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Value of Perception in Organizational Reputation and Corporate Communication: The Case of Esgaz Eskisehir Natural Gas Distribution Company

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Abstract

The research aims to portray the reputation of Eskişehir Natural Gas Distribution Company among its employees, stakeholders and customers. The energy as a sector and as a prominent economic player, ESGAZ Eskişehir Natural Gas Distribution Company (noted as ESGAZ herewith) are playing a pivotal role in Turkey and in Eskişehir in city scale. Eskişehir hosts second largest industrial district in the country and demand for clean and efficiently managed energy resources is a daily routine of its for nearly all the inhabitants. Naturally, spotlights would be over on such an important and emerging sector and its players. Evidently, more people are becoming environmentally conscious and sensitive when it comes down of using natural resources. How such resources are managed, who are the people managing it, what are the expectations of end–users from energy company and would there be any gap in communicating among these people become vital questions to answer, and requires more and scientific attention. For this purpose, survey method is deployed in order for assessing the ESGAZ reputation among its publics. In order for utilizing a reliable measurement scale, series of focus groups and in-depth interviews were organized for the purpose of developing a reliable measurement instrument.

Keywords: Corporate communication, reputation, corporate image, corporate signs and advertising

JEL Code: M370

1. Introduction

Increasingly, various forms of organizations are shifting their promotional efforts from traditional advertising and public relations to managing corporate communications in real and in virtual settings. This is a new delegation of power, reshuffling and redistribution of cards. Needless to say though, there will be new players on the table. Even perhaps we may need a new deck. Rapid innovations in digital technologies coupled with intensive competition in almost every perspective, and providing products or services to consumers requires and even

dictates giving priority to consumers' desires that is though their perception. In this business of "convincing" people has never been obliged to the fact that there is a colossal need to comprehend how people see us. Reputation is what we would like to have as individuals. Good reputation translates to more of credibility and that in return would possibly bring us what we desire. It may surface as amore of a social life, a help at when we are desperate, having personal credit that would possibly exists as a form of being attended to our messages when we have something to say.

Organizational reputation is no less than individual one, even requires more attention. Organizational reputation can be defined as the way how stakeholders, employees and public(s) perceive organizations' values, virtues, its signs and overall, how they see the organization in general. Such definition requires a huge task to accomplish by any organization that aims to achieve a sustainable communication inwardly and outwardly. This task involves setting proper communication strategies and utilizing communications tools accordingly.

A good reputation is vital for the organizational life cycle. In turbulent times, when a crisis hits an organization, survival becomes a top priority. This is the circumstance where a good reputation pays off. If an organization struggles to keep the trading value of its shares or simply continuing its daily activities would largely depend on consumers' or stakeholders' trust; this is where a good reputation comes into the play.

2. Literature Review

The first step in corporate communication studies is to assess how its stakeholders perceive an organization. Nevertheless, today corporate "image" by far surpasses the "reputation" and often used in its place. Corporations often resort to the effort of "making" an image, refrain the task of measuring their perception that they already have in the eyes of internal and external stakeholders. It is a common practice that personal or corporate image is often reduced in a notion that it is what one can perceive as *façade* or just an image of an organization or an individual. Evidently, this approach presumes only the tip of the iceberg and neglects the huge chunk underwater.

There are two types of approaches to the concept of corporate reputation: (1) utilitarian and (2) reflective (Pruzan 2001).

Utilitarian approach assumes to increase organization's profitability to a maximum level. Therefore, both management and employees should share this simple goal.

As Pruzan (2001) stated, Reflective approach on the other hand perceives that an organization must fulfill its duties to the society in which it operates. For instance, using natural resources wildly and polluting the environment just for to make more profit is not a humane behavior, also it will ruin company reputation in the long run.

Naturally, in order for to establish a corporate reputation an organization must decide on its identity first. Like human beings, organizations should agree on name, logo, vision etc. things that make up an identity. Melewar (2003) defines corporate identity as visual presentations of an organization that potrays what the corporation is about to outside world.

However, Foroudi and others stated that there is insufficient evidence to establish a link between visual attributes and physical proportions of corporate logo, sign and positive perception of corporate reputation (2014).

