HOW ARE UNIVERSITY REPUTATION PRACTICES AND REPUTATION PERCEPTIONS RELATED?

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ABSTRACT The main aim of this study is to explore the relationship between university practices and reputation perceptions in a public university sample. A quantitative study was conducted by using Structural Equation Modeling. The research sample consists of 1021 graduate and undergraduate students. According to the results of the study, the main hypothesis stating that corporate practices are positively related with corporate reputation perceptions is supported. Managerial implications for universities may also be derived from survey results. Universities should be competitive if they want to be selected by students, draw support, and keep qualified academicians. The main contribution of this study is to provide significant comprehension about the importance of developing competent strategies to enhance university reputation.

Keywords: Reputation, reputation measurement, university

Scope: Business administration
JEL codes: M1, M10
Type: Research

KURUMSAL İTİBAR UYGULAMALARI İLE KURUMSAL İTİBAR ALGILAMALARI NASIL İLİŞKİLİDİR?

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ÖZ Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, üniversite uygulamaları ile itibar algısı arasında bir ilişki olup olmadığını bir kamu üniversitesi örneklemine dayanarak irdelemektir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda yapısal eşitlik modeli kullanılarak kantitatif bir araştırma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma örneklemi 1021 lisans ve yüksek lisans öğrencisinden oluşmaktadır. Araştırma sonuçları, kurumsal uygulamalar ile kurum itibarı algısı arasında anlamlı bir ilişki olduğu hipotezini desteklemektedir. Araştırma bulgularına dayanılarak üniversiteler için yönetsel uygulamalarla ilgili sonuçlar çıkarılabilir. Üniversiteler, öğrenciler tarafından tercih edilmek, destek almak ve donanımlı akademisyenlere sahip olmak istiyorlarsa rekabetçi olmalıdırlar. Bu çalışmanın başlıca katkısı, üniversite itibarının arttırılması için etkin stratejilerin geliştirilmesinin önemli olduğuna işaret etmesidir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *İtibar, itibar ölçümü, üniversite*

JEL kodları: *M1, M10*
Alanı: *İşletme*
Türü: *Araştırma*

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of corporate reputation has attracted strong interest from both academicians and the business world during the last years. Corporate reputation involves stakeholders' judgments about the issues which are particular to corporations (Epstein, 2008, p.180) and research results indicate that positive corporate reputation may produce strategic value for organizations (Roberts & Dowling, 2002, p.1077). However, there is no consensus on the definition and measurement of reputation. One of the reasons behind the disagreement may be the multidisciplinary nature of the corporate reputation concept (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001, pp. 25-26). The literature points out that identity and image are used as synonyms with reputation, although they have different characteristics (Barnett, Jermier & Lafferty, 2006, p. 28; Chun, 2005, p. 93; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001, pp.24-25; Wartick, 2002, p. 373). Since it is not related with the objective of the study, we will not discuss the details of the difference between the concepts, but instead, we may assert that identity is the answer of "who/what do we believe we are?" or "how the internal stakeholders perceive the organization?" questions, while image is the response to the question of "what/who do we want others to think we are?" (Walker, 2010, p. 366; Whetten, 1997, p. 27). Corporate reputation is a product of stakeholders' comprehensive assessment of an organization over time and good corporate reputation encourages trust in organizations (Esen, 2012, p. 47). On the other hand, "c*orporate reputation is a sort of emotional capital that reflects various stakeholders' perceptions about the organization's past and future actions and intangible asset"* (Esen, 2011, p. 9). In other words, corporate reputation is the overall and final attribution of various stakeholders over time (Fombrun, 1996, p. 37) and students, recruiters, faculty, alumni, and the parent university are the stakeholders of a university. Thus, the university reputation is the result of how stakeholders view the school (Safón, 2012, p. 178).

Reputation is as valuable for countries, societies, and institutions as it is for universities that prepare individuals for life by bringing different perspectives to help them grow up and also respond to the needs of the society in every field by producing scientific investigation of high quality. Universities cannot exist without stakeholders and it is important to keep students, academic and administrative staff, graduates, national and international institutions in cooperation with universities to evaluate a university's corporate reputation status, because they are the most important stakeholders of the university.

Existing reputation literature indicates that a lot of research initiatives and practices have been realized in the area of corporate reputation measurement. While most of the measurements were done in the field of general characteristics of corporations, some of them were conducted according

to their particular features. On the other hand, from the standpoint of educational institutions, it is observed that there are limited research on the measurement and management of reputation. This study examines university stakeholders' perceptions about corporate reputation by focusing on students' perspectives on university practices and puts forward the hypothesis: "*Corporate practices are positively related with reputation perceptions*".

