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Press Releases as a Tool of Media Relations: An Analysis towards Public Relations News on Newspapers

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Abstract

Organizations adopt a set of strategies to perform their own public relation activities which include strategic communication management along with their public and stakeholders. Media relations is one of the most frequent and used strategies for public relations. Media relations involve such duties as raising awareness about organization activities and creating public opinion by delivering organization messages. Those duties explain why media relations are an indispensable part of public relations. From the point of view of journalists, press releases delivered by public relations departments function as journalists' news sources. In this sense, the starting point of the research is to analyze to what extent news on newspapers is associated with public relations. To seek an answer, the financial news sources of Turkey's 5 mass circulation newspapers will be examined. The research will also qualitatively enlighten whether financial news is based on press releases, press tours or reporters' own news.

Keywords: Public relations, media relations, press releases, newspapers

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Introduction

Media relations, as the most commonly used public relations strategy, allows corporations to interact with their publics and social stakeholders. Thanks to media relations, corporations accomplish their missions such as raising awareness on their campaigns and formation of public opinion, thereby disseminating corporate messages. Such duties also explain the reason why media relations are an indispensable part of public relations. When it comes to journalists, journalists use press releases as a source to write news. In this respect, public relations practitioners expect journalists to publish their stories, while journalists see public relations practitioners as their news source. The paper will explain the concept of media relations, the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists, as well as the importance of their cooperation, will be touched upon. Therefore, as public relations tactics in media relations, press releases, press conferences, press trips and press interviews will be discussed. Following the literature review, the scope of the research will be defined regarding the question of how many news items published in the newspapers are relevant to public relation-based news. To answer this question, economy pages of 5 Turkish daily newspapers with the most circulation will be analysed. Afterwards, the following hypothesis "the major part of the media coverage in economy pages of Turkey's newspapers with the most circulation is based on public relations activities" will be tested.

Media Relations in Public Relations Strategies

"In today's world, it is of significance for corporations or people to be able to mold public opinion on behalf of their own activities. Public relations are a process of molding the public opinion. The function of public relations is to create change or development for various groups or society" (Mengü 2012: 5). It should not be ignored to be successful that public relations practitioners choose and construct messages that are convenient for the structure and characteristics of a corporations' public and then convey their messages to their publics through the most appropriate communication channels along with the most convenient time and place (Akım 2015: 17). At this point, we clearly see that public relations practitioners commonly use media relations as their strategy.

Given that the far-reaching media has communication mediums, it undertakes a mediator role in terms of conveying messages and functions as a channel in this sense. This function supports the argument that the media is the fourth power after the executive, legislative and judicial powers due to its role of creating public opinion (Vural and Bat 2013: 279). The fact that the media serves as a channel between a corporation and their publics and delivers the messages according to its own assessment reveals why media relations should be managed very carefully. "It is very crucial to conduct available and potential media relations in all kinds of activities that will contribute to realize

corporations' goals and targets. Media relations are required to adapt; to prioritize or limit; to develop strategies or to provide added value regarding a problem, an issue or opportunities that corporations face with or likely experience. In this respect, the following section presents in which areas successful media relations support organizations" (Şatir et al. 2015: 144).

Corporations use mass communication tools to convey their messages to the public. Public relations practitioners' communication activities regarding getting corporate news coverage in the mass media can be defined as media relations. "Media relations involve managing relationships with the media- all the writers, editors and producers who contribute to and control what appears in the print, broadcast and online media" (Tench and Yeomans 2006: 312). As understood, in media relations, public relations practitioners engage in everybody in charge until the phase of news publishing. According to some writers, the objectives of media relations are as follows: "Media relations are building relations with communication media in line with the benefits and objections of an organization. Through this way, the strategic use of media is planned and practiced" (Erdoğan 2006: 227). "Media relations involve how representatives of an organization work with representatives of the news media. "The goal of media relations is to garner positive media coverage for organizations" (Coombs and Holladay 2010: 108). "Public relations professionals can use the wired global village for immediate, effective and persuasive communications ...". Organizations today need to convey their thoughts, programs and objectives to narrow segments of the population" (Kirat 2007: 166). In a nutshell, the primary purpose of the media relations is to make corporate promotion in favour of corporate interests, to receive positive media content about the corporation and to disseminate corporates' opinions, programs and purposes to their publics.