Püsküllüoğlu (2004) defines the term identity as sum of all traits that makes a person and differentiates him or her from others. According to the scholar corporate identity is a

total and consistent perception of which an organization uses it to promote itself to its employees and stakeholders.

Van Riel and Balmer (1997) states that identity is how an organization presents itself to outside in a consistent way. Scholars further explain that while making this presentation, organization must spread its essence into itself.

Integrated corporate communication is perceived as antecedent of reputation. Some studies revealed that word of mouth communication and verbal referrals are as equally important as disseminating corporate messages (Kitchen and Sever 2008).

Corporate reputation can be defined as an organizational act for the purpose of acquiring a positive and intended outcome for the organization of which such act was originated (Fombrun and Rindova 1996).

Fombrun and Shanley (1990) concluded that reputation enables a corporation to dictate the prices for products or services that they sell; it's also a valet parking ticket for stock exchanges, and helps to persuade skilled employees to join their ranks.

Fombrun and Low (2011) stated that only a small percentage of consumer do prefer product itself to corporate perception. In other words, researchers indicate that if a consumers has positive attributes related to a particular company and its brand(s) they are more prone to purchases it products.

Based on the measurement scale, which is well accepted in the literature also known as Fombrun index, corporate reputation has six different components. These components are emotional appeal, products and services, vision and leadership, workplace environment, social and environmental responsibilities, and financial performance (Fombrun et al. 2000).

It is evident that there is a direct link between how an organization is perceived and its degree of reputation. In other words, without a positive perception there will be no positive reputation (Young 1995).

Evidently, corporate reputation is not limited to the only visible parts of an organization. It can be said that morof its roots goes deep to how the corporations acts responsibly towards its internal as well as its external publics. This will lead to managing responsibilities in many respects and will naturally sharpen corporate reputation in return (Baldarelli and Gigli 2014).

3. Method

3.1. Purposes and Research Questions

As outlined above, the main purpose of the research is to assess ESGAZ Eskişehir Natural Gas Distribution Company's reputation among its publics. However, in order to gain more insight, the researcher set the following research purposes.

(1) How perception of public(s) affects the overall reputation of an organization?

(2) Would perception of internal and external publics vary significantly?

(3) Which parts of an organizational reputation perceive positively by its publics?

(4) Which parts of an organizational reputation perceived negatively by its publics?

(5) Are there any variations of ESGAZ's publics' perception on how they perceive the company in terms of different aspects of corporate reputation?

3.2. Ingenuity of the Research

The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the following points:

(1) This research would help to assess the overall quality of ESGAZ as a corporation.

(2) ESGAZ will be able to ascertain the areas where it needs to develop its corporate reputation.

(3) ESGAZ would be able to develop reputation enhancement strategies.

(4) ESGAZ as a public utility company would set as an example for other organizations that have similar nature.

3.3. Assumptions

This research will operate from the following assumptions:

(1) Organizational/corporate reputation is a monolithic body of construct that consist the views of internal and external publics.

(2) Organizational/corporate reputation is affected from both retrospective and prospective point of views of various publics.

(3) ESGAZ values and is sensitive to the perception of its publics.

(4) The Participants of the research are capable of assessing the organizational values, management style, and operations of ESGAZ.

3.4. Limitations

This research has the following limitations:

(1) The research venue is Eskişehir city center.

(2) The participants of the research are the members of internal and external publics of the ESGAZ.

3.5. The Research Model

On the basis of research and available literature in this area, a new measurement scale was developed on dimensions related to corporate perception and reputation. To generate items comprising the domains of attitudes, three focus groups were conducted comprising 36 people in Eskisehir, Turkey. In constructing the focus groups, a representative group of people was selected on the basis of their demographic characteristics and relations with the ESGAZ. Individuals were asked about how they see their corporation from various aspects. The interviewer generated total of 20 items, which were discussed in the focus groups, and then revised into a preliminary questionnaire. The questionnaire was further pre-tested on a group of 35 participants, who were judged to be representative of the target population. This helped the researcher to reduce redundancy and clarified wording.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part is comprised of 6 demographic questions. Statements used in the second part were adapted from previous studies, the literature review and from focus group interviews, and they were designed according to potential implications corporate perception. A total of 93 statements were thus presented

and respondents were asked to indicate their attitudes on a five-point Likert scale with being 1="strongly agree" and 5="strongly disagree". As in every research project, similar steps of measurement scale development procedures were followed rigorously. Table 3.5.1. shows categories along with number of items included in each of them. The overall Cronbach Alpha value for the scale is .98 that clearly indicates the reliability of the measurement scale developed for the research.

