

## **What is Public Relations? An Analysis of Turkish Public Relations Job Advertisements Discourses**

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### **Abstract**

From Barnum's publicities on his circus to Bernays' studies with its emphasis on research, and to modern and contemporary practices, public relations has been transformed. As strategic communication process, public relations uses research, planning, implementation and evaluation. In a modern sense, its affiliations are corporate social responsibility, stakeholder management, corporate citizenship, corporate governance, crisis and risk communication, media relations, image, reputation and perception management.

In today's Turkey, public relations have often been confused with customer relationship and marketing for many years. This confusion is also reflected in job advertisements. In this study, public relations job advertisements discourses on human resources network will be analyzed. The paper aims to answer the following questions: How academicians define public relations? What are the differences between public relation's job advertisement discourses and public relations academician's descriptive discourses? What is the image of public relations profession reflected by job advertisement discourses?

### **Conceptual Framework of Public Relations**

The hundreds of definitions of public relations so far represent different dimensions of public relations. The definitions could be divided into academicians' definitions and practitioners' (professional associations e.g.) definitions. The most common definition of public relations no doubt is its managerial function. According to Wilcox and Cameron, the key words to remember public relations are; deliberate, planned, performance, public interest, two way communication and management function (2006:6-7). It could be seen that public relations is a two way communication process pursuing public interest with planned activities and also a management function of the business. Cutlip, Center and Broom also pointed out the management function of public relations: "Public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics on whom its success or failure depends" (1994: 6).

The definitions regarding management function of public relations are followed by other definitions attributing to such roles of public relations as building relationship, communicating with public and social stakeholders According to Grunig and Hunt, "Public relations is the management of communication between and organization and its publics"(1984). Coombs and Holladay define public relations as "the management of mutually influential relationships within a web of stakeholder and organizational relationships" (2007: 26). They argue that modern public relations has re-energized the term "relationship" and relationship oriented public relations reflects the corporate-centric view (2010: 5). According to Caywood, "Public relations is the profitable integration of an organization's new and continuing relationships with stakeholders including customers by managing all communications contacts with the organization that create and protect the brand and reputation of the organization" (1997, xi). Johnston, Zawawi and Brand define public relations as "the development and management of ethical strategies using communications to build relationships with stakeholders or publics" (2009: 7).

As seen above, public relations, as a management function, is responsible for establishing and maintaining a relationship with all relevant social stakeholders influencing business processes. Naturally, relationship management perspective of public relations includes activities with strategic decision making, planning, implementation and evaluating processes. Center and Jackson's public relations definitions show that: "Public relations is the

systematized function that evaluates public attitudes and behaviors; harmonizes the goals, policies and procedures of an individual or organization with the public interest, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding, acceptance and supportive behavior” (2003: 12). In addition to efforts of academicians, public relations practitioners also contribute to defining public relations. The earliest definition of Public Relations Society of America on public relations is that “public relations help an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other” (PRSA, 2016). In time, a new definition has been adopted with the changing role of public relations. Thus, some other roles of public relations have been added to the new definition. According to the new definition of PRSA, “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.” (PRSA, 2016) The new roles of public relations are relationship building and dialogical communication. Besides, public relations are seen as a management process by the most important association. According to Chartered Institute of Public Relations, “*Public relations is about reputation: the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public Relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behavior. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics*” (2016).

No definitions of public relations have been found on the websites of the Institute for Public Relations (IPR), conducting key researches for public relations, and the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA), a significant platform bringing European public relations practitioners together.

On the other hand, when we review definitions of public relations in Turkey, Alaeddin Asna, one of the first private sector practitioners and, after then, one of the first academicians in the field, defines public relations as follows: “Public relations is an art of management which private or legal person establishes and develops confidence and strong ties with relevant publics; directs them to goodwill and positive actions; shapes their attitudes by viewing their reactions and thus, builds mutually beneficial relationship with planned efforts” (1983). While Asna defines public relations as planned efforts, Balta Peltekoglu recognizes public relations as a strategic communication management. According to Balta Peltekoglu, “Public relations is a strategic communication management whose prioritization may sometimes vary from

consumer to distributor and employees and it is grounded on organization's interests and is performed by organizations' publics (2007: 7). On the other hand, there is no definition presented by Public Relations Association of Turkey.

