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PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (MUNICIPALITIES)

Abstract

Today, public relations has become a unit that undertakes important activities in institutions and organizations. Public relations can be categorised according to its field of activity as internal and external public relations for recognition and promotion. In this context, public relations has a unit function for the organisation, reaching the target audience and the public in general. Public relations activities in public institutions, especially in elected structures, have increased in importance in order to create a positive perspective in society. In other words, organisations aim to create corporate identity and corporate image by knowing the target audience and providing information about the organisation to the public.

Local governments, one of these structures, can be briefly defined as local institutions that aim to serve the local people and are organised for this purpose. When we examine the organisational structure of municipalities as a local government model, we see that the public relations unit has been established as a unit that will organise and manage relations with the public. Under the headings of recognition and promotion, this study examines the public relations initiatives put forth by the local government within the framework of its fundamental principles.

Key words: public relations, local governments, municipality

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Introduction

In recent years, public relations has been a field that has been implemented and developed in both private and public organisations to regulate relations with the public and create a good image in the public. Especially in public institutions, both recognition-oriented and promotional activities attract attention. These studies not only ensure mutual information flow but also play a role in creating the corporate image.

First of all, it should be noted that municipalities with local government practices need a public relations unit to successfully perform their own functions. Because local government must determine local policy and carry out projects in accordance with this policy in order to implement the duties it has undertaken, In the process of determining these public relations policies, recognition activities are especially important.

When public relations activities are examined, we encounter two types of practices. These are institutions that purchase this service from outside, and the other is an institution that chooses to create

a public relations unit within the institution. In the local government structures we examined, we generally see that a public relations unit is established within the institution. This structure enables successful internal and external public relations practices. In our study, it will be revealed that recognition and promotion activities should be carried out in public relations to determine local policies in line with the wishes and demands of the local people.

Literature Review

Pınar Yayınoglu, in her study titled "Public relations function and new approaches in local government organizations" generally speaking, public relations in local governments), argued that the aim is to objectively evaluate how the decisions taken or services provided in local government affect the local people, to determine the issues, and to put into action a communication programme that focuses on explaining who, what, why, where, and when (Yayınoglu, P. 2013).

In his study, M. Akif Özer argues that local governments in particular and public institutions in

general should give more importance than ever to the public as the person being governed (Özer, M. A. 2013).

In Ahmet Tarhan's research, it is questioned how much the services of the municipalities on the Internet, which provide opportunities such as interactive, direct communication, and widespread communication with the target groups, are used to represent the services and to learn the wishes and expectations of the citizens (Tarhan, A. 2007).

Ahmet Tarhan, Sevgi Kirca, and Engincan Doğmuş came to the conclusion in their joint study that social media platforms, which have gained an important place for people with the development of communication technologies, mediate the development of an interactive communication structure today. The public also actively participates in social media platforms, where a large part of the target audience is located, in order to ensure sharing (Tarhan, A., Kirca, S., & Doğmuş, E. 2022).

Based on Yaman Kübra's study, municipalities are local governments that provide convenience in the field of service. The target audience of municipalities is the public. Public relations, which is the connection between municipalities and the public, informs the public about services and steps in to get the public's influence and support. (Yaman, K. 2011).

Aslı Yağmurlu The paper aims to reveal the relationship between political participation and public relations. For this purpose, an analysis was made on the websites of sixteen central district municipalities in Ankara. By examining the websites, public relations activities supporting political participation were revealed and classified (Yağmurlu, A. 2011).

The Need for Public Relations in Local Governments

Considering that the aim of local government is generally to solve local problems and provide services, a method to implement planned communication is needed in this process. The need for public relations arises to ensure this planned communication. Because, first of all, there is a need to collect information to find solutions to the problems and to provide information for the success of the services.

In municipalities, the administration and council come to power through elections. This process necessitates the determination of a policy in line

with the wishes of the local people and the carrying out of studies within this framework. Because it is necessary to create a good image in the eyes of society and to have a chance to re-govern. From another perspective, the aim of local governments is to operate for the public good, which can be achieved through the establishment of proper public relations. In order for public relations to be for the public benefit, it must have an organisation that responds to modern and current demands (Tortop and Özer, 2013, p. 6).

