



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE EFFECT OF COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES OF LULEBURGAZ 39 SPORTS CLUB ON CLUB'S RECOGNITION.

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Abstract

This study aims to reveals the contribution level of communication activities of Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club competing in Turkish Women's 1st League in the 2012-2013 football season to club's recognition and their effects on the public. The Descriptive and Relational Research Model was utilized in accordance with the purposes of the study. The information and data collection was performed using the survey method. The information and data were tested with descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression analysis. The survey was applied to 400 individuals selected with the random sampling method in Lüleburgaz. It was found that activities aimed at the public, relations with the media and the public's interest in the club positively affected club's recognition. The majority (74,4%) of the participants who responded to the survey had been living in Lüleburgaz for 8 years or more. It was concluded as a result of the study that club's communication activities ought to be restructured, relations with the local media ought to be reshaped, and publicity activities and various organizations ought to be held so that the public will recognize and embrace the women's team.

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Introduction:

This study aims to reveals the contribution level of communication activities of Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club competing in Turkish Women's 1st League in the 2012-2013 football season to club's recognition and their effects on the public. Based on the idea that a successful communication may be one of the ways to attract the same level of interest in men's football to women's football, we believe that this study will be guiding for both professionals and future research on the subject.

Communication Management in Sports Clubs

In future, sports clubs which do not have managerial and economic efficacy will have difficulties in continuing their existence. In this context, sports clubs must use successful methods of contemporary business administration and fulfill requirements of corporate management (Akşar, 2005).

The corporate communication process, which includes creating and maintaining strong internal and external relations, involves an organization's relations with employees, customers, suppliers and the community (Goodman, 2000). Today, organizations are perceived with their images which they demonstrate before the community above all else (Uzoğlu, 2001). The corporate communication process, with its most basic description, is the voice of an

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organization. At this point, we can say that communication activities and communication management of a sports club influence how the sports club is perceived by the target audience.

The corporate communication process is performed by using methods such as meeting, interviews, discourses, reports, image ads and online communication in order to convey all messages of the organization to the target audience (İçel, 2004). Corporate communication may also be defined as communication products notes, letters, e-mails, and reports sent to relevant internal and external groups or websites, statements or press releases (Argenti and Forman, 2002). In practice, corporate communication is a strategic tool for contemporary corporate managements used in order to gain competitive advantage against rivals (Goodman, 1998).

Based on these definitions, the concept of corporate communication may be described as sports club's strategic management and internalization of all communication efforts with the target audience in a purposeful, planned, efficient, compatible and conscious manner. The corporate communication process in sports clubs fulfills the function of organizing by supporting activities inside and outside the club. Also, the corporate communication process allows for information flow to the target audience inside and outside the club and performs the function of integration by socializing individuals related to the club. Ensuring the coordination between these functions is a basic requirement. For organizations, the most important point in corporate communication is the presence of coordination between these functions (Akyürek et al., 2005).

Corporate communication may appear as three different structures depending on functions of the organization. These structures may be classified under three main titles: management communication, marketing communication and organizational communication (Solmaz, 2004).

In management communication, the manager of the organization has important tasks such as enhancing employees' motivation, creating an environment of trust, developing the shared vision of the organization, creating a good management team, and initializing and managing the process of change. Accomplishing these tasks requires an efficient communication and management communication involves communication skills necessary to accomplish these tasks (Van Riel, 1995).

Marketing communication, with its most basic description, is a process that supports the promotion function. However, it includes all components and activities related to marketing. Today, communication is a central element and fundamental value in marketing activities (Bozkurt, 2005).

Organizational communication is a process allowing all elements in the organization interact in order to achieve organizational objectives. In general, organizational communication involves an organization's public relations, organizational advertising, communication with investors, and communication with internal and external circles (Gürgen, 1997).

In the light of this information, we can say that the corporate communication process in sports clubs includes all communication activities with relevant internal and external circles carried out by the clubs. With the industrialization of football, building a corporate structure has become one of the primary requirements for sports clubs. In a world where sports clubs are building corporate identities, communication activities of sports clubs and the way clubs manage these activities constitute the main dynamics of the process.

Areas of corporate communication are specified in different ways by different authors. For example, Gertrud Achterhold addresses corporate communication in three basic areas: corporate advertising, corporate sales promotion and corporate public relations. Ralph Berndt classifies corporate communication under titles of advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct communication, product promotion and localization (Katırcı, 2007).