As it can be seen above, public relations has been defined in many different ways. For this reason, Harlow reviewed 472 public relations definitions between the years of 1970 and 1976 and he put a very comprehensive study by using common aspects of all definitions in a new definition. According to Harlow, the public relations is defined as follows:

*“Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems and issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools” (Harlow, 1976: 36).*

As the Harlow's definition suggests, the communication is between organization and its public and the communication is utilized to form public opinion, to tackle with problems and to provide desired behavioral change. In result, all mentioned definitions demonstrate that public relations are definitely the management function. By means of required tasks and qualifications of the profession, communication process is carried out strategically and in a planned way.

### **The Components of Public Relations**

Being responsible for the strategic communication between an organization and its publics, public relations has various duties in the context of relative publics. According to PR News, the domains of public relations are; corporate responsibility, crisis management, digital public relations, internal communication, measurement, media relations, media training, non-profit public relations, research, social media, web tools and writing (PR News, 2016). As seen in the table below, public relations is involved in thirteen activities (Fawkes, 2004: 7).

<b>Public Relations Activity</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Internal Communication	Communicating with employees	In-house newsletter, suggestion boxes.
Corporate Public relations	Communicating on behalf of whole organization, not goods or services	Annual reports, conferences, ethical statements, visual identity, images.
Media Relations	Communicating with journalists, specialists, editors from local, national, international and trade media, including newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and web-based communication.	Press releases, photocalls, video news releases, off the record briefings, press events
Business to Business	Communicating with other organisations, suppliers, retailers	Exhibitions, Trade Events, News Letters.
Public Affairs	Communicating with opinion formers, local /national politicians, monitoring political environment	Presentations, Briefings, Private Meetings, Public Speeches.
Community Relations / CSR	Communicating with local community, elected representatives, headteachers,	Exhibitions, Presentations, Letters, Meetings, Sports Activities and other sponsorships.
Investor Relations	Communicating with financial organizations / individuals	Newsletters, briefings, events.
Strategic Communication	Identification and analysis of situation, problem and solutions to further organizational goals.	Researching, planning and executing a campaign to improve ethical reputation of organization.

Issues Management	Monitoring political, social, economic and technological environment	Considering effect of US economy and presidential campaign on UK organization.
Crisis Management	Communicating clear messages in fast changing situation or emergency	Dealing with media after major rail crash on behalf of police, hospital or local authority
Copywriting	Writing for different audiences to high standards of literacy	Press releases, newsletters, web pages, annual reports.
Publications Management	Overseeing print / media processes, often using new technology	Leaflets, internal magazines, websites.
Events Management, Exhibitions	Organisation of complex events, exhibitions.	Annual conference, press launch, trade shows.

**Table 1: Public Relations Activities**

According to Johnston, Zawawi and Brand, the roles and key activities of public relations are: communication, publicity, promotions, press agency, integrated marketing, issues management, crisis management, press secretary / public information officer, public affairs / lobbyist, financial relations, community relations, internal relations, minority relations, media relations, public diplomacy, event management, sponsorship, cause / relationship marketing and fundraising (2009: 8-9).

As the first ranked company on the world top 250 public relations company list, Edelman's practices focuses on business and social purpose, consumer marketing, corporate communication, crisis and risk communication, digital communication and public affairs (2016). Being another global public relations company, Burson-Marsteller's capabilities are consumer and brand marketing, corporate and financial communications, digital public relations, future trend analysis, healthcare communications and market access, issues and crisis management, media relations, public affairs, sports marketing and technology

communications (2016). On the other hand, as the Turkey's first public relations company, A&B Tanitim's working areas are; corporate communications, integrated marketing communications, crisis management, media relations, leadership positioning, internal communications and event management (2016). Another important public relations company, namely, Unite Communication, provides such disciplines and areas of expertise as media relations, crisis management, event management, advertising, digital communications, sustainability communications, corporate responsibility communications, financial communications, health communications and internal communications (2016).