To summarise all this, the success of local government and the long-term survival of the current administration depend on public relations. Because the work of local government and the services they provide take place every day in front of the eyes of society, If these activities are carried out by communicating with the public continuously and correctly, then the local government will achieve the success it desires against the local population and will have the chance to continue its administration for a long time.

Although public relations is of great importance in local government, it is sometimes not seen as a necessary unit. For this reason, some management institutions have neither a public relations unit nor public relations personnel. When such a situation occurs, communication between society and the local government breaks down, and the people's trust in the local government decreases (Tarhan and Bakan, 2013, p. 27).

Halkla ilişkiler faaliyetlerinin sürekli ve sistemli bir şekilde yapılması için örgütsel structure is needed. The form of organisation can be of two types: internal or external consultancy. When we say intra-organisational, we mean the public relations unit established within the organisation's own organisational structure. External consulting is done by making an agreement with an expert firm that provides public relations consulting from outside the business. However, in local governments, the public relations unit should work in coordination with all units in the organization. For this reason, internal restructuring is usually done within the organization. Because public relations is about narrowing the gap between how an organisation sees itself and how others outside the organisation perceive it. In other words, the purpose of public relations in local government is to make the public

think positively about the institution and the services it provides. For this, the public relations unit should work together with all units operating in the local government organization. To summarise, the public relations unit has a very important position in local governments. Therefore, due to the activities it carries out, the public relations unit is positioned closest to the top management (Yayınoğlu, 2005, p. 122; Sabuncuoğlu, 1998, p. 76–77).

Briefly stated, public relations in local governments includes preparing the public relations programmes of the local government organisation together with their budgets, executing the public relations programme in accordance with the planning and budget, conducting the necessary research for public relations, sharing all the information obtained by the public relations unit within the organisation, preparing the annual activity report, and communicating with the upper management. It is seen that he also undertakes duties and responsibilities such as consulting (Yayınoğlu, 2005, pp. 122-123).

Public Relations Practices in Local Governments

When public relations units in local governments are examined both in terms of subject and activities, it is seen that the organisation is structured by taking into account its priorities, and activity plans are created in accordance with the needs. Kazancı (2004) and Tortop (1998) categorised public relations practices as "recognition" and "promotion" activities. "Recognition" activities include the institution getting to know the public and determining appropriate policies. "Promotion" is to inform the public about the work that will be done in accordance with the determined policy and to create a positive attitude towards the institution.

• Public Relations Practices for Recognition in Local Governments

Yerel yönetimlerde doğru bir halkla ilişkiler programının belirlenmesi için öncelikli olarak It is necessary to get the necessary information about the local society and get to know it (Göksel, 2013, p. 74). Because a public relations unit that does not have extensive knowledge about the local people cannot produce successful public relations work, In other words, the desired result cannot be

achieved unless the characteristics, wishes, opinions, and thoughts of the local people are known. In other words, a programme created in this way does not coincide with the wishes and goals of society (Asna, 1993, p. 78).

The practices and research carried out by the public relations unit for recognition can be explained under the headings of public opinion surveys, media monitoring, meeting offices with local elements, information obtained from personnel, and other practices and methods (Tarhan and Bakan, 2013, P. 65; Kazancı, 2004, P. 135; Tengilimoğlu and Öztürk, 2004, P. 139; Özüpek, 2013, P. 45).

Public Opinion Research

Through public opinion research, local governments learn the answers to questions such as what motivates the public and what the factors are that affect their opinions. In particular, he or she obtains information about how and through which communication tools they can be reached. The most frequently and effectively used tool to obtain information in these studies is the survey. Because the information obtained is a strategic tool in determining service policies,

One of the most effective tools used to obtain information in public opinion research is surveys. Although surveys are always viewed as a snapshot, public relations is a strategic tool in developing a roadmap for service policies (Rick, 2019).

In other words, the information obtained through surveys helps to understand the target audience in depth and which measurements will be used during the projects to be created.

Media Monitoring

Media monitoring by local governments will help them determine local population expectations, identify social influencers, find new press opportunities, and identify problems with existing public relations service policies.

With technological developments, the media has become the most effective power centre in society (Aydınalp, 2013, p. 153). That's why public relations takes the media monitoring process seriously. While trying to get to know the public in depth with this method, it determines policies in the light of the information revealed. Media monitoring is a fundamental component of a comprehensive public relations strategy (Okay and Okay, 2002: 54–55).