2. REPUTATION

According to The Turkish Language Association's dictionary, reputation infers respectability and prestige. With regard to word meaning, reputation is an intangible asset that cannot be measured easily and expressed in a numerical way (Alsop, 2004, p. 1). Reputation is presented in the American Heritage dictionary as an overall public opinion (Günlü, 2007, p. 392). The opinion reflects a general assessment by the public about the extent to which a person or a corporation is admired or appreciated with regard to past behaviors or characteristics (Uzunoğlu & Öksüz, 2008, p. 112). In this process, in addition to past and present consideration, individuals may attempt to draw future inferences. Individuals or corporations are admired or appreciated with reference to their past and future actions and statements. The source of the admiration and appreciation is the consistency between promises and actions (Argüden, 2003, p. 10; Casalo, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2007, p. 4). In other words, keeping promises is the way of generating reputation. Under these circumstances, reputation helps to fill the gap between the reality and perception (Karaköse, 2007, p. 16). The fewer the gaps between them, the more reputation is gained.

To provide a general definition, corporate reputation refers to stakeholders' emotional and influential beliefs concerning the qualities of the company as good, bad, strong or weak. Reputation is developed over time through social interaction and public communication and takes a long time to build but equally withstands damage (Brewer & Zhao, 2010, p. 36). Understood from this perspective, corporate reputation is the sum of past and present actions and outputs of the organization that describe the capacity to create valuable consequences for different stakeholders (Castro, Lopez, & Saez, 2006, p. 362; Dortok, 2006, p. 323). As mentioned in the definition, corporate reputation is an intangible concept which is difficult to identify and express numerically (Hannington, 2004, p. 46; Page & Fearn, 2005, p. 306). As a consequence, while identifying corporate reputation, it is also necessary to focus on aspects of measurement.

2.1. Reputation Measurement

The measurement of reputation is quite important, however, difficult to convey. The measurement of an organization's reputation is closely related to

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the definition of reputation. The important definitional attributes necessary to be involved in reputation measurement are (Kraatz & Love, 2006, p. 363; Walker, 2010, pp. 372-374):

1. Reputation measurement should examine perceived reputation.
2. Corporate reputation should be result-oriented and represent total perceptions.
3. Corporate reputation, as required by the competitive nature of contemporary organizational life, inherently should enable the possibility of comparison with other firms.
4. Measurement of corporate reputation should present both negative and positive results.
5. Measurement of corporate reputation should be longitudinal due to its enduring characteristic.
6. Corporate reputation should comprehensively and globally evaluate the organization.

There are several frameworks which are used for measuring corporate reputation, such as *The Reputation Quotient, Barron's Magazines List of Most Respected Companies, Corporate Character Scale, Fortune World's Most Admired Companies,* and *Newsweek's Green Ranking*. In Turkey, one corporate reputation research to be mentioned is Turkey's Most Admired Companies and it is being conducted by Capital Magazine since 2008. Turkey's Reputation Index conducted by GFK RepMan (Reputation Management) is another corporate reputation research carried out in Turkey.

2.2. University Reputation

As with many organizations, reputation is quite important for universities because these institutions are becoming increasingly competitive in terms of attracting students, grants, and sponsored research. Despite the fact that universities have traditionally not exhibited market orientation, reputation is still significant for them (Ressler & Abratt, 2009, p. 39). Although reputation has generally been associated with corporations, corporate reputation literature can be adapted to universities. As it is mentioned before, corporate reputation can be defined in several ways which reflect assessments of many stakeholders about an organization's capacity to meet their expectations (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2003, p. 147). Examples are, "*a collective system of subjective beliefs among members of a social group*" (Bromley, 1993, 2000, 2002), "*collective beliefs that exist in the organizational field about a firm's identity and prominence*" (Rao, 1994; Rindova & Kotha, 2001), "*media visibility and favorability gained by a firm* (Deephouse, 2000) or "*collective representations shared in the minds of multiple publics about an organization over time*" (Grunig & Hung, 2002; Yang & Grunig, 2005). Using common elements in these definitions, a

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university's reputation can be defined as *"collective representations that the university's multiple constituents—various internal and external constituents, including the media—hold of the university over time"* (Alessandri, Yang, & Kinsey, 2006, p. 261; Yang, Alessandri& Kinsey, 2008, p. 147).