Due to the fact that corporations need the media to publicize their activities so much that the media is placed as a stakeholder of corporations: "Corporations inform their target publics by introducing their products or services through the media. Therefore, it is obligatory that the media is seen as a stakeholder rather than a mediator. On the other hand, the media coverage of a product or a service is not enough; their way of appearance in the media is of vital importance as well. A long term relation between a corporation and the media depends on whether the relations between corporations and media members are proper and based on trust in the eyes of their publics" (Vural and Bat 2013: 283). Of course, media relations in public relations do not guarantee that messages will be conveyed as the way a corporation wants. Since the tools used in media relations are uncontrolled tools, media relations management once again becomes vital.

The aim of attracting positive news coverage in the media in fact indicates whether public relations practitioners control media relations tools. "Practitioners of public relations use both controlled media and uncontrolled media to communicate with their organizations' many publics. Uncontrolled media are those over which practitioners has no direct role in decision making about media content. Instead media gatekeepers decide what is reported, how is

reported, when is reported and whom it is reported" (Cutlip et al. 1994: 259). "In uncontrolled media, because of the fact that corporations, as news sources, do not have a control on published news, campaign activities should be creatively designed and become newsworthy and in this process, media relations are extremely important" (Satir et al. 2015: 143). In media relations, messages delivered are under the control of media members that public relations practitioners engage with and for this reason, the interaction with decision-maker media members is vital. "The perceived importance of media for both business and government has led to a tremendous growth of communication departments and has fuelled further the professionalization of the profession. That means that an increasing number of practitioners and other media strategists use the media to try to influence the formation of opinions and decision making process on a daily basis" (Neijens and Smith 2006: 232-233). Grunig and Hunt explain how public relations practitioners conduct strategies to influence media members as follows: "Relations with the news media are so central to the practice of that many practitioners believe that public relations are nothing more than media relations" (Grunig and Hunt 1984: 223). Public relations practitioners also undoubtedly deal with other works except than with media relations.

As seen, the interaction with media members is highly important for public relations practitioners. However, the main issue is here, which also poses the research question for this study, that media members need public relations news as a source to write news. "There are times public relations need to have information disseminated by the news media. Conversely, there are times when the news media need public relations people to create content for publication or broadcast" (Coombs and Holladay 2010: 107-108). The link between public relations and the media will also be reviewed during the rest of the paper.

The Relationship between Public Relations and the Media

As a public relations strategy, public relations practitioners need newsworthy stories to convey to the media. In order to practice effective media relations, it is imperative that public relations practitioners commit themselves to providing information that is valuable to journalists (Supa and Zoch 2009: 19). As seen, journalists expect newsworthy information in this relationship. On the other hand, public relations practitioners seek news coverage for their organizations. "The justifications why a public relations practitioner needs journalists are crystal clear. Public relations practitioners want to see positive news coverage in their campaign" (Akbulut 2016: 85). "Practitioners often conduct media relations by systematically distributing information subsidies to the media on behalf of their organizations" (Sallot and Johnson 2006: 83). Journalists become addicted to public relations news after for a while, since public relations practitioners want to place their stories in the news. Shaw and White (2004: 499) assert that "Journalists and public relations educators both acknowledge that journalists depend on public relations-originated material due

to inadequate staffing levels in most newspapers. There is a symbiotic relationship in media relations. Public relations people want coverage and reporters are looking for low-cost stories" (Coombs and Holladay 2010: 110). As emphasized by Coombs and Holladay, Aydede and Johnston also argue that media relations in public relations benefit both sides: Media relations are a profitable and efficient relationship for both sides. Upon invitations, journalists attend press conferences, inaugurations, cocktails, trips and other activities, thereby acquire news stories and corporate public relations departments thus achieve their professional missions by managing this relationship (Aydede 2004: 48). "While the role of public relations practitioners may rightly be seen as vital to the media, it is not a one-way relationship. Just as public relations provide information to the media, so too do the media provide information to the public relations profession" (Johnston 2009: 245). As can be understood, each side expects something from the other. "Editors and reporters and public relations people need each other. The media must have materials and ideas from public relations sources, and practitioners must have the media as a place to tell their stories" (Wilcox and Cameron 2006: 277).

As has been explained earlier, when we discuss the relationship between public relations practitioners and media members in terms of collecting news stories and getting media coverage, we conclude that both sides need to each other. The intereffication model also supports this argument. According to Okay and Okay (as cited in Bentele and Nothaft), there is an intereffication based on symmetry and integration between journalists and public relations practitioners. According to the intereffication model, "Just as two professions affect each other, they complement each other at the same time. Public relations practitioners influence on journalists in terms of issue-building, agenda building and assessment of people and events. On the other hand, journalists have impact on public relations practitioners in terms of news making and news selection. Additionally, both sides harmonise with each other's area of expertise with respect to time, theme and social areas (Okay and Okay 2013: 32-34).