Thomas Glöcker, on the other hand, lists areas of corporate communication as internal communication, corporate advertising, public relations, corporate sales promotion, direct marketing, sponsorship, exhibitions and fairs. In this study, the corporate communication process and areas of corporate communication, which include all relevant shareholders and forms of communication of sports clubs, were based on Glöcker's work. In this context, areas of corporate communication were assessed under six main points as internal communication, corporate advertising, public relations, corporate sales promotion, direct marketing, and sponsorship (Okay, 2002).

Internal Communication:-

Internal communication is defined as the information flow process which occurs between employees and includes the entire organization (Altuğ, 1997). Sports clubs operate with a structure consisting of administrative units, technical staff, athletes and service personnel. Within this structure, it is highly important that club's management increases the cooperation both within itself and between employees. An efficient internal communication process in the club has a significant role in increasing this cooperation.

Public relations:-

Public relations is the art of evaluating, directing and managing the production, practices, philosophy of the organization and thoughts and remarks about the organization (Bıçakçı, 2000).

Public relations makes significant contributions to an organization's image (Kocabaş et al., 2000). Directors of sports clubs has various public relations tools in their disposal to internally and externally communicate with groups in the community. These tools include announcement (press conference, press release, etc.), participation in various groups in the community, development of written materials (annual report, press guide, etc.) and lobbying (ArganveKatırcı, 2002). Public relations has an important role in ensuring the organization is embraced by the target audience (Aran et al., 2005). In this context, the public relations process allows sports clubs to build useful relations with various groups in the community, be embraced by the target audience and create a positive image to public opinion (Mullin et al., 2014).

Sponsorship:-

Today, sponsorship activities are indispensable marketing and communication channels for organizations (Katırcı, 2007).

In recent years, corporate sponsorship is considered to be one of the most popular elements of the marketing communication mix. Sponsor means a guarantor or a patron (Öztürk, 1992). Commercial sponsorship is an investment and the party that sponsors expects a return. Geçikli notes that sponsorship is a commercial relationship based on mutual benefit between the sponsor and the sponsored party (Katırcı, 2007). Meenaghan (1991) states that the sponsor buys two main things: (a) the opportunity to promote itself in an activity which has audience potential, and (b) the opportunity to connect with the events' image and identity depending on the way sponsored organization is perceived.

From a historical perspective, it seems that the main objectives of organizations in sponsorship activities have been to gain social support (Rhonda, 1999), increase awareness and sales (Bennett, 1999), advertise (Argan and Katırcı, 2002), build relations with consumer groups (Gardner and Shuman, 1997), and create a change in attitude (Heper, 2000).

Sports sponsorship is to provide cash or in-kind resources to a sports organization (event, league, athlete, etc.) in order to benefit from said organization in line with organizational goals, marketing objectives and/or promotional strategy (Cornwell and Maignan, 1998). The sponsorship activity may enhance an organization's brand identity, awareness or image (Javalgi et al., 1994). In some cases, it may even help the organization achieve direct sales goals by building a relationship with the event (Meenaghan, 1991). Of course, sports sponsorship has certain effects on the image, identity or awareness of the sponsored. Similarly, the sponsored sports organization is affected by the image of its sponsor. In this context, we can say that the way a sports club is perceived is affected by the perceived image of its sponsors.

Corporate advertising:-

Corporate advertising serves as a tool to make an organization's activities more transparent and clarify an organization's contribution to the community, its position in the community and its responsibility to the community. Some of the tasks and objectives of corporate advertising may be listed as informing the public, creating a positive attitude toward the organization, making the organization more appealing to investors, increasing organization's level of recognition, building trust, correcting misvaluations, and defending the organization against accusations (Okay, 2002).

Sales promotion:-

The sales promotion process, which involves short-term activities aiming to encourage consumers to take action by creating a sudden change, may be intended for consumers and agents in the distribution channel. Sales promotion intended for customers is regarded as “Pull Strategy”, whereas sales promotion intended for agents is regarded as “Push Strategy” (Engel et al., 1991). Sales promotion methods include tele-marketing, price promotion tools, exhibition at sales point, drawings, contests, autograph sessions and are extensively used in sports (Pitts and Stotlar, 2002). For example, many NBA teams exhibit their products by opening stands aimed at consumers/fans before the competition, organize various contests and drawings before the competition or in the half time, hand out various promotional products, and improve the fan-athlete dialog via autograph sessions with the participation of athletes during off-season. Also, they invite fans to competitions and encourage product sales through TV and radio campaigns.