Table 3.5.1. Alpha Coefficiencies of Categories

Categories	Number of Items per Category	Cronbach Alpha Values
Management and Leadership	10	.92
Employees	9	.86
Corporate Signs	7	.70
Work Place Environment	9	.83
Corporate Culture	10	.92
Products and Services	10	.88
Fiscal performance	5	.73
Communication	13	.86
Social Responsibility	9	.85
Respect to Individual Rights	11	.87
Total	**93**	**.98**

3.6. The Sampling Methodology

Due to its limited number of employees, all ESGAZ personnel were surveyed. The employees of the companies that are sub-constructors to the ESGAZ were participated to the research. A total of 10 employees from each sub-constructor company were participated. A convenience sampling method was employed to gather data from various individual ESGAZ customers. The total of participants were 585.

4.FINDINGS

The initial research process took four months to conclude and final report was written in a period of one month. The total point adhered for the measurement scale is 3,44 out of 5 highest attainable points. In other words, the level of reputation of ESGAZ was assessed in the upper-middle range. If the 3,44 is converted to the percentage, the number would be equal to 68 out of 100.

The point where the corporate reputation is most prominent was to be found to be the corporate logo. Naturally, due to its visible character and its easy to recall corporate logo deemed as the most visible point in the corporate culture of the company. The percentage is for the logo is 69%. The detailed explanations of findings are given below.

4.1. Distribution of Employees

Employees who took a part in the research were shown in Table 4.1.1. Total of 52 employees were participated the research, and among them technicians constitutes the highest contingent with 14 participants. The least number of employees comes from security personnel with 2 participants.

Table 4.1.1. Distribution of Employees

Position	Number
Manager	7
Engineer	5
Chef	6
Teller	5
Clerk	9
Technician	14
worker	4
Security	2
Total	**52**

4.2. Distribution of Participants by Genders

Table 4.2.1. shows the numbers of participants and their definitions. Table 4.2.2. however, indicates the gender ratio of all participants. Based on that, 47, 4 per cent of participants are women, and 52, 6 per cent of participants are men. This indicates a relative equality among genders in the research.

Table 4.2.1. Distribution of Participants

Status	Number
Employee	52
Subcontractor	10
ESGAZ customers	523
Total	**585**

Table 4.2.2. Distribution of Participants by Gender

Gender	Number	percentage
Female	277	47,4
Male	308	52,6
Total	**585**	**100**

4.3. Management and Leadership

There are 10 items under this category and a maximum point attainable is 50. Table 4.3.1. shows itemized mean and standard deviation scores for each item. The total M=3,28 and SD=0,99 for this category. Only one item is above the threshold value of 3,41 that is “it honors its agreements and contracts”. The mean score for this item is 3,44. All other items were grouped under the threshold. As for the genders, there no significant difference was observed. Naturally, managers find leadership more important than employees and customers. This finding indicates a similarity with Kitchen and Laurence’s (2003) conclusion. Scholars state that managers overvalue their significance in organizations while others look the issue with relative objectivity.

Table 4.3.1. Management and Leadership Items

Item Order	Items	M	SD
01	It is a well managed corporation	3.26	1.057
02	Managers are competent	3.12	0.94
03	Corporation have clear vision and goals	3.18	0.97
04	Corporate values are clear	3.23	0.99
05	Its leadership is more successful than many other corporations	3.28	1.01
06	It's a specialized organization in its field	3.38	0.99
07	It values the team work	3.17	0.86
08	It has a good reputation	3.36	1.06
09	It honors its agreements and contracts	3.44	1.03
10	It values the productivity and efficiency	3.37	1.01
01-10	**Management and Leadership Category**	**3.28**	**0.99**

4.4.Employees

This category has 9 items. Table 4.4.1. indicates the mean scores and standard deviations for each item covered under this category. The overall mean score of the category is M=3,12 and SS=1,04. Obviously this score is well below the general threshold value of M=3,41. Only item 13 (they are well dressed) exceeded the limit by M=3, 51. No significant differences were assessed among managers, employees and other stakeholders, including the customers under this category. This clearly shows that managers should take the lead and should be corporation evangelist in outer world (Alsop 2004). In fact all employees are corporate evangelists and should help to promote corporate values (Ali et al. 2014).