The mutual dependency thesis indicates that both sides serve the interests of both sides. "As with all relationships, a degree of mutuality is required: the relationship should serve the interests of the media while also serving the interests of those who fund the public relations activity" (Tench and Yeomans 2006: 312). Consequently, public relations practitioners and journalists should find a middle ground where they accomplish their goals. "Journalists and public relations practitioners must negotiate and compromise in order to exchange resources and accomplish their goals" (DeLorne and Fedler 2003: 101). The most common media relations tactics used by public relations practitioners are stated as follows.

The Most Common Tactics in Media Relations

Press releases and briefings are undoubtedly one of the most commonly used media relations tactics: "Press briefing is one of the tools utilized by corporations to disseminate their activities. Press briefings are organized to publicize any major event, corporate anniversary or corporations' reaction towards a public issue" (Budak and Budak 2014: 275). Press releases cover a wide range of news such as launch of new product service, company's anniversary year, company marriages, awards received and patents, start-up of a new company or branch or any kind of research (Karsak 2016: 81). "Press release is a written communication which helps periodical flow of information between corporations and media within the editorial framework" (Onat 2014: 36). "If a press release has a powerful content, it means that targeted publics understand the messages correctly and the goal is achieved" (Vural and Bat 2013: 285). As can be seen, newsworthy press releases therefore are made up of news stories that are distributed to journalists in writing. The less a press release getting media coverage is revised by a journalist, the more it is considered successful.

"When a press release fails to create public opinion or fails to perform its purpose, press conferences are held" (Vural and Bat 2013: 290). Press conferences/meetings organized for the purpose of distributing information to press members, are also another media relations tactics. "The most common public relations event is the news conference. To hold a news conference essentially means to gather the media at a designed place and time so that they can hear a significant and newsworthy announcement and ask questions" (Aronson et al. 2007: 149-150). "Press conferences used to be the traditional means by which companies brought together a large number of journalists in order to make an announcement, launch a campaign, or disseminate information" (Butterick 2011: 152-153). "When a research is finalized, when a report is prepared, when a book is introduced or when project findings are obtained, a press conference is held with the participation of experts or all related parties" (Vural and Bat 2013: 290). In press conferences, journalists have the opportunity to report their own stories about organizations, as well as the opportunity to ask questions to organizations' executives and employees about which they are curious.

In addition to press conferences, press trips are also among media relations tactics facilitating journalists to observe and experience on-site. "Allowing journalists to establish more sincere relationship, press trips provide on-site observation for media members. Press conferences held in press trips also provide further information concerning the agenda that media members have the chance to experience on-site" (Okay and Okay 2013: 91-92). Organizations use the media via news, columns and interviews etc. and they build good relations with journalists through press trips (Asna 2012: 167). "Press trips are organized to draw attention of press on a public issue. It can be a natural disaster risk and thus a press trip can be arranged to get attention of political authorities and society or it can be anything such as an on-site visit of a

company's new factory. In press trips, an invitation letter is written to media members and when an upcoming trip approaches, media organizations are called via telephone to remind" (Vural and Bat 2013: 291). As understood, the main benefit of press trips is to establish long-term relationship between corporations' executives with public relations practitioners and journalists. Such a long-term relationship will also enhance the mutual benefit principle between public relations practitioners and journalists.

What's more, organizations offer interview opportunity to a journalist which they rely on in order to publicize any issue. On the other hand, journalists demand interview from organizations. "An interview suggestion by a journalist or interviews organized by an organizations' own effort are another way of getting coverage in newspapers, magazines and other tools. The most important feature of interviews is to cover interesting news and events and to explain them" (Kazancı 2007: 353). "Interview is known as a form of writing which journalists add their opinions to their analysis or research on prominent, well-known people, places or events" (Vural and Bat 2013: 292). Journalists share their comments predominantly in interviews rather than press releases. Just as an interviewer only wants to catch a good story, a person who gives an interview aims to convey key messages (Seitel 2016: 191). The use of interview in media relations shows once again that each side has mutual dependence.

When it comes to another key importance of media interviews, they form the great majority of news published in newspapers. Face to face interviewing or telephone interviewing between reporters and various people make up of two thirds of the newspaper coverage and news appeared in radio radio-tv news channels. According to one definition, interview is the formal approach of a journalist to a person to ask a question. "More or less, each news makes interviews necessary in terms of collecting information" (Asna 2012: 191).