In today's world of rapid technological developments, a successful public relations strategy depends on following a lot of media. Because almost the entire society shares information on these media elements. Local governments have to follow the media to know the opinions and thoughts of their target audience about the services they offer. However, the pros and cons of service policies implemented in this way can be evaluated, and necessary arrangements can be made.

Using media monitoring methods to get to know the public offers some advantages (Mindruta, 2013). Media monitoring can be used to prevent problems that may become crises, helping local governments obtain more information about the general feeling of the local population towards management organisations and services, their preferences and wishes, and accordingly develop correct management policies, key aspects (emotions, positions, issues), and planning strategies and tactics for future service policies.

Offices for Meeting with Local Elements

Local governments hold face-to-face meetings to both obtain and provide information. Open door policy or White Table can be given as examples.

In particular, White Table is an application that provides solutions by listening to the complaints and requests of the local people where the municipalities are located. One of the advantages of this application is that it can quickly resolve a situation or problem. In short, the aims of the White Table include relieving bureaucracy, preventing waste of time, eliminating intermediaries, ensuring public unity, ensuring internal control, increasing public control, and preventing bribery (Sezgin and Özbay, 2016, p. 203-204).

Information Obtained from Personnel

Institutional personnel can also be defined as individuals who represent the institution in society. Information obtained from individuals within both the institution and society has strategic importance. Because if the employees of the institution talk about how efficient the services provided will be and what problems will be encountered, important determinations can be made.

As part of the local elements, employees of the institution can work in coordination with the public relations unit and provide in-depth information about the problems or how the institution responds to society.

Other Applications and Methods

Examples of other methods to obtain information about local people include wish and complaint boxes and public listening meetings held at certain times (Acar, 1993, pp. 119–120).

Although request or complaint boxes have become a method that is not used much physically, developments in communication technologies have enabled applications to be made over the internet. As we mentioned above, the black table or open door application is more preferred in order to reach a solution in a shorter time.

Public Relations Practices for Promotion in Local Governments

Promotion is the basic field of work in public relations. Promotion activities in public relations aim to create a positive image of the institution and eliminate the lack of information about the institution in society. Promotion can be defined as informing the target audience about the work done and the decisions to be taken by the organization or business in order to eliminate the lack of information (Kazancı, 2004, p. 73).

Informing the society in advance about the work to be done by the institution not only creates a positive image in the society but also provides an advantage in terms of the deficiencies of the work seen.

Public relations practices for promotion in local governments can be listed as: organisation publications, press relations, annual reports, events (exhibitions, festivals), and applications of communication technologies for information and promotion (Tarhan and Bakan, 2013, p. 65; Özüpek, 2013, p. 51).

Establishment Publications

The own publications of institutions and organisations offer significant advantages in self-promotion as a process. Although organisation publications categorised as magazines, newspapers, news letters, and mega-papers do not differ greatly in terms of the purpose they serve on behalf of local government, they differ from each other in terms of format, cost, and ease of publication (Peltekoğlu, 2007, p. 260).

A news letter is a printed report, usually one or a few pages in normal paper size, prepared for the use of certain interested parties (Erdoğan, 2006, p. 324). Businesses and institutions typically use

these letters to inform relevant parties about new information on a particular topic and to invite them to any activity. It is an easy source of communication (Asna, 1993, pp. 118–119). Therefore, management organisations can easily connect with their employees and community members through print and digital news letters.

Applications such as news letters can be defined as printed reports of several pages. Local government newspapers can be published weekly, fortnightly, or monthly. Compared to newspapers, magazines can provide more detailed information over a longer period of time. Another difference is that journals are more expensive (Sabuncuoğlu, 1998, p. 140). Combining many features of newspapers and magazines, megapapers offer information and commentary together (Peltekoğlu, 2007, p. 265).

Press Relations

While local governments create a positive image by promoting the institution in the press with activities such as press releases, press conferences, and special interviews, the press will also meet the need for news with these activities (Aydede, 2002, p. 124).

In order to carry out successful relations with the press, the public relations unit and its officials must have extensive knowledge about their own institutions (Tortop and Özer, 2013, pp. 48–52). There are issues that need to be taken into consideration when organising relations with the press, one of which is the sharing of unnecessary information during events aimed at improving relations with members of the press. Another is the selection of the right press tool when doing media planning. Each media tool has its own target audience, and it may not cover your target audience.