Table 4.4.1. Employees

Item Order	Items	M	SD
11	Employees are competent at their work	3.20	1.08
12	Employees have enough expertise on their jobs	3.23	0.96
13	They are well dressed	3.51	1.00
14	They are kind and hospitable	3.29	1.11
15	They do want to get benefit out of customers	2.63	1.10
16	They are successful at their work	3.40	0.94
17	They have professional ethics	3.32	0.94
18	Their knowledge level, attitudes and practicality are good	3.27	1.01
19	I know many of the employee in person	2.26	1.27
11-19	**Employees Category**	**3.12**	**1.04**

4.5. Corporate Signs

There are 7 items under this category therefore the maximum point attainable is 35. Table 4.5.1. shows itemized mean and standard deviation scores for each item under this category. The overall mean score of the category is M=3,44 and SS=1,11. Obviously this score is above the general threshold value of M=3,41. Therefore it can be concluded that 69 per cent of participants positively perceive the corporation in terms of it signs. No significant

differences were assessed among managers, employees and other stakeholders, including the customers under this category.

Table 4. 5.1. Corporate Signs

Item Order	Items	M	SD
20	Corporate signs are clearly indicates the corporation	3.40	1.14
21	Its logo draws attentions	3.90	0.90
22	Its vehicles are easily identifiable	3.66	1.10
23	Its forms and documents are easily identifiable	3.48	1.07
24	Everybody knows its abbreviation	3.82	1.08
25	Its uniforms and hats are special to the corporation	3.37	1.03
26	Its building is quite ordinary	3.05	1.12
20-26	**Corporate Signs Category**	**3.44**	**1.11**

4.6. Work Place Environment

There are 9 items under this category therefore the maximum point attainable is 45. Table 4.6.1. shows itemized mean and standard deviation scores for each item under this category. The overall mean score of the category is M=3,27 and SS=0,93. Obviously this score is below the general threshold value of M=3,41. Therefore it can be concluded that participants negatively perceive the corporation in terms of its work place conditions. No significant differences were assessed among managers, employees and other stakeholders, including the customers under this category. While item 34 (work place safety is not the priority) has the lowest mean score (M=2,58), when this item reversed, it further indicates that internal and external stakeholders do not see the organization in a tragic state, nevertheless this does not mean that they necessarily approve the current state of work place environment.

Table 4.6.1. Work Place Environment

Item Order	Items	M	SD
27	It's a right place to work	3.36	1.02
28	Its hardware is sufficient	3.32	0.84
29	It obeys occupational health and safety regulations	3.42	0.90
30	Its got tidy and clean working environment	3.52	0.98
31	Working hours are good	3.42	1.01
32	Storage facilities are sufficient	3.16	0.73
33	Its got easy access to its buildings and facilities	3.45	1.04
34	Work place safety is not the priority	2.58	0.99
35	Human resources are sufficient	3.17	0.89
27-35	**Work place environment**	**3.27**	**0.93**

4.7. Corporate Culture

There are 10 items under this category therefore the maximum point attainable is 50. Table 4.7.1. shows itemized mean and standard deviation scores for each item under this category. The overall mean score of the category is M=3,33 and SS=0,88. Obviously this score

is below the general threshold value of M=3,41. Therefore it can be concluded that participants negatively perceive the corporation in terms of its corporate culture. Two items are above the threshold value of 3,41. These are "it's a fastly developing organization", and "employees have loyalty to the corporation." The mean scores for these items are 3,50 and 3,61 respectively. No significant differences were assessed among managers, employees and other stakeholders, including the customers under this category. Item 38 (internal communication is healthy) have the lowest mean score (M=3,20). One interesting finding is however; external stakeholders perceive the corporate culture more positive as compare to internal stakeholders.