Direct marketing:-

Direct marketing assumes the function of sales and examined and involve two basic structures: direct advertising and direct communication. Direct advertising is to directly aim the target audience with advertising materials. Direct advertising is addressed under two basic classifications. Direct mailing, the first one of these classifications, includes materials such as catalogs, advertising letters and brochures, whereas direct response advertising involves classified ads, spots and newspaper or magazine supplements. Among these, especially television spots are very common today. In this direct marketing method, a telephone number is given after presenting the product and consumers are encouraged to buy the product immediately. Direct communication includes three main methods: tele-marketing, sales in consumer's home and sales outside consumer's home (Okay, 2002).

Research Method:-**Data Collection:-**

The descriptive and relational research model was utilized in accordance with the purposes of the study. The information and data collection was performed using the survey method. The survey related to effect of communication activities on the public was applied following the end of the league in July and August in Lüleburgaz District of the Province of Kırklareli. The reason behind the preference of the end of the league was opportunity to evaluate the entire season. The survey consists of 3 parts. The first part involves club's communication with the local media, directors' communication with the public, club's activities related to integration with the public, and public's level of interest in the club; the second part involves recognition of club's corporate identity, club's historical recognition, and club's structural recognition; and the third part involves general information. Survey questions were prepared considering the communication management and club information in order to measure to what degree the public recognizes the club. The survey was prepared according to the Likert scale.

In order to determine whether questions were understood correctly and whether there were unclear, missing or incorrect questions, a pilot application with 20 participant, which is 5% of the actual sample size, was performed and necessary corrections were made following the pilot application.

Population and Sample:-

The population of the study was made up of the Lüleburgaz District of the Province of Kırklareli, which had a population of 137872 according to 2012 statistics (<http://tuikapp.tuik.gov.tr>, Date of Access: 17 April 2013). The appropriate sample size was calculated to be 384 participants with 0,05 significance level (sosbil.usak.edu.tr/dokuman/ornekleml.xls, Date of Access: 17 April 2013). Although 384 participants were sufficient, the survey was applied to 400 individuals.

Research Hypotheses and model:-

The research has 3 main hypotheses as follows.

H₁: Club's corporate recognition is influenced by club's social relations.

H₂: Club's structural recognition is influenced by club's social relations.

H₃: Club's historical recognition is influenced by club's social relations.

Depending on these hypotheses, the research model was determined to be as follows.

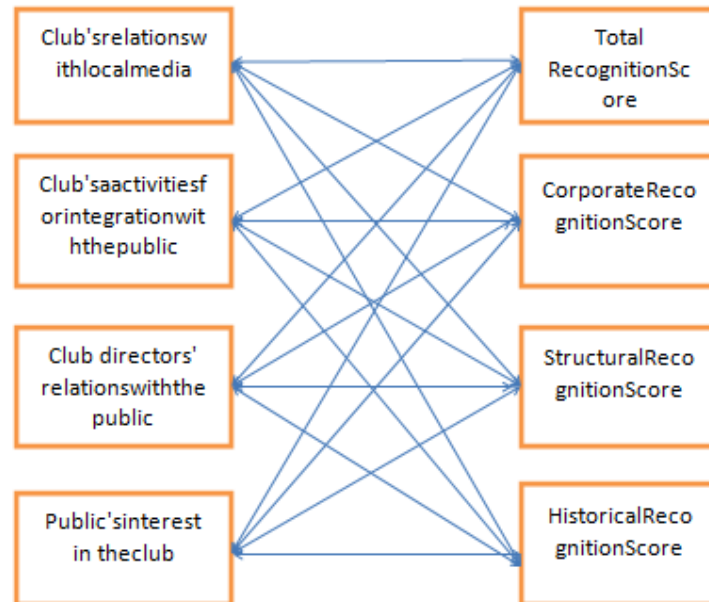


Figure 1:- Research model.

Information and data analysis:-

The information and data were tested with descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression analysis. Since the probability value for Bartlett's was found to be ($p < 0,05$) and KMO value was found to be 0,912 in pretests performed for the factor analysis in relations with shareholders scale, the data set was "perfectly" suitable for factor analysis. This can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1:- Relations with shareholders scale's factor analysis summary.