It is clear that qualified students and faculty, and load fund prefer reputed universities. In parallel with the globalization, in the last decade, universities started to be ranked globally and the ranking system gained an important role in terms of how a university is perceived externally. Besides, the system is also expected to influence the viewpoints of potential stakeholders in relation to the university's reputation (O'Loughlin, Macphail & Msetfi, 2015, pp. 806-807). Although rankings are controversial, stakeholders and policymakers need an indicator for their decision making. Thus, in the literature, it is observed that several studies have been conducted to examine and measure university reputation. Arpan, Raney, and Zivnuska (2003) put forward the questions of "What criteria are used to determine university image?" and "How do the various dimensions of image, or image criteria, contribute to the overall image of a university?" in their research (Arpan et al., 2003, p. 101). The study revealed that factors such as "academic attributes, athletic attributes, and news coverage" determined current university students' image ratings (Arpan et al., 2003, p. 110).

Another research, on the other hand, indicated that academic reputation, service, employment prospects, and teaching were the most important factors in the decision making process of prospective students (Brewer & Zhao, 2010, p. 37). Landrum, Turrisi & Harless (1999) asked general public about their opinion of a regional university and found that academics, familiarity, athletics, value, employment, and outreach are the main factors of university reputation and parents considered university reputation as an important criterion for university choice (Ressler, 2015, p. 139). A 1998 study found that Canadian students considered an institution's academic reputation and also graduates' success in finding a good job in their university decisions. Sikosek and Kodrioccarrojon (2011) reported that faculty's reputation, academic environment, academic excellence, employment opportunities, staff competence and expertise, and teaching staff and student relationships are taken into account by students in assessing academic reputation (O'Loughlin et al., 2015, p. 808).

The issue of reputation is also important for universities and academics in Turkey. Oktar and Çarıkçı (2012) examined the reputation level and the dimensions of reputation in Süleyman Demirel University by using the Reputation Quotient of Charles J. Emotional appeal, education and service quality, vision and leadership, workplace environment, and social responsibility are used as the dimensions of reputation. According to the results of the

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research, stakeholders had a positive perception of the university and emotional attraction was the dimension that was perceived at the highest level of prestige by all stakeholders. However, the quality of education and service was the dimension that was perceived at the lowest level of prestige by three stakeholders. In a study by Özalp, Tonus, and Geylan (2012), it was aimed to determine how different stakeholder groups perceived Anadolu University's reputation. In this research, it was seen that students, employees, and alumni of Anadolu University perceived the university as an institution with high reputation due to its financial strength.

3. METHOD

The main aim of this paper is to examine the indicators of perceptions about university reputation in a state university and to determine the influence of university practices on reputation perceptions. A quantitative survey with structural equation modeling was conducted in a sample of students as stakeholders of a public university in Istanbul.

3.1. Participants

The research sample consists of 1021 graduate and undergraduate students from a public university in Istanbul. In general, reputation has been closely associated with the credibility of an organization (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993, p. 7) and is known to affect the buyers' expectations with respect to the quality of its offerings (Shapiro, 1982). This same definition can also be used effectively with regard to university reputation by considering prospective or actual students as key constituents (Merchant, Rose, Moody & Mathews, 2015, p. 28). Thus, the sample of the study has been decided to be composed of students. The majority of the students are between the ages of 20-23 (n=772), the number of male students is 303 and female students is 718. The sample involves 656 juniors and seniors. Whereas 243 students have job experience in a company, 778 of them do not.

3.2. Instruments

The data was gathered by semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The questionnaire consists of three parts; existence of corporate reputation practices, perceptions about corporate reputation practices, and demographic characteristics of participants.

Corporate practices instrument

Public organizations have different qualities; since stakeholders of universities can be differentiated, it is appropriate to reflect the needs of particular stakeholders. Therefore, we developed a measurement tool to reveal corporate practices that can influence corporate reputation perceptions of students by conducting an interview. In the semi-structured interview, the

following questions were asked regarding the university's reputation: "How do you evaluate your university's reputation level?, What kind of practices exist in your university that you believe they are representative of corporate reputation?, Would you list these reputation practices?". These related answers were gathered and selected items were listed. The corporate practices instrument for students involves 29 items with a five-point rating scale, ranging from never observed (1) to very frequently observed (5).

Corporate reputation perceptions scale

Participants also rated the corporate reputation practices according to their perceptions. The reputation perception scale consists of 15 items with a five-point rating scale, ranging from never agree (1) to completely agree (5). These perceptions reflect how students perceive their university's reputation practices, therefore 15 general items were selected.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by using AMOS 16.0 via structural equation modeling technique. The measurement model that contains two latent variables (corporate practices and reputation perceptions) and six observed variables is examined. Firstly, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was done for each variable and then confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was implemented in order to verify that the structure fits in with data. Also, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relations between research variables.

