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## A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TURKISH DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

### Abstract

There are almost 60 faculties of communications in Turkey. These faculties are able to hold doctoral programs when they employ enough lecturers. When looked at the database of theses in the Higher Education Institution, it can be clearly seen that there are few theses in the field of public relations. However, there is no study about what kind of contributions these theses, especially the doctoral ones which require a model or proposal, make. Therefore, in this study, 110 doctoral theses done on public relations between the years 2010-2015 are analyzed in terms of research model, style of data acquisition, methods of data analysis, subject headings, wording, history of the thesis advisors and gender. It is determined at the end of this analysis that these theses are far from coming up with a theory, are pursuers of the American School and they use similar research methods in the determination of situations that already exist. The universities and the Higher Education Institution of the country must develop some new policies in order for the doctoral theses to contribute to science.

**Keywords:** Public Relations, Doctoral Dissertation, Research Methods, Turkey.

## TÜRKİYE’DE HALKLA İLİŞKİLER ALANINDA YAPILMIŞ DOKTORA TEZLERİNİN İÇERİK ANALİZİ

### Öz

Türkiye’de sayıları 60’lara varan iletişim fakültesi bulunmaktadır. Bu fakülteler asgari yeterli öğretim üyesi istihdam ettiklerinde doktora programları açmaktadır. Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu Tez veri tabanına bakıldığında halkla ilişkiler alanında çok sayıda tez üretildiği görülmektedir. Ancak üretilen bu tezlerin özellikle de bir model veya önerisi olması gereken doktora tezlerinin bu alana nasıl bir katkısı olduğu incelenmemiş bir konudur. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmada 2010-2015 yılları arasında halkla ilişkiler alanında yazılan 110 doktora tezi; araştırma modeli, veri toplama biçimleri, veri analiz yöntemleri, konu başlıkları, kullanılan dil, tez yöneticilerin akademik geçmişi ve cinsiyet bağlamında incelenmiştir. Yapılan bu inceleme sonucunda yapılan tez çalışmalarının yeni teoriler üretmekten uzak, Amerikan ekolünün devamı niteliğinde, varolan durumu saptamaya yönelik benzer araştırma modellerinin kullanıldığı tezler olduğu saptanmıştır. Doktora tezlerinin bilime katkı sağlayacak düzeyde hazırlanması için üniversitelerin ve dolayısıyla ülkenin yüksek öğretim kurumunun yeni politikalar geliştirmesi gerekmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Halkla İlişkiler, Doktora Tezi, Araştırma Metodolojisi, Türkiye.

## 1. Conceptual Framework

Although studies of public relations date back a long time throughout history, first systematic studies took place in the USA. While studies of public relations showed up in business enterprises in the USA, they showed up in public institutions in Turkey. It became possible for the private sector in Turkey to be involved in public relations with the entrance of foreign capital into Turkey in 1970s. This is the most obvious evidence that the public relations in Turkey improved with the effects of foreign countries (Okay and Okay, 2012, 24-30). In Turkey, the education of public relations started within the faculties of political sciences, the college of journalism in 1960s. In 1992, the first faculty of communications was established and the departments of public relations were transferred to these faculties (Peltekoğlu, 2012, 131-132). With the changes made regarding the policies of education in Turkey, the number of private and state universities increased highly. Now, there are public relations departments in almost 60 universities. This numerical increase put the process of education and the educational outputs in a debatable position.

Doctoral theses are seen as important tools for a discipline to improve academically. According to Hall, the academical significance of a discipline depends on the postgraduate studies (Hall, 1991, 520-523). As in other disciplines, a lot of research has been done on postgraduate studies in the field of public relations. In the research done by Raupp and Van Ruler, the doctoral theses done in Germany and in Holland were compared from different angles. The characteristic features, subject headings, research design, manner of data analysis and number of theses in Germany (1995-2000) and Holland (1990-2000) were analyzed by comparison. At the end of this analysis, it was seen that the theses in Holland and Germany were not so different from each other. Besides, it was also seen that these theses are insufficient in developing a new theory and the increase in the number of these theses contributes to academical researches (Raupp and Van Ruler, 2006, 18-26). The doctoral theses written in Spain during the reign of Xiafra and Castillo Franco were analyzed (Xiafra and Castillo, 2005, 302-308). In the research in Turkey, postgraduate theses were analyzed in terms of subject but there were no findings about the methodology of these theses (Okay and Okay, 2008, 6-8). These researches show that in order to improve the public relations discipline in an international degree, the postgraduate studies done in this field have to be analyzed not just within the conceptual framework but also in terms of methodology. In the wake of literature research it is seen that although there is a lot of research and analysis about doctoral theses in the fields of social sciences such as education and business, there are few researches about doctoral theses done in the field of public relations.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. The Purpose of This Research

The purpose of this research is to bring new perspectives to future theses by analyzing the doctoral theses written between 2010-2015 and to encourage researchers to develop new research methods.

### 2.2. Data Acquisition and Analysis

This research has been done by screening the electronic thesis archive of the Higher Education Institution. On the starting date of this research, 01.08.2015, it was seen that there are 124 theses about public relations. It was possible to access 110 theses and the data about these theses were digitised and analyzed by using descriptive statistics. These theses were analyzed in terms of methods of data acquisition and analysis, wording, academic titles of thesis advisors and gender of writers and whether the thesis suggests a theory or not.