Following the literature review, the scope of the research will be defined regarding the question of how many news items published in the newspapers are relevant to public relations-based news. To answer this question, economy pages of 5 Turkish daily newspapers with the most circulation will be analysed. Afterwards, the following hypothesis that "the major part of the media coverage in economy pages of Turkey's newspapers with the most circulation are based on public relations activities will be tested" was made. To measure the hypothesis, whether economy news are based on press releases, press trip, press conference, press interview or a reporter's story will be identified through a qualitative analysis.

Methodology

Following the literature review, the scope of the research will be defined regarding the question of how much of the news that appeared in the newspapers is relevant to public relations-based news. To answer this question, the economy pages of 5 Turkish daily newspapers with the most circulation

will be analysed. Afterwards, the following hypothesis "the major part of the news content in economy pages of Turkey's newspapers with the most circulation are based on public relations activities" will be tested. To measure the hypothesis, whether economy news are based on press releases, press trips, press conferences, press interviews or a reporter's story will be determined through a qualitative analysis.

According to Medyatava data (2017), the top 5 Turkish Daily newspapers with the most circulation between the dates of 6-12 March 2017 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. 6-12 March 2017 Circulation Report

Newspaper	Sales Figures
Hürriyet	322.546
Sabah	301.658
Sözcü	280.141
Posta	269.868
Habertürk	203.169

Source: http://www.medyatava.com/tiraj/2017-03-06.

When conducting the research, the most circulated five newspapers between the dates of 14-23 March, 2017 has been followed and reviewed for 10 days, each news item has been reviewed and their sources have been analysed. In the meantime, columns, public relations based paid announcements, sectorial pages has been excluded from the context. During the analysis of reporters' news, foreign-sourced news like FED (the American Central Bank), news on Euro Dollar currency, research news based on statics, Ministry statements, investigate reports and file reports have been categorized as reporters' news. On the other hand, corporate releases, interviews with corporate agents, press conferences and trips have been categorized as corporate news.

Findings

The news published in Hürriyet, Sabah, Sözcü, Posta and Habertürk newspapers have been analysed in the research paper. As summarized in Table 2, 52 out of 129 news items have been published by reporters, while 77 of this news were based on public relations-based stories.

Table 2. The Number of Public Relations-based News in Hürriyet Newspaper

News Source	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	Total
Reporter	4	6	7	2	6	5	3	7	8	4	52
Press Release	7	3	1	1	6	6	-	9	5	1	39
Press Conference	-	1	2	4	4	4	1	2	1	3	22
Press Interview	2	-	-	2	2	2	3	-	-	-	11
Press trip	-	1	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	5
PR-based news in total	9	5	3	8	13	14	4	11	6	4	77
News in Total	13	11	10	10	19	19	7	18	14	8	129

When it comes to news on economy appeared in Sabah newspapers, 64 out of 137 news items have been based on reporters' own stories. The number of public relations-based stories is 73 when compared to the total number of news (Table 3).

Table 3. The Number of Public Relations-based News in Sabah Newspaper

News Source	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	Total
Reporter	12	5	7	7	4	7	5	5	9	3	64
Press Release	3	3	5	6	1	4	7	4	4	1	38
Press Conference	1	2	3	1	1	2	3	3	1	2	19
Press Interview	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	-	7
Press trip	-	1	2	2	1	1		-	-	1	8
PR-based news in total	5	7	11	10	4	8	11	7	6	4	73
News in total	17	12	18	17	8	15	16	12	15	7	137

Regarding the economy news in the Sözcü newspapers, 64 out of 121 news items have been published through reporters while 57 are public relations-based stories (Table 4).

Table 4. The Number of Public Relations-based News in Sözcü Newspaper

News Source	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	Total
Reporter	7	6	6	3	6	8	1	8	7	12	64
Press Release	4	3	4	4	10	3	2	2	2	7	41
Press Conference	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	3	5
Press Interview	-	-	-	1	2	-	2	1	1	1	10
Press trip	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	3
PR-based news in total	4	3	4	7	13	4	4	3	4	11	57
News in Total	11	9	10	10	19	12	5	11	11	23	121

In another highly circulated newspaper, Posta, as seen in the table below, 53 out of 142 news items on economy have been published by reporters, while 89 items are public relations based stories (Table 5).

Table 5. The Number of Public Relations-based News in Posta Newspaper

News Source	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	Total
Reporter	5	6	6	6	5	8	4	4	5	4	53
Press Release	8	3	10	9	8	6	6	8	5	7	70
Press Conference	-	1	1	2	2	ı	1	2	-	3	10
Press Interview	-	3	ı	ı	1	1	-	-	-	ı	5
Press trip	1	-	ı	ı	1	ı	-	-	-	ı	2
PR-based news in total	9	7	11	11	12	7	7	10	5	10	89
News in Total	14	13	17	17	17	15	11	14	10	14	142

Lastly, the findings illustrate that the news source of 51 economy news in Habertürk newspapers are reporters, while 95 are based on public relations stories (Table 6).