3.4. Findings

The measurement model is examined by a confirmatory factor analysis prior to structural equation modeling. Before the confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, exploratory factor analysis was done through SPSS 16.0. At the first step of the factor analysis, Bartlett's Test was used in order to test the compatibility of the factor model and the relationships among the variables. KMO was used to measure the sampling adequacy (Ghauri, Gronhaug & Kristianslund, 1995, p. 125; Nakip, 2006, pp. 428-429). According to the results of the factor analysis, KMO test value was found above ,50 and Bartlett's test value was significant. Principle component factor analysis was applied to all variables by varimax rotation. Corporate practices instrument involves 29 items; at the end of the analysis, 22 items remained and 4 factors appeared. These factors were labeled as ''academicians and administrators'', ''image and promotion'', ''academic and social activities of the university'', ''education friendly facilities''. The four factors explained 61,000 % of the variance. Cronbach alpha values were ,897; ,873; ,767; and ,784 (Table 1) for the factors respectively.

Corporate reputation perceptions scale involves 15 items; at the end of

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the analysis, 12 items remained and 2 factors appeared. These factors were labeled as ''strong corporate university'' and "sensitive approach to external constituents". The two factors explained 66,939 % of the variance. Cronbach alpha values were ,919 and ,862 (Table 2) for the factors respectively.

Table 1: Factor Analysis and Reliability Results of Corporate Practices

		Factor Loading	% Variance Explained	Alpha
Items	**Factor 1 (Academicians and Administrators)**			
	Friendly and helpful academicians	,785		
	Lecturers who listen to students' ideas and problems	,785		
	Managerial approach that is open to criticism	,708		
	Managerial approach that values students	,708	43,541	,897
	Friendly and helpful lecturers and administrative	,700		
	Young, dynamic, and competent academicians	,649		
	Success of academicians	,511		
	New education technology	,492		
Items	**Factor 2 (Image and Promotion)**			
	Well-known university image	,743		
	The important position of the university in respect to others	,718		
	The image of the university in business sector	,678		
	Positive news in the media	,585	7,708	,873
	The rooted, historical heritage of the university	,576		
	Well-known academicians	,573		
	The efforts of the university for promotion and image	,569		
	The qualified student profile	,569		
Items	**Factor 3 (Academic and Social Activities of the University)**			
	Various student exchange programs	,794		
	Panels and conferences	,760		
	Collaboration with foreign universities	,592	5,135	,767
	Active student clubs	,581		
Items	**Factor 4 (Education Friendly Facilities)**			
	Clean and tidy educational environment	,778		
	Learning friendly classrooms	,718	4,617	,784

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KMO = .947; Bartlett's test of Sphericity = 11848,906; df = 231; p = .000

Table 2: Factor Analysis and Reliability Results of Corporate Reputation Perceptions

	Factor Loading	% Variance Explained	Alpha
Strong Corporate University	**Factor 1**		
Making proud about being a student of the university	,806		
Providing appropriate facilities for students	,776		
Educating responsible and capable students	,743		
Being a well-known and respected university	,737	58,839	,919
Having qualified academicians	,728		
Preparing the students to business life	,706		
Having powerful leadership and management approach	,650		
Ranking as a corporate university	,631		
Sensitive Approach to External Constituents	**Factor 2**		
Displaying a sensitive approach to social issues	,797		
Supporting social responsibility projects and being sensitive to environmental issues	,795		
Giving importance to advertising and promotional activities	,758	8,100	,862
Communicating transparently and sharing information with the external environment	,733		

KMO = .943; Bartlett's test of Sphericity = 7949,336; df = 66; p = .000

According to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), corporate practices scale (four-factor model) (χ^2= 75.01 and CFI= 0,98) and corporate reputation perceptions scale (two-factor model) (χ^2= 460.70 and CFI= 0,86) were observed to display good fit with the data.

Before conducting the path model test, correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationships between the research variables. The results of the correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between corporate practices and reputation perceptions (r=,889, p<0,01). As it is shown in Table 3, the highest correlation is seen between the Image and Promotion subdimension of corporate practices (x2) and the total scale of corporate practices (r=,903).