Factor Name	Items	Factor weight	Explanatoriness (%)	Reliability
Public's interest in the club	I go to Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club's games all the time	,857	17,69	,792
	I follow news about Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club with great interest	,841		
	I consider myself as a fan of Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club	,763		
	I follow Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club's festivals and activities	,733		
Club's integration with the public	Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club organize publicity events aimed at the public	,800	17,13	,830
	Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club organize festivals and support events aimed at the public	,742		
	Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club make an effort to ensure participation of the public to activities	,643		
	Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club announces events in Lüleburgaz on a sufficient level	,635		
Club's dialog	Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club's athletes have sufficient dialog with the public	,798	16,77	,845
	Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club's directors have sufficient dialog with the public	,754		
	I admire activities of Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club's public relations unit	,668		

with the public	We can find someone to answer our inquiries in Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club's facilities	,657		
Local media's interest in the club	News related to Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club are published in local newspapers	,783	16,27	,863
	News related to Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club are broadcast on local radio stations	,761		
	News related to Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club are published in local magazines	,733		
	News related to Lüleburgaz 39 Sports Club are broadcast on local TV stations	,637		
	Total		67,87%	,908

*KMO value 0,912 *For Bartlett's Test $p=0,00$

The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient for 16 items of the scale was calculated to be ,908. The data have a high level of reliability.

Findings:-

55% of the respondents were male and 45% were female. It can be assumed that potential fans of the women's football team have a similar distribution. Almost half of the respondents (45,9%) were in the 20-29 age group. About 22% of the respondents were in the 30-39 and 40-49 age group, whereas only 10,6% of the respondents were in the 50 and above age group. 74,4% of the respondents were residents of Lüleburgaz for 8 years and more. It can be concluded from this result that the data were collected from a sample group living in Lüleburgaz, thus reflect the reality. 54,1% of the respondents had no relative playing in a sports club. 16,6% were actually players in a sports club. The remaining respondents had a relative playing in sports club. Football seems to be, by far, the most popular sport among respondents with 45,6%. It was followed by Basketball (26,5%), Swimming (19%), Wrestling (6%), and Weightlifting (2,9%). Football stood out as the most popular sport played amateurishly or professionally by the respondents with 50,5%. Football was followed by Basketball (26,5%), Swimming (13,8%), Wrestling (6,1%), and Weightlifting (3,1%).

Pearson's correlation analysis was used to determine correlations of total, corporate, historical and structural recognition scores to dimensions of shareholder relations. Accordingly, it was found that almost all correlations between recognition scores and dimensions of shareholder relations were significant.

Table 2:- Correlations Between Total, Corporate, Historical and Structural Recognition Scores and Shareholder Relations Dimensions

	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Total Recognition Score	1							
2	Corporate Recognition Score	,810**	1						
3	Historical Recognition Score	,868**	,599**	1					
4	Structural Recognition Score	,796**	,428**	,533**	1				
5	Relations with local media	,252**	,155**	,208**	,259**	1			
6	Club's relations with the public	,192**	,162**	,091	,224**	,520**	1		
7	Club's activities for integration	,149**	,124**	,070	,178**	,578**	,694**	1	
8	Public's interest in the club	,442**	,383**	,337**	,376**	,372**	,443**	,450**	1

** $p<0,01$, * $p<0,05$

Total recognition score had a positive correlation with relations with local media (,252), club's relations with the public (,192), club's activities for integration with the public (,149), public's interest in the club (,442); corporate recognition score had a positive correlation with relations with local media (,155), club's relations with the public (,162), club's activities for integration with the public (,124), public's interest in the club (,383); and historical recognition score had a positive correlation with relations with local media (,208) and public's interest in the club (,337). The correlations between historical recognition score and other two dimensions, club's relations with the public and club's activities for integration with the public, were statistically insignificant.

Structural recognition score had a positive and significant correlation with relations with local media (.259), club's relations with the public (.224), club's activities for integration with the public (.178), public's interest in the club (.376).

Regression analysis was performed in order to determine whether the variable of total recognition score could be explained with variables of relations with local media, club's relations with the public, club's activities for integration with the public, and public's interest in the club, results of which can be seen in Table 3. The table shows that independent variables explained 21% of the total recognition score in the model, since R^2 was 0,218. The reliability of this result is 99%.

Table 3:- Results of The Regression Analysis Related to The Relationship Between The Total Recognition Score and Dimensions of Shareholder Relations

Independent Variables	Non-standard coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	p
	B	Std.Error	Beta		
Constant	1.979	,053		37,446	,000
Relations with local media	,060	,018	,175	3,300	,001
Club's activities for integration with the public	,050	,018	,152	2,761	,006
Public's level of interest in the club	,128	,014	,445	9,206	,000

* $R^2 = ,218$ (F=29,8 P<0,05)

All of the independent variables affected the dependent variable positively. In this context, it was found that the coefficient of the relations with local media dimension was ,06, the coefficient of the club's activities for integration with the public dimension was ,05, and the coefficient of the public's interest in the club dimension was ,128. Since all probability values of coefficients were found to be smaller than $p < 0,05$ in the significance test, all three independent variables affected total recognition.