Table 4.7.1. Corporate Culture

Item Order	Items	M	SD
36	Employee relations are respectful	3.24	0.81
37	Employees have loyalty to the corporation	3.61	0.99
38	Internal communication is healthy	3.20	0.83
39	It values its employees development	3.21	0.82
40	Its got sustained working climate	3.29	0.88
41	Job definitions are clear	3.40	0.94
42	It is a fastly developing organization	3.50	0.94
43	It supports its employees	3.23	0.81
44	Work loads and schedules are clearly defined	3.29	0.94
45	It provides extra support to its employees	3.25	0.86
36-45	**Corporate Culture**	**3.33**	**0.88**

4.8. Product and Services

There are 10 items under this category therefore the maximum point attainable is 50. Table 4.8.1. shows itemized mean and standart deviation scores for each item under this category. The overall mean score of the category is M=3,17 and SS=1,02. Obviously this score is below the general threshold value of M=3,41. Therefore it can be concluded that participants negatively perceive the corporation in terms of its corporate culture. Two items are above the threshold value of 3,41. These are "it's a fastly developing organization", and "employees have loyalty to the corporation." The mean scores for these items are 3,50 and 3,61 respectively. Internal stakeholders, namely employees have a positive perception as oppose to external stakeholder for this category.

Table 4.8.1. Product and Services

Item Order	Items	M	SD
46	It provides quality products and services	3.34	1.05
47	It is always behind its products and services	3.32	1.04
48	It develops its product and services	3.14	1.02
49	It explores new product and service use	3.16	0.99
50	You can get what you paid for	3.16	1.08
51	It updates its products and services	3.13	0.99
52	Nothing is new	2.81	1.09

53	You can trust its products and services	3.37	1.00
54	It always find what customers need	3.20	0.93
55	It diversifies its products and services	3.07	1.02
46-55	**Products and services**	**3.17**	**1.02**

4.9. Fiscal Performance

There are 5 items under this category therefore the maximum point attainable is 25. Table 4.9.1. shows itemized mean and standard deviation scores for each item under this category. The overall mean score of the category is M=3,26 and SS=0,98. Obviously this score is below the general threshold value of M=3,41. Therefore it can be concluded that participants negatively perceive the corporation in terms of its fiscal performance. Internal stakeholders, namely employees have a positive perception as oppose to external stakeholder for this category. It may be seen normal because external stakeholders may not observe how company is performing and they have no access to daily operational data.

Table 4.9.1. Fiscal Performance

Item Order	Items	M	SD
56	It has numerous resources	3.22	1.02
57	It has no financial strains	3.39	1.00
58	It is financially in good standing	3.53	0.94
59	It wastes its financial resources	2.76	0.96
60	It is financially rock solid	3.42	0.98
56-60	**Fiscal performance**	**3.26**	**0.98**

4.10. Communication

There are 12 items under communication category therefore the maximum point attainable is 65. Table 4.10.1. shows itemized mean and standard deviation scores for each item under this category. The overall mean score of the category is M=3,14 and SS=0,98. Obviously this score is well below the general threshold value of M=3,41. Therefore it can be concluded that participants negatively perceive the corporation in terms of its communication performance. There are no significant differences observed between employees and external stakeholders in this category. However, the mean score of the item "its promotional efforts are sufficient" (M=3,00). This mean score suggests that the company should spend more effort to promote itself and its policies and practices to general public. As suggested in the literature, more and frequent appearance on media with positive content would not only help to promote company to external public, it will also help to sustain internal communications smoothly and swiftly among employees (Lewellyn 2002; Pharoah 2003).