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According to the results of the descriptive statistics, means and standard deviations were found as 3,2 and ,69 for corporate practices and 3,05 and ,819 for reputation perceptions.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis for Variables

	Mean	Sd	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Corporate practices	3,20	,69	1						
2. Reputation perceptions	3,05	,819	,889**	1					
3. Academicians and Administrators	2,88	,862	,894**	,812**	1				
4. Image and Promotion	3,33	,763	,903**	,826**	,705**	1			
5. Academic and Social Activities of the University	3,75	,750	,771**	,613**	,560**	,653**	1		
6. Education Friendly Facilities	3,28	1,06	,677**	,581**	,564**	,567**	,457**	1	
7. Strong Corporate University	3,23	,842	,873**	,961**	,792**	,831**	,597**	,589**	1
8. Sensitive Approach to External Constituents	2,85	,890	,761**	,885**	,687**	,686**	,535**	,465**	,745*

The fit statistics indicates that the research model provides a reasonably good fit with the data: χ^2 = 93,562/sd, df = 8, p = .00, RMSEA = .102 (recommended value: >,05), RMR = .016 (recommended value: <,08), CFI = .980 (recommended value: >,90), GFI = .972 (recommended value: >,80), AGFI = .925 (recommended value: >,80), NFI = .978 (recommended value: >,90).
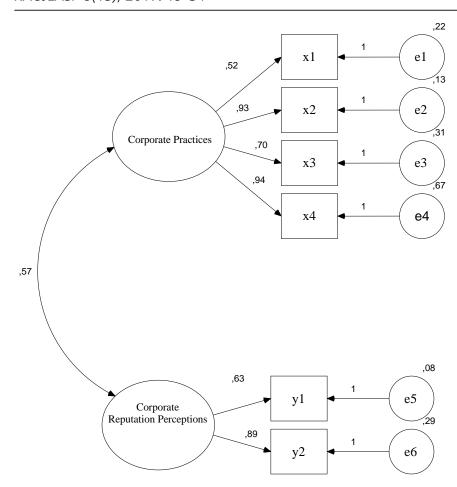
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Figure 1: Path Models for the Relationship between Variables

It is found that corporate practices are positively related with corporate reputation perceptions (β= ,57, p<,01). Corporate practices explain 79.1 % of the variance in corporate reputation perceptions. Therefore, ''*Corporate practices are positively related with reputation perceptions''* hypothesis is supported. It is observed that x4 (Education Friendly Facilities) (β= ,94, p<,01) and x2 (Image and Promotion) (β= ,93, p<,01) have the greatest level of impact on corporate practices. They are followed by x3 (Academic and Social Activities of the University) (β= ,70, p<,01), and the lowest effect on corporate practices is produced by x1 (Academicians and Administrators) (β= ,52, p<,01). On the other hand, y2 (Sensitive Approach to External Constituents) has the greatest level of impact on corporate reputation perceptions (β= ,89, p<,01),

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followed by y1 (Strong Corporate University) which has been found to produce moderate effect on corporate reputation perceptions (β= ,63, p<,01).

4. DISCUSSION

Corporate reputation that reflects expectations and attributes about past, present, and future actions should be assessed as a sustainable, competitive advantage resulting in performance, productivity, efficiency, and customer demands. It is also valuable for public organizations as well individuals and private organizations. Universities should be as reputable as others in order to create sociological and psychological outputs, to implement scientific projects, and to educate qualified grads for work life.

The purpose of this study is to explore students' perspectives so as to examine the relationship between university practices and reputation perceptions. Two scales have been developed for measuring the concepts in question. According to the results of the exploratory factor analysis, ''academicians and administrators'', ''image and promotion'', ''academic and social activities of the university'', and ''education friendly facilities'' factors are determined for corporate practices instrument. For the reputation perception device, "strong corporate university'' and ''sensitive approach to external constituents" factors appeared. According to the results of the correlation analysis, all subdimensions of corporate practices are significantly related with reputation perceptions. These results show that attitude of academicians and administrators, the image of the university and how the institution is promoted, the variety of academic and social activities, and the friendly nature of educational facilities all matter in terms of how the university is perceived. The presence of favorable practices contributes to the perception of a strong corporate university and a sensitive approach displayed towards external constituents.

Survey results also reveal managerial implications for universities. Universities should be competitive if they want to be selected by students, obtain support, and maintain qualified academicians. Since the graduates of a university represent their institution in the work environment, such representation can be seen as a criterion for evaluating the university reputation. Therefore, the quality of education and academic and social activities are important in terms of enhancing university reputation perceptions.

This survey was conducted with students since their perceptions are important as they are the primary stakeholders of universities. For further studies, other stakeholders may be incorporated for obtaining more comprehensive results. Focusing on academicians', administrative staff's, and grads' perspectives would bring in additional insights about stakeholder

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perceptions. Besides, it may be suggested to conduct reputation measurements periodically in order to make comparisons between years to show the trends of increase or decrease in corporate reputation. Also, corporate reputation practices and perceptions have similar items from the perspectives of participants, therefore in further studies, practices should reflect more tangible activities. On the other hand, perceptions should reflect intangible ones. These limitations can be eliminated by developing research instruments to differentiate between them.

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