Nowadays, if the public relations unit of local governments decides to cooperate with any media organisation in terms of promotion, it must first evaluate its activities in the digital environment. Because a positive view of local governments is better provided by a press organisation that has been able to create a positive image in society, (Okay and Okay, 2014, p. 113–116; Koçyiğit, 2017, p. 42–46).

There are some general rules to follow when dealing with the media. These can be listed as providing convenience to the media by being open to communication, choosing the right media and

media representatives to establish relations with, determining the place and time well, not making requests that cannot be broadcast, and avoiding boring news (Oktay, 2002, p. 102).

Annual Reports

The annual report of local governments is a study that provides broader information about the activities carried out and services provided during the year. These reports help determine new policies by comparing the differences between years. Another issue is that annual reports are important within the framework of public responsibility (Asna, 2012, p. 142).

Annual reports must be thorough and error-free because they have the function of informing the necessary parties and outlining the work or services that the management institution will offer throughout the year. Because reporting errors can damage the image of the institution.

Events (Exhibitions, Festivals)

Events, exhibitions, and festivals are examples of tools frequently used by local governments to inform the public. Such events not only provide integration with society but also provide the opportunity for administrations to provide information to society about the activities they have done and will continue to do.

Such studies help the institution create a good perspective in the eyes of society. In other words, it has a positive impact on the image of organisations in society (Tengilimoğlu and Öztürk, 2004, p. 156).

Exhibitions are one of the tools that help local governments promote themselves or their services. The main goal of these exhibitions is to place the messages in the public's memory and strengthen the image. (Budak and Budak, 2014, p. 290).

The other biggest advantage of the events is that they provide the opportunity for face-to-face communication by reducing the physical distance between the local government and society. In this context, by inviting important people to such events, the number of participants can be increased, and the promotional activity can also have an impact on the local community and the guests (Asna, 1993, p. 131).

Applications of Communication Technologies for Information and Promotion

New communication technologies provide great opportunities as promotional tools. People

today use social media especially as a tool for both receiving and providing information.

Mobile SMS applications continue to be used today because they are cheap. In this context, local governments' preference for SMS as a means of conveying information to society provides some advantages (Mahmud and Gope, 2009, p. 153–154; Kalender and Tarhan, 2009, p. 25; Timo, 2015, p. 5–6). :

- An SMS written for informational purposes can be sent to all people; there is no need to write a message to everyone individually.
- It has a low cost.
- With the ability to share information with the local population in a short time, it gives the management time to do other work.
- The local population does not need to be anywhere or buy anything (newspapers, magazines, etc.) to obtain information about local governments; all they need to do is have a mobile device.
- It improves political image and transparency, increases e-democracy, and increases citizen participation.

Today, many institutions have created their own websites to benefit from the opportunities of this communication network. Websites have a two-way communication structure due to their technological features. The web also offers the opportunity to get information about the services provided and to receive some services through the site. In addition, having a beautiful design on the websites will create a positive opinion about the institution in the minds of the people who visit it (Özüpek, 2013, p. 52).

Local governments will be able to provide the following advantages by having a website (Özüpek, 2013, p. 52–53; Onat, 2014, p. 138–139; Koçyiğit, 2017, p. 27–31): These will enable the local community and relevant individuals to be able to obtain information about the management institution 24/7, to announce the achievements of the local government to the society, to convey information about new services to be offered to the society, to strengthen the relationship between the institution and the citizens, to provide the local people with the opportunity to easily follow the agenda in the field of activity of the local government, and to inform citizens about any problems that occur in the field of activity. It provides the

opportunity to easily learn the public's expectations, demands, and complaints through surveys to be conducted on the internet.

The use of social media can also be expressed as the most popular promotional tool among institutions and organizations. Social media, which combines the features of all other tools, provides mutual communication. Social media accounts, which we will consider open communication channels, can be used for different purposes. This also depends on the purpose for which its target audience uses that tool. While some social media tools are thought to be more suitable for making the official statement, others can be supported with short videos or live broadcasts for entertainment purposes. Corporate accounts opened on Facebook, Instagram, and X can be given as examples of these tools.

Conclusion

Local governments, as structures organised to provide services to the local people, work closely with the local people. These structures need an organisation that will plan or carry out the mutual relationship regarding the services they provide or the policies they will determine. In this study, first of all, by giving information about local methods, the basic principles of local governments (the principle of openness (transparency), the principle of efficient and effective service, the principle of impartiality, the principle of participation, and the principle of bidirectionality of interaction) are explained.