Table 6. The Number of Public Relations-based News in Habertürk Newspaper

News Source	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	Total
Reporter	7	5	4	2	8	5	5	5	7	3	51
Press Release	3	4	2	4	12	7	8	10	9	4	63
Press Conference	-	-	-	2	2	-	3	3	1	3	14
Press Interview	-	-	2	-		1	2	-	1	3	9
Press trip	-	2	2	1	1	1	2	-	-	1	9
PR-based news in total	3	6	6	7	15	9	15	13	11	10	95
News in Total	10	11	10	9	23	14	20	18	18	13	146

All the news that appeared in the economy pages of newspapers has been reviewed and media relations tactic used for public relations-based news has been identified. In this regard, according to figures stated in Table 7, the most commonly used media relations tactic is press releases (251 items) regarding the public relations-based news in economy pages of newspapers. It has been followed by press conferences (70 items), press interviews (42 items) and press trips (27 items). There is no doubt that press trips are the most expensive media relations tactics and for this reason, it is quite normal to be ranked as the last tactic in Table 7.

Table 7. Public Relations Based News by Types

	Hürriyet	Sabah	Sözcü	Posta	Habertürk	Total
Total PR News	77	73	57	89	95	391
Press Release	39	38	41	70	63	251
Press Conference	22	19	5	10	14	70
Press Interview	11	7	10	5	9	42
Press Trip	5	8	3	2	9	27

Discussion

Before concluding the discussion, it is important to note the limitations of the study. Columns, public relations based paid announcements, sectorial pages have been excluded from the context within the scope of the study. After having reviewed the findings obtained in the present study, we see that reporters get benefit of public relations-based news rather than writing their stories according to 4 out of 5 newspapers with the most circulation. As the table below indicates, the great majority of news appeared in the economy pages of Hürriyet, Sabah, Posta and Habertürk newspapers is public relations-based news in the form of press releases, press conferences, press trips and press interviews.

Interestingly, findings have shown that the number of reporters' stories is more than public relations-based news in the Sozcu newspaper. When it comes to news in total, 391 out of 675 news items are relevant to public relations-based news. In conclusion, in light of the views obtained, the hypothesis "the major part of the news content in economy pages of Turkey's newspapers with

the most circulation are based on public relations activities" has been verified (Table 8).

Table 8. The Total Number o	News Appeared in Econom	v Pages of Newspapers
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Newspaper	The Number of	The Number of PR-	Total News
	Reporters' News	Based News	Numbers
Hürriyet	52	77	129
Sabah	64	73	137
Sözcü	64	57	121
Posta	53	89	142
Habertürk	51	95	146
Total	284	391	675

Conclusion

Media relations are the most common public relations tactic used by public relations practitioners. As corporations often are benefited of media relations tactic to disseminate information about their activities during their interaction with their publics and stakeholders, it is significant to carry out researches on media relations. Journalists and public relations practitioners work together due to their professions. While public relations practitioners need journalists to get media coverage about their companies, journalists also need public relations practitioners as a source to write.

The significance of the concept of media relations in public relations has been touched upon, the mutual dependency between public relations and the media has been elaborately discussed. Afterwards, as the most common media relations tactics used by public relations practitioners, press releases, press conferences, press trips and press interviews have been presented.

The present study has also addressed how the intereffication model between public relations practitioners and the media were reflected in the newspapers regarding the question of how much of the news that appeared in the newspapers are relevant to public relations-based news.

Upon analysis of the economy pages of 5 newspapers with the most circulation in Turkey, it has been understood that public relations-based stories have received a large volume of coverage when compared to reporters' stories in the following newspapers: Hürriyet, Sabah, Posta and Habertürk. On the other hand, the research indicates that reporters' stories have received far more coverage than public relations-based news in number. Another outcome of the research is a great majority of public relations-based news have been obtained through press releases (251 news). It has been followed by press conferences (70 news), press interviews (42 news) and press trips (27 news). In light of the views obtained, the hypothesis that "the major part of the news content in the economy pages of Turkey's newspapers with the most circulation are based on public relations activities" has been verified. In a nutshell, this mutual benefit approach between public relations practitioners and the media leaves readers

with more corporate news and media literacy is increasingly seen as necessary in this process.

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