In view of the opinions of academicians and practitioners on public relations, we see that there are many different activity areas of public relations. Basing on the working areas stated above, the most frequent activity areas are media relations, crisis communication and event management. There is no doubt that a public relations practitioner should be equipped with some qualifications to perform those tasks.

### **Personal Qualifications of Public Relations Practitioners**

Wilcox and Cameron highlight that public relations practitioners should be qualified for the five basic areas which are writing skills, research, planning expertise, problem-solving and business- economic competence (2006, 27). According to Cutlip, Center and Broom, the following ten categories summarize public relations work assignments: writing and editing, media relations and placement, research, management and administration, counseling, special events, speaking, production, training and contact (1994:34). According to Johnston, Zawawi and Brand, there are certain key words that are required for a public relations practitioner.

- *Possessing vocational skills: research, writing, listening, presentation and media,*
- *Possessing relationship skills: interpersonal skills, political nous, networking ability, listening,*
- *Possessing professional skills: the ability to meet deadlines and plan ahead,*
- *Having a strong ethical perspective,*
- *Understanding technology and how it can be used as a tool,*
- *Possessing industry knowledge; undergoing professional experience, understanding how theory informs practice, keeping abreast of current affairs, developing the ability for lifelong learning,*

- *Being thinkers: “analytical, critical, strategic, evaluative, creative and lateral”* (2009:14-15).

Naturally, those having the required duties above should perform public relations profession. A person being ineligible for writing skills could fail to manage media relations properly or a person lacking of deep cultural knowledge could fail to satisfy requirements of event management. If required qualifications for the profession are ignored, then the image of the profession will be perceived differently and it will often be confused with other jobs. Qualifications of public relations employees working in TV series and film companies play an important role in shaping the profession and this could give rise to some prejudices about the profession. Wilcox and Cameron touch upon some stereotypes about public relations: “The Sex and The City character Samantha Jones who owns PR agency, talks about her career as a way to meet men” (2006: 13).

As a result, in view of the findings above, a study on how public relations is defined in public relation’s job advertisement discourses and required skills for those to be recruited will reveal whether public relations is perceived as it is supposed to be in fact.

### **Research: Analysis of Turkish Public Relations Job Advertisements Discourses**

As can be seen above, various components of public relations from management, strategic communication to maintaining mutually beneficial relationship were touched upon by academicians in their public relations definitions. In this context, initial starting point of the research is to measure differences between public relations academicians’ definitions in theory and published public relations job advertisements in practice. The research will seek answers to the following questions: 1) How public relations job advertisements describe the profession? 2) How the image of public relations profession is reflected in job advertisements? Within the given problematic, the following hypotheses will be tested.

### **Hypothesis**

H1: “Employers in Turkey do not describe public relations profession as it is supposed to be.”

H2: “The requirements of job duties are not specified in public relations job advertisements.”

H3: “Jobs incorporating duties of public relations are evaluated in the context of corporate communication in job advertisements.”

### **Methodology and Scope of Research**



The present paper examines job advertisements titled “Public Relations” and “Corporate Communication” which published on May, 1- 15 2016 on web site “kariyer.net”, Turkey’s most visited human resources site. According to Alexa’s data recorded in 2016, the human resources websites ranking among the 500 most-visited websites in Turkey are as follows:

Web site	Ranking by the 500 most-visited websites in Turkey	Ranking by sector
kariyernet.com	69	1
yenibiris.com	278	2
secretcv.com	291	3
elemanonline.com	471	4

**Table 2: The most visited Career Web Sites**

The definitions of public relations discipline in job advertisements were analyzed to test the first hypothesis and a set of criteria were proposed basing on the literature review at the beginning of the research. Considering managerial function of public relations, the first criteria measures whether job advertisements involve duties such as working with senior management and close relationship with senior management. On the other hand, in terms of strategic communication dimension of public relations , the second criteria measures whether job advertisements include researching and planning qualifications and whether there is a discourse concerning having analytical thinking skills.