### 3. Findings and Remarks

**Table 1. The distributions of doctoral theses in the field of public relations by universities**

University	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Akdeniz University		1					1
Anadolu University		1		1			2
Ankara University	4	1	2	2			9
Atatürk University						1	1
Ege University	7	3	4	3	1	1	19
Erciyes University				2			2
Gazi University	1	3	1	2	3		10
İnönü University		1					1
İstanbul University	3	3	3	1	1		11
Marmara University	7	3	6	5	3	2	26
Selçuk University	8	6	4	4	3	1	26
Yeditepe University		1			1		2

In Table 1, the numerical distributions of the doctoral theses in the field of public relations by universities are seen. There are 60 communication faculties but 12 universities that produce doctoral theses. Among these 12 universities, Marmara University and Selçuk University are the most productive ones. In Turkey, the departments have to employ enough lecturers to be able to hold the doctoral programs. When it is taken into account that as the faculties fulfill the requirements they will be allowed to hold doctoral programs, it can be possible to produce the number of theses normally done in 10 years, in just one year. Therefore, the departments which will hold doctoral programs have to have enough knowledge and experience.

**Table 2. The distributions of theses by the gender of the writers**

	f	%
Female	65	59
Male	45	41
Total	110	100

As it can be seen in table 2, the majority of the writers are female.

**Table 3. The distributions of theses by the gender of the managers**

	f	%
Female	66	60
Male	44	40
Total	110	100

As it can be seen in table 3, the majority of the managers are female.

**Table 4. The degree of the managers that administered the theses**

	f	%
Professor	72	65,45
Associate Professor	33	30,00
Assistant Professor	5	4,55
Total	110	100

As it can be seen in table 4, the majority of the managers that administered the theses are professors. On the other hand, associate professors can administer theses as well.

**Table 5. The distributions of theses by the methods of the research**

	f	%
Qualitative	35	38,5
Quantitative	61	55,4
Qualitative+Quantitative	14	12,1
Total	110	100

As it can be seen in table 5, in the theses done between 2010-2015, the quantitative methods have been preferred. The quantitative methods used in theses split in two parts. One is the adaptation of scales developed by the American School and the other one is the scales developed by the researcher.

**Table 6. The distributions of theses by the research methods**

	f	%
Screening	107	99,98
Experimental	3	0,02
Total	110	100

According to the analysis in table 6, in the theses done between 2010-2015, the screening method has been preferred. Although some theses claim that they use the experimental method, they failed to form an experimental research area. Experimental theses are key to revealing new methods and developing new theories. That the screening method has been preferred mostly causes to restrict the subject and to not get rid of foreign impacts.

**Table 7. The manner of the data acquisition of the research**

	f	%
Survey	56	50,90
Interview	10	9,09
Content Analysis	20	18,18
Survey-Interview	6	5,45
Survey-Semiotic	2	1,81
Survey-Content Analysis	5	4,54
Content Analysis-Semiotic	3	2,72
Interview-Content Analysis	5	4,54
Survey-Interview-Content Analysis	2	2,72
Other	5	4,54
Total	110	100

According to table 7, the most used manner is survey. On the other hand, in 24 researches, many manners are blended to acquire data.

**Table 8. The manners of the data analysis**

	f	%
Descriptive	24	21,81
Descriptive-Inferential	61	55,45
None Statistical	25	22,72
Total	110	100

According to table 8, both descriptive (percentage distribution, centring, etc.) and none statistical (correlation, regression, anova, chi-square test) have been preferred.

**Table 9. The situation of the theses, whether they offer a method suggestion or not**

	f	%
Method Suggestion Existed	7	63,63
Method Suggestion Not Existed	103	36,37
Total	110	100

According to table 9, there are few theses offering a method or forming a new theory.

**Table 10. The distribution of the theses by subjects**

	f	%
Pedagogy/education in public relations	0	
Ethics and social responsibility	6	0,54
The history of public relations	2	0,18
The profession of public relations	1	0,09
International PR practice	6	0,54
Management in PR/decision-making/problem-solving	7	0,63
Implementing programs and campaigns	27	24,54
Organizational communication	9	0,81
Social issues and issues management in PR	7	0,63
New communication Technologies	13	11,81
Legal issues	1	0,09
Crisis response/communication		
Image/reputation/impression management	20	18,18
Theory/symmetrical communication/Grunig's models	7	0,63
Fundraising	1	0,09
Other	3	0,27
Total	110	100

According to table 10, the theses tend to value practise rather than forming a new theory. This is the most obvious reason why the theses done in Turkey are restricted by the American School.

### Conclusions and Suggestions

This research shows that the number of universities that produce doctoral thesis has increased in years, which indicates the importance of developing new policies in terms of content and research methods for future theses and sharing these policies with about 60 communication faculties.

In the wake of this research it is seen that researchers use the same research design. Especially, we can say that there is almost no research using the experimental research method. But considering data analysis methods, it was seen that many methods were blended. This indicates that the researchers are in search of finding new ways to produce more profound theses.

When we analyze the theses in terms of whether they suggest a method or not, we realize that few theses suggest a method. This shows us that theses are far from developing methods and maintain the American School.

In these theses, it was seen that the researchers are in search of versatile ways in terms of data acquisition tools. The reason for that is the struggle to add a creative dimension to the theses which have become ordinary with the American School. The surveys used in the theses are Turkish adaptations of the scales developed abroad. These kinds of adapted researches hinder the theses where cultural elements come into prominence and may cause cultural elements to influence the surveys. Although these theses claim that they use experimental methods, they aren't actually conducted with an experimental method. Besides, in 6 theses, there is no research design. This situation shows us that the researchers working in the field of public relations have to develop themselves about research manners and methods.

There are no comparative ones among these theses. To know about other countries may help develop new subjects and research methods.

This research shows us that researchers have to form a platform where they can share their researches and expectations about the future by developing vocational and academical dialogues.

With this research, the methodological problems of the theses in Turkey are revealed for the first time. These problems cannot be solved with the struggle of the researchers alone but also need educational policies developed by the Higher Education Institute.

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