The study emphasised the need for public relations, especially in municipalities with a local government model, and focused on what activities the public relations unit should carry out as a unit and how to categorise these activities.

In this regard, first of all, public relations activities aimed at recognition in local governments, public surveys, monitoring of the media, meeting offices with local elements, information obtained from personnel, and other practices and methods are explained. Then, public relations activities for promotion in local governments, organisation publications, press relations, annual reports, events (exhibitions, festivals), and applications of communication technologies for information and promotion were examined.

As a result of the study, it was determined that while planning public relations activities in local

governments, studies aimed at recognition should be carried out first. Especially in newly restructured municipalities, it necessitates efforts to recognise regional problems, institutional problems, and the policies that need to be determined to overcome them. In the second stage, promotional activities are needed regarding these policies determined in mutual communication and the work carried out within the framework of these policies. When this process is completed, both recognition and promotion activities can be carried out in parallel.

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ОСУЩЕСТВЛЕНИЕ СВЯЗЕЙ С ОБЩЕСТВЕННОСТЬЮ В ОРГАНАХ МЕСТНОГО САМОУПРАВЛЕНИЯ (МУНИЦИПАЛИТЕТАХ)

Резюме

Сегодня связь с общественностью в организациях и учреждениях превратилась в сферу, выполняющую важную функцию, которую можно классифицировать как деятельность признания и продвижения внутренних и внешних связей. В этом контексте, в целом, связи с общественностью имеют единственную цель - обретение общественной аудитории. В целях создания положительного мнения в обществе выросло значение пиар-деятельности местных учреждений (особенно в выборных структурах). Другими словами, организации стремятся создать фирменный стиль и корпоративный имидж, зная запросы аудитории и предоставляя информацию об общественной организации. Одну из структур, цель которой служить местному населению, можно охарактеризовать, как местный орган власти. Мы становимся свидетелями организации модели муниципальной структуры, занимающейся также связями с общественностью. В целях признания, учитывая основные принципы местного самоуправления была проведена исследовательская работа основной деятельности связей с общественностью.

Ключевые слова: общественные связи, органы местного самоуправления, муниципалитет.

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Xülasə

Bu gün İctimaiyyətə Əlaqələr qurum və təşkilatlarda mühüm fəaliyyətlər həyata keçirən bir bölməyə çevrilmişdir. İctimaiyyətə əlaqələr fəaliyyət sahəsinə görə tanınma və tanıtma istiqamətində daxili və xarici ictimai əlaqələr kimi təsnif edilə bilər. Bu kontekstdə ictimaiyyətə əlaqələr təşkilat üçün hədəf auditoriyaya və ümumilikdə ictimaiyyətə çatmaq üçün vahid funksiyaya malikdir. Cəmiyyətdə, müsbət imic yaratmaq üçün yeni qurumlarda, xüsusən də seçkili strukturlarda ictimaiyyətə əlaqələr fəaliyyətinin əhəmiyyəti artmışdır. Başqa sözlə desək, təşkilatlar hədəf auditoriyanı tanıyaraq, ictimaiyyətə təşkilat haqqında məlumat verməklə korporativ şəxsiyyət və korporativ imic yaratmağı qarşısına məqsəd qoyur.

Bu strukturlardan biri olan yerli idarəetmələr qısaca olaraq yerli xalqa xidmət etməyi qarşısına məqsəd qoyan və bu məqsədlə təşkil edilən yerli qurumlar kimi tərif etmək olar. Bələdiyyələrin təşkilatı strukturlaşmasını yerli özünüidarəetmə modeli kimi araşdırdıqda ictimaiyyətə əlaqələri təşkil və idarə edəcək bir bölmə kimi ictimaiyyətə əlaqələr bölməsinin yaradıldığının şahidi oluruq. Bu məsələdə yerli idarəetmənin əsas prinsipləri nəzərə alınaraq, bu prinsiplər çərçivəsində həyata keçirilən ictimaiyyətə əlaqələr fəaliyyətləri tanınma və tanıtma başlıqları altında araşdırılmışdır.

Açar sözlər: ictimaiyyətə əlaqələr, yerli özünüidarəetmə orqanları, bələdiyyə

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