With the purpose of testing the second hypothesis, a set of criteria were determined in two different fields. In this respect, one of the first criteria measures whether public relations duties are specified in job advertisements. In the meantime, the job duties were compiled in line with duties defined by Fawkes. Besides, other duties observed through analysis of advertisements were also added to the criteria.

Another field that criteria were performed is required personal qualifications and skills in public relations profession. In this sense, Cutlip Center Broom’s model was utilized and similarly, other duties observed through analysis of advertisements were also included to the criteria.

The criteria employed for the assessment of the first two hypotheses were also applied for analysis of the third hypothesis relating to corporate communication job advertisements and differences between public relations and corporate communication job advertisements was measured.

### Research Findings

The number of public relations job advertisements that were posted between the dates of 01.05.2016 and 15.05.2016 on web site “kariyer.net” and their distribution by sectors are presented below.

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Number of Advertisement</b>
Automotive	2
Education	22
Construction/Real Estate	6
Tourism	6
Retail	6
Informatics	1
Food	4
Health	5
Service	3
Transportation	1
Industry	2
Other	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>

**Table 3: Distribution of Public Relations Job Advertisements by Sectors**

The number of corporate communication job advertisements that were posted between the dates of 01.05.2016 and 15.05.2016 on web site “kariyer.net” and their distribution by sectors are presented below.

Sector	Number of Advertisement
Energy	1
Sport	1
Service	2
Construction/ Real Estate	1
Textile	1
Industry	2
Informatics	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>

**Table 4: Distribution of Corporate Communication Job Advertisements by Sectors**

**H1: “Employers in Turkey do not describe public relations profession as it is supposed to be.”**

By viewing managerial function of public relations, it was examined whether job advertisements entail duties such as working with senior management and close relationship with senior management. Positioning of public relations as a strategic communication management was revealed in literature reviews. Therefore, the requirement of researching, planning and evaluating skills and analytical thinking skills for the practice of public relations were analyzed in job advertisements.

Criteria	Stated in Advertisement	Not stated in Advertisement
<b>Working with senior management</b>	2	57
<b>Researching, Planning, Evaluating and Analytical Thinking</b>	12	47

**Table 5: The Place of Public Relations Job Descriptions in Public Relations Job Advertisements**

The research findings demonstrated that managerial role of public relations is not much mentioned in public relations job advertisements. Only 2 out of 59 advertisements point out managerial role of public relations. Besides, 12 out of 59 job advertisements deals with

researching, planning and evaluating processes of public relations. For this reason, key findings presented above indicated that the hypothesis arguing “Employers in Turkey do not describe public relations profession as it is supposed to be.” were verified.

**H2: “The requirements of job duties are not specified in public relations job advertisements.”**

To assess the second hypothesis, job advertisements in the field of public relations were analyzed by two different steps. In the first step, an analysis was conducted to find out which duties were specified in public relations job advertisements. Likewise, existence of other irrelevant duties associated with public relations such as selling and customer relations were examined.

<b>Duties</b>	<b>Number of Advertisement</b>
Customer Relations	29
Selling	14
Media Relations	6
Event Management	7
Publicity	7
Advertisement/Digital Advertisement	3
Crisis Management	2
Reputation Management	2
Social Media Management	4
Corporate Management	2
Brand Management	2
Social Responsibility	1
Corporate Identity	2

**Table 6: Duties Specified in Public Relations Job Advertisements**

The numbers indicated in the table above revealed that the majority of public relations job advertisements offer duties covering customer relations and selling. As persuasive ability referred in job advertisements is mostly associated with selling product and service, it was concluded that employers are seeking for salesman in reality. Furthermore, because of the fact that practitioners are required to fulfill such tasks as reception and answering telephones in job advertisements, the conclusion was drawn that employers are looking for customer relations representative in fact.

