close relations with hotel workers:

*For instance, the guest came and said 'my room is bad'. I had very good relations with the front office, I requested another room. [And I] got a nice room promptly. [Then] my guest says, 'my rep got me a very nice room'. (Interview 4)*

*You cannot do this work if your personal relations are not good [with hotel workers]. They [the hotel workers] will exclude you; they do not help. You cannot make your guests happy, [and] you will be ashamed in front of your guests. (Interview 17)*

*You should be most friendly to receptionists, since you do all kinds of stuff with them. (Focus Group 2, Interviewee 4)*

In the training session, the instructor also emphasizes the significance of close relations with receptionists. He notes that if tour reps have bad relations with the receptionists, the receptionists complicate the tour reps' work; however, if the tour reps' relations with them are close and intimate, the receptionists help them to solve tourists' problems (Observation, 28.04.2015).

Since tour reps and receptionists mostly work within the hotel lobby, and their work overlaps within customer service, they need to have frequent contact. Thus, tour reps are careful to be polite and helpful in order to develop and maintain close relations with them:

*You should have good relations with receptionists... if we [the tour reps] face a problem, we first consult*

receptionists. ... *We reveal ourselves by our talk. For instance, there is a huge difference between saying 'the guest wants this...' and 'I beg your pardon, the guest is bothered by ... and could you do something?'* (Interview 6)

*Interviewee: Your relation with the receptionist must be close, because when your customers have a problem with their room, you can change the room with the help of the receptionist. We must do favours for the receptionist so that she or he can do favours for us.*

*Researcher: What do you do for this?*

*Interviewee: Sometimes I take tea and coffee for them.* (Interview 3)

**Avoiding Aggressive Sales Work.** Tour reps avoid aggressive sales work, as this may impair their trustful relations with tourists. Selling excursions is entangled with the tour reps' trustful and sincere relations with tourists. To gain the trust and sincerity of tourists, tour reps do not insist that tourists purchase the excursions. Rather, tour reps avoid giving direct information about them. First, the tour reps ask tourists if they have any problems and if they are enjoying their holidays; then the tour reps mention the excursions. Starting the conversation by inquiring about the quality of the tourist's holiday, as one interviewee underlines, provides a background for tour reps to talk about the excursions (Interview 18). Another interviewee notes that "actually, when we are customer-oriented, sales come automatically" (Interview 14). The following quotes represent how tour reps talk about excursions in their interactions with tourists:

*Researcher: How do you approach customers to sell excursions?*

*Interviewee: First, we chat. For instance, if I see the customer at the poolside, I say 'Hello, how are you, how is your holiday, do you have any problems?'; then, I talk about excursions. I say, 'Tomorrow we have such and such excursions, do you want to participate?', and I also inform about the excursions.* (Interview 20)

*I start by saying 'How are you?', 'How is your holiday going?', and then I inform them about the excursions and ask if they want to participate.* (Focus Group Interview, 1, Interviewee 5)

The tour reps determine which tourists are interested in excursions and which are not. For instance, as one interviewee says, she can understand which ones are not interested because they do not pay attention when she is talking about

the excursions (Interview 20). Another interviewee notes that when he informs tourists about the excursions a few times and the tourists reveal their indifference, he does not mention the excursions again (Interview 8). Avoiding aggressive selling also evokes the feeling that the tour reps' main priority is not sales work:

*The tour rep should not create an atmosphere in which it is as if they are obliged to sell excursions. If he or she does that, the tour operator is disgraced and the guest will not purchase an excursion.* (Interview 17)

One interviewee remarks that when a tourist wants some time to think about participating in excursions, he tells them that "there are limited spaces, and the spaces can be sold in a short time". After this warning, he remarks that most tourists tend to buy excursions (Interview 7). Tour reps also try to inform tourists about excursions within a relaxed atmosphere. In this context, some interviewees remark that the appropriate times to talk about excursions are before and after dinner. Telephone messages also play a major role in informing tourists about excursions. Most interviewees note that they mostly send such messages before dinner. The messages provide brief information about the excursions organized for the next day.

**Valuing the excursions.** In face-to-face conversations, tour reps try to sell excursions by emphasizing the quality and safety of the excursions. They avoid misinforming tourists, because tourists can express their discontent to tour reps directly, as they mostly stay for approximately 7-15 days in the hotels. However, some interviewees note that although they do not misinform tourists about excursions, they do try to enhance the descriptions. One interviewee explains that tour reps should not lie to tourists to sell excursions, since this may put both the tour rep and the tour operator in a difficult situation, but he explains that he can still enhance his descriptions of the excursions (Interview 7). The following quote also represents how a tour rep can enhance the excursions:

*I mostly sell excursions by making the tourists dream ... I say 'Imagine, you are on a big boat, your family is with you. You soar on blue water ... Music is playing. You are seeing fabulous bays... Imagine how good it is...'* (Interview 14)

Since excursions are intangible at the point of selling, tourists cannot touch, smell, or feel them. To materialize excursions at the point of selling, tour reps use the brochures of the tour operators.