Table 4.10.1 Communication

Item Order	Items	M	SD
61	It has a positive public perception	3.16	1.15
62	Its press releases are convincing	3.16	1.08
63	Corporate documents and publications are in good quality	3.26	1.01
64	Never keeps its promises	2.57	1.04

65	It's the corporation that I can trust	3.36	1.00
66	It has a good relation with unions	3.04	0.74
67	Its public communication is candid and transparent	3.17	1.00
68	Never heard a thing about it lately	3.28	1.09
69	It has a good relation with other organizations	3.19	0.75
70	Its promotional efforts are sufficient	3.00	0.74
71	It values media relations	3.05	0.92
72	It uses proper language and accord the others with courtesy	3.36	1.00
73	It informs the publics when necessary	3.27	1.038
61-73	**Communications**	**3.14**	**0.98**

4.11. Social Responsibility

There are 9 items under communication category therefore the maximum point attainable is 45. Table 3.11.1. shows itemized mean and standard deviation scores for each item under this category. The overall mean score of the category is M=3,14 and SS=1,04. Obviously this score is well below the general threshold value of M=3,41. Therefore it can be concluded that participants negatively perceive the corporation in terms of its communication performance. Only the mean score of item 75 "it is sensitive the environment" was found above the average (M=3,44). This score indicates a slightly better performance as oppose to the other items under this category. There are no significant differences observed between employees and external stakeholders in this category.

Table 4.11.1. Social Responsibility

Item Order	Items	M	SD
74	It contributes a lot to the society from various aspects	3.30	1.10
75	Its sensitive to the environment	3.44	1.05
76	It supports societal projects	3.17	0.97
77	It values protecting the habitat	3.38	1.01
78	It supports not for profit projects	2.79	1.10
79	It creates new jobs	3.21	1.07
80	It has no contribution to national economy	2.61	1.10
81	It supports the societal development	3.27	0.99
82	Helps other organizations	3.06	0.94
74-82	**Social responsibility**	**3.14**	**1.04**

4.12. Respect to Individual Rights

There are 11 items under "respect to individual rights" category therefore the maximum point attainable is 55. Table 4.12.1. shows itemized mean and standard deviation scores for each item under this category. The overall mean score of the category is M=3,10 and SS=1,04. Obviously this score is well below the general threshold value of M=3,41. Therefore it can be concluded that participants negatively perceive the corporation in terms of its "respect to individual rights" performance. There are no significant differences observed between employees and external stakeholders in this category. Research findings indicate that there might be numerous factors that come into the play in lowering individual rights perception in an organization (Budd 1994). Davies and others have found that motivational

factors such as heavy and unbalanced workload may affect employees' perception and this eventually has a spillover effect on overall reputation (Davies et. al. 2001).

Table 4.12.1. Respect to Individual Rights

Item Order	Items	M	SD
83	It spends effort to understand what customers want	3.16	1.09
84	It takes complaints seriously	3.20	1.14
85	It values individuals as well as profitability	3.12	1.11
86	Individual opinions are respected	3.11	1.05
87	Being equally fair to all employees is important	3.04	1.04
88	Employees are more important than customers	2.98	1.20
89	It adopts problem solving approach	3.19	0.97
90	They show care to individuals who has business with the corporation	3.19	0.97
91	They try to learn from criticism and suggestions	3.06	1.00
92	After sales service is valued	3.03	1.07
93	They have high standards and values in dealing individuals	3.06	1.06
83-93	**Respect to individual rights**	**3.10**	**1.04**

5. Conclusion and Future Research

The research reveals that the organization needs do more of promoting itself to its publics and to local community as well. Managers may do some site visits to consumers or contractors so as to find out if they observe any problem.

The company currently has a Public Relations department. This should reorganized as to serve as a "corporate communications" department instead. This new department must liaise with a vice-general manager in order to going more power authority.

Organization must have a communication agenda and this should aim to reach its stakeholders, customers and local media in a sustained way. But, internal communication with its employees must not be neglected and social gathering should be organized for gaining their positive perceptions.

Individual development should also be more of a concern of top management. Therefore, more educational occasions for employees must be created and individuals who are willingly attending to such programs must be recognized and promoted. This way, they will be corporate evangelist. Their positive approach is upmost important.

Based on the findings, corporate reputation is less visible at corporate culture level (67%). However, the company made a tremendous effort to raise the figure at this level. Nevertheless, the difference between the corporate logo and the culture is 2 points and can be disregarded. Only this finding alone may reveal the fact that ESGAZ as a corporation has very reputable standing, despite the fact that energy as a sector is not very well known to the general public. The company can easily increase its reputation scale simply by paying attention to the areas where a bit tedious work is required.

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