Another field that criteria were measured is personal qualifications and skills required in public relations profession. In this sense, Cutlip Center Broom's model was utilized and new criteria were set by means of additions. These criteria could be summarized as follows: skills for writing techniques, media relations, event management, speaking skill in foreign language, computer skills, social media management and communication skill. In addition to it, appearance, persuasive ability, diction and skills for issue management and crisis management were included to the criteria.

<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Number of Advertisement</b>
Writing skills	8
Media relations	5
Event Management	4
Language	18
MS Office	28
Social Media Management	4
Communication Skills	33
Appearance	31
Persuasive Ability	20
Diction	20
Issue Management	5
Crisis Management	2

**Table 7: Expected Qualifications of Public Relations Practitioners**

As can be seen in the table above, the two key qualifications expected from public relation practitioners are communication skills and appearance. They are followed by computer skills, persuasive ability and diction skills. It was revealed that less number of advertisements covers essential duties of public relations such as media relations, writing skills, social media management and event management. In this respect, the analyzed 59 job advertisements were reexamined to see whether they were in accordance with public relation definitions in general. Within this framework, it was understood that only 12 job advertisements are compatible with public relations profession.

As it is seen in table 6 and table 7, job advertisements titled “Public Relations” are irrelevant to public relations profession. Similarly, it was discovered through the third evaluation that only 12 out of 59 advertisements are related to public relations profession. Therefore, the hypothesis arguing that “The requirements of job duties are not specified in public relations job advertisements.” was confirmed.

**H3: “Jobs incorporating duties of public relations are evaluated in the context of corporate communication in job advertisements.”**

Corporate communication job advertisements were evaluated in term of the criteria comprising working with senior management and researching, planning, evaluating and analytical thinking as a strategic communication function of public relations and following results were found:

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Stated in Advertisement</b>	<b>Not stated in Advertisement</b>
<b>Working with senior management</b>	2	9
<b>Researching, Planning, Evaluating and Analytical Thinking</b>	8	3

**Table 8: The Place of Public Relations Job Descriptions in Corporate Communication Job Advertisements**

As seen in the table above, as a criteria of public relations, working with senior management were ignored in corporate communication job advertisements. However, researching,

planning, evaluating and analytical thinking qualifications that are employed in public relations process are appeared in many corporate communication job advertisements. On the other hand, following results were recorded after analyzing corporate communication job advertisements by duties.

<b>Duties</b>	<b>The Number of Advertisements</b>
Customer Relations	6
Selling	1
Media Relations	7
Event Management	5
Publicity	5
Advertisement / Digital Advertisement	5
Crisis Communication	0
Reputation Management	1
Social Media Management	10
Corporate Communication	2
Brand Management	3
Social Responsibility	3
Corporate Identity	2
Sponsorship	2
Internal Communication	2

**Table 9: Expected Public Relations Duties in Corporate Communication Job Advertisements**

As seen in the table above, social media management, as a duty of public relations, is the most required qualification in corporate communication job advertisements. This is yet followed by media relations as sine qua non for public relations discipline. Then, customer relations, publicity, event management and advertising/digital advertising take place. The most critical

data obtained in the table above is that only one corporate communication job advertisement seeks practitioners qualified for selling. Lastly, an assessment of required qualification from practitioners was performed.