Some tour reps also use their own photos and videos of excursions to describe what the experiences are really like (Focus Group Interview 2, Interviewee 5).

Outside of the hotels, tourists can see other travel agencies. These travel agencies usually sell excursions more cheaply than the tour operators. Thus, tourists often ask tour reps why they sell more expensive options. To persuade them about the quality of their excursions, tour reps devalue the excursions of other travel agencies by either emphasizing their poor service quality and unreliability:

*I say 'You cannot find what you expect from other excursions; they [travel agencies] get more passengers than the boat's capacity, and what you will eat there is not healthy. (Interview 3)*

*We explain that our boats get 60 passengers; the others get 120 passengers. (Focus Group Interview 2, Interviewee 5)*

Another interviewee also remarks that he warns tourist that the excursions sold by travel agencies do not include insurance (Interview 9).

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In recent years scholars use the concept of relational work to address how economic and organizational relations are mingled with social relations. Unlike the network embeddedness perspective, relational work does not address structural aspects of relations; rather, it examines how economic and social relations are mingled in situ (Bandelj, 2012). As Bandelj (2012: 194) notes, "much work is needed to further elaborate the concept by relying on discoveries of empirical research that makes relational work come to life in different situations". This study contributes to the scholarly literature by exploring how tour reps enact relational work within customer orientation and sales work.

In our study, the relational work of tour reps addresses the harmonizing of capitalist interests with intimacy and trust (Bandelj, 2012; Zelizer, 2012). We present how tour reps harmonize customer orientation and sales work by certain practices such as welcoming tourists, being in touch with tourists, solving tourists' problems, being close with hotel workers, avoiding aggressive sales work, and valuing the excursions. In short, tour reps enact their relational work as if sales work is extraneous to their customer orientation. The more customer-

oriented the tour reps are, the more excursions they sell.

Future studies can also address the relational work of hotel workers and customers with tour reps; for instance, how do hotel workers manage their close relations with tour reps to help their own relations with tourists? How do customers enact relational work to get special service from tour reps? How do the relational work of customers and hotel workers affect tour reps?

Previous studies on the work of tour reps neglect tour reps' relations with hotel workers (see Andrews, 2000; Guerrier & Adib, 2003). Our study shows that tour reps' relations with hotel workers can mediate their relations with tourists. Thanks to intimate relations with hotel workers, tour reps can solve tourists' problems and thus develop trustful and intimate relations with them. This finding is significant, since it reveals the blurred boundary between being a tour rep and being a hotel worker.

Since most of the tourists' problems are related to hotel facilities, the work of tour reps overlaps with that of hotel workers. Future studies should address the implications of the mediator role of tour reps between hotel and tourists. For instance, what are the advantages and disadvantages of the intimate relations of tour reps and hotel workers for hotel management and hotel workers? What are the management policies regarding the mediator role of tour reps? Do tourists prefer to contact hotel workers or tour reps?

The mediator role of tour reps between the hotel and tourists forces them to face many problems for which they are not principally responsible. As most of the problems that they deal with relate to hotels, they cannot solve the problems on their own. Thus, poor hotel services decrease tour reps' customer orientation scores and sales. Despite this, the managers of tour operators change tour reps' hotels or assign them to tourist transfer work when the tour reps' sales records decrease. In this context, managers should take into consideration the aforementioned decision as sales work is also entangled with the quality of hotel service, which tour reps cannot control.

Moreover, our study also shows that Turkish tour operators depend on the youth labour of intern undergraduate students. Our interviewees explain their discomfort regarding the long working hours, and almost all of them state that they do not want to continue their career as a tour rep. Despite their reluctance to remain in the same occupation, they try their best in their relational work to avoid managerial sanctions and to accomplish their

internships. Thus, our study highlights the dark side of the relational work of tour reps that serves capitalist interests and exploits tour reps' intimate relations. Universities should defend their intern students against the aforementioned dark side within the internship arrangements. Moreover, future studies can also highlight the dark side of the relational work which serves to make work meaningful and obscure exploitation (Mears, 2015).

Since the findings of this study are based on data collected on the work of tour reps who serve Turkish tourists for Turkish tour operators, the transferability of the findings are restricted within the study's unique context. This study also neglects tourists' and hotel workers' perspectives on their relations with tour reps. Since every relation is reciprocal (see Korczynski, 2005; Bandelj, 2012), future studies can address tourists' and hotel workers' relational work with tour reps. For instance, how do tourists or hotel workers manage their relational work with tour reps to accomplish their objectives?

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