Results of the regression analysis related to the relationship between the Corporate Recognition Score and dimensions of shareholder relations given in Table 4 show that independent variables explained 14,7% of the corporate recognition score in the model since the determination coefficient R^2 was 0,145. The reliability of this result is 99%.

Table 4:- Results of The Regression Analysis Related to The Relationship Between The Corporate Recognition Score and Dimensions of Shareholder Relations

Independent Variables	Non-standard coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	p
	B	Std.Error	Beta		
Constant	2,103	,044		48,186	,000
Public's interest in the club	,126	,015	,383	8,618	,000

* $R^2 = ,147$ (F=74,27 P<0,05)

Public's interest in the club affected the dependent variable positively. The public's interest in the club, which was the only independent variable of the model, was found to have a coefficient of ,126. Since probability values of coefficients were found to be smaller than $p < 0,05$ in the significance test, the independent variable was effective in the model. Therefore, the H1 hypothesis was accepted, i.e. "Club's corporate recognition is influenced by club's social relations."

Results of the regression analysis related to the relationship between the Structural Recognition Score and dimensions of shareholder relations are shown in Table 5. Independent variables explained 15,8% of the corporate recognition score in the model since the determination coefficient R^2 was 0,158. The reliability of this result is 99%.

Table 5:- Results of The Regression Analysis Related to The Relationship Between The Structural Recognition Score and Dimensions of Shareholder Relations

Independent Variables	Non-standard coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	p
	B	Std.Error	Beta		
Constant	1,775	,066		27,081	,000
Relations with local media	,057	,020	,138	2,898	,004
Public's interest in the club	,114	,017	,325	6,820	,000

* $R^2 = ,158$ (F=21,0 P<0,05)

Relations with local media and public's interest in the club affected structural recognition positively. The coefficient of the relations with local media dimension was found to be ,57 and the coefficient of the public's interest in the club dimension was found to be ,114. Since probability values of coefficients were found to be smaller than $p < 0,05$ in the significance test, both independent variables were effective in the model. Thus, shares of relations with local media and public's interest in the club dimensions need to be increased in order to improve the structural recognition score. Therefore, the H2 hypothesis was accepted, i.e. "Club's structural recognition is influenced by club's social relations."

Results of the regression analysis related to the relationship between the Historical Recognition Score and dimensions of shareholder relations are shown in Table 6. According to these results, independent variables explained 14,5% of the historical recognition score in the model since the determination coefficient R^2 was 0,145. In this model, probability level was significant on 0,01 (%99) level.

Table 6:- Results of The Regression Analysis Related to The Relationship Between The Historical Recognition Score and Dimensions of Shareholder Relations

Independent Variables	Non-standard coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	p
	B	Std.Error	Beta		
Constant	2,035	,070		29,046	,000
Relations with local media	,083	,024	,191	3,461	,001
Club's activities for integration with the public	,084	,024	,201	3,493	,001
Public's interest in the club	,130	,018	,356	7,040	,000

* $R^2 = ,145$ (F=24,3 P<0,05)

Relations with local media and club's activities for integration with the public affected historical recognition positively. It was found that the coefficient of the relations with local media dimension was ,83, the coefficient of the club's activities for integration with the public dimension was ,84, and the coefficient of the public's interest in the club dimension was ,130. Since probability values of coefficients were found to be smaller than $p < 0,05$ in the significance test, all three independent variables were effective in the model. Thus, shares of relations with local media and public's interest in the club dimensions need to be increased in order to improve the historical recognition score, which means that H3 hypothesis was accepted, i.e. "Club's historical recognition is influenced by club's social relations."

Conclusion:-

Lüleburgaz 39 Women's Football Team were the undefeated champions of the 2009-2010 season and finished the Turkish Women's Football 1st League in the 5th place in 2012-2013 season. Considering these achievements, it is safe to say that Lüleburgaz 39 Women's Football Team stands out as a remarkable team in the Turkish Women's Football 1st League.

A successful communication may be one of the ways to attract the same level of interest in men's football to women's football. Considering that sports clubs are managed with a commercial company logic and within this framework and regarded as profitable businesses and large employers which provide job opportunities and thus support the social structure, we can say that the communication of Lüleburgaz 39 Women's Football Team with their fans needs to be restructured.

74,4% of our respondents were residents of Lüleburgaz for at least 8 years and 81% of our respondents were residents of Lüleburgaz for at least 5 years. Thus, we can say that the participants of this study knew Lüleburgaz very well, which increases the importance of study results even more.

Toplam recognition score was observed to be positively correlated with all variables of relations with local media, club's relations with the public, club's activities for integration with the public, and public's interest in the club. The increase in club's recognition depends on improvements in these variables.

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