<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Number of Advertisement</b>
Writing skills	6
Media relations	7
Event Management	5
Language	8
MS Office / Google Ad / Adobe	10
Social Media Management	10
Communication Skills	8
Appearance	1
Persuasive Ability	0
Diction	0
Issue Management	0
Crisis Management	0

**Table 10: Expected Qualifications of Corporate Communication Practitioners**

As the table 10 indicates, the most key qualifications in corporate communication job advertisements are knowledge of foreign language and required computer skill. Although social media management, media relations and writing skills are duties of public relations practitioners, they are seen in many corporate communication job advertisements as well. The most significant result acquired from the table 10 is that there is almost no expectation in corporate communication job advertisements with respect to appearance, diction and persuasive abilities associated directly with selling. In conclusion, 11 corporate communication job advertisements were evaluated in the final overall analysis and it was



revealed that the all of the job advertisements are compatible with requirements of public relations discipline.

Consequently, the third hypothesis concerning corporate communication job advertisements was tested through the same procedure applied to public relations job advertisement. As it is seen in the table 8, the key findings suggest that although corporate communication job advertisement does not involve managerial function of public relations, the majority of advertisements are directly related to strategic communication aspect of public relations. As it is seen in table 9, corporate communication job advertisements are mostly concerned with social media management and media relations responsibilities of public relations. Yet, it is not interested in selling. The table 10 shows that contrary to public relations job advertisements, corporate communication job advertisements do not include qualifications regarding persuasive ability, appearance and diction and many duties specified in public relations are stated in corporate communication job advertisements. In result, the research findings indicate that the hypothesis suggesting “Jobs incorporating duties of public relations are evaluated in the context of corporate communication in job advertisements” was verified.

### **Research Result**

According to findings in the table 5, the first hypothesis of the research arguing “Employers in Turkey do not describe public relations profession as it is supposed to be.” were verified.

Another hypothesis suggesting “ The requirements of job duties are not specified in public relations job advertisements.” was also confirmed in line with the research findings gathered.

As it is seen in table 6 and table 7, job advertisements titled “Public Relations” are irrelevant to public relations profession. Similarly, it was discovered through the third evaluation that only 12 out of 59 advertisements are related to public relations profession. Therefore, the hypothesis arguing that “The requirements of job duties are not specified in public relations job advertisements.” was confirmed. Public relations job advertisements are mostly concerned with selling, reception and customer relations.

The criteria employed for the assessment of the first two hypotheses were also applied for analysis of the third hypothesis relating to corporate communication job advertisements and

differences between public relations and corporate communication job advertisements were measured. The research findings demonstrates that public relations duties and expectations are much more prevalent in corporate communication job advertisements compared to public relations job advertisements and the hypothesis arguing “Jobs incorporating duties of public relations are evaluated in the context of corporate communication in job advertisements” was verified.

In the current research, 59 public relations job advertisements and 11 corporate communication job advertisements were analyzed in total. It was found that the fact that the number of public relations job advertisements is higher than corporate communication job advertisements result from being unawareness about public relations profession.

### **Conclusion**

As a strategic communication between organizations and their social stakeholders and publics influencing business processes, public relations is a management philosophy as well. The place of public relations in the world and Turkey today is related to magnitude of its power. Public relations could turn negative ideas and opinions into positive views and exhibit a desired behavior change. Public relations may sometimes provide a social benefit, make profit or gain a political propaganda success.

In the study, a wide range of public relations definitions from academia to professional associations and private sector in World and Turkey have been analyzed. The problematic of the study is whether there is a connection between academician’s descriptive discourses and employer’s discourses. Public relations job advertisements on Turkey’s most visited human resources website have been examined for 15 days and it has been understood that common definition of public relations do not coincide with job advertisements posted related to public relations profession. Public relations are still mistaken for such jobs as customer relations, reception, product/ service selling and call center specialist. According to another result obtained from the study, public relations job advertisements do not include management function of public relations.

On the other hand, another finding suggests that duties in the context of public relations are stated in corporate communication job advertisements. Therefore, the less public relations duties are seen in public relation job advertisements, the more they become prominent in

corporate communication job advertisements. This explicitly reveals that public relations is replaced by corporate communication in practice. Consequently, academia practitioners and more importantly, professional associations should take more responsibility to prevent this confusion and to fix the image of public relations.

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