

## **Digital Communication Activities of Corporations in the Context of Corporate Communication and Governance**

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### **Abstract**

Internet enables both public institutes and private sector to reach their target masses fast and effectively. Each company which aims at institutionalization wants to benefit from internet which removes geographical boundaries and provides the possibility of access to social partners without time limitation. Websites which are simple, user-friendly, professionally prepared and on which continuity in the use is provided plays a significant role in not only in short term but also long term social partner relations. Governance, removing the existing hierarchical structure in the administration, adopts an understanding based on mutual communication. For this reason, internet and especially websites are important instruments which can be used with the purpose of governance. In the study, governance applications on the websites are tried to be analyzed. To that end, in the context of communication with the social partners, the components belonging to governance applications on websites were specified as accountability and participation and these two component were divided into eight sub-element. According to the data from Istanbul Sanayi Odası [Istanbul Chamber of Industry], when the websites of the biggest 100 industrial enterprise were analyzed, it was seen that websites were usually used for promotion and they rarely give place to the applications which will provide social partner communication.

**Keywords:** Corporate Communication, Web Sites, Governance, Online Communication

## **Introduction**

Development in mass media has caused a global change in terms of time and space and has brought together all the spectators in the ‘moment’ without minding time and space. Now significant incidents are shared within seconds. While the images after earthquakes are causing millions of people to shed tears, aids done to people who got injured in earthquakes are known by millions and applauded. Internet has ended the passivity of television viewer and it has become possible to participate in and comment on the incidents experienced at that moment and therefore interactivity in communication has revealed itself as dominant.

Internet technology, which is a very significant success according to some, was not welcomed by others. Paul Virilio, one of those who approach developing technology critically, in his piece “The Information Bomb” (2002), mentioning that technology will shatter every kind of time difference and duration, specifies that instantaneity of tele-existence replaced the old three-way duration classification which is past, now and future. Virilio acts in a critical attitude, looking into the grand scheme of things. Together with this, it cannot be denied that technology is one of the important phenomena especially in the change of closed systems.

Easy access to information affects perception. Data, which can or cannot be gained, cause images of persons or institutions, or the perception to be formed in a short time. Moreover, relation established with a certain target mass remains insufficient, a continuing relationship with social partners becomes obligatory. This change in the communication efforts of corporations caused various notions to show up or gain importance. Corporate communication and governance can be counted as one of these notions.

## **Corporate Communication and Governance**

Corporate communication is the totalitarian communication which the corporation forms with its social partners. All the communication activities formed emphasizing the corporation identity by an organization or corporation and directed at target groups are stated under the title of corporate communication. Studies made in the topic of corporate communication can be examined under the titles of strategy, identity and image. Strategy can be defined as the corporate communication center missions, identity as corporate profile and image as the organization of communication (Kaya, 2003; 383). Corporations are in activities with various

target masses. In this respect, corporate communication covers advertising, corporate sales, promotion, public relations, corporate design, organizational communication and communication with the partners outside of corporation (Küçük, 2005; 47). Corporate communication forms a quite vast spectrum from consumer& investor relations to media relations. Collection of all the communication studies under the same title provides corporate identity with refreshment. Corporate identity means that corporation presents how it wants to position itself at present and in the future, again with its own effort.

And governance puts forward the communication effort based on mutual interaction by removing the hierarchical structure present in its administration. Totalitarian structure of corporate communication enables governance to reflect the relations formed with social partners into the totality of relations. The concept of governance which find a broad place to itself in corporate level is also sensed in private sector with different dynamics. (Sözence Algan; 2009).

Within this frame governance determines and control the strategic side of the corporation's relations with its social partners (İşcan, Kaygın, 2009; 215). At the same time, it looks after the benefits of groups which it has relations, besides its own; and wants to reflect it to its social partners. Those who can reflect the strategies which they formed in the frame of corporate governance principles to their social partners effectively build reputation also perceptively or strengthen their existing reputation. In brief, application of corporate governance is a process which leads to good reputation.

One of the most basic points where governance is differentiated from administration is the decision making process. The decision mechanisms which dictated from top to bottom are replaced with decisions which are formed in the frame of accountability and which are made by getting all the related people's opinion. Besides, the process requires that all the information which will not harm the continuity of the corporation are to be revealed. In general, good governance is (Çamdereli, 2004; 18);

- the process of openness, accountability, pluralism and thus guidance in a democratic level.
- the administration form in which administration leaves the monopole of central authority and authorities are shared.

- a multi-actor understanding of administration where public bureaucracy, private sector and civil society organizations play the role together.
- impression of the center from all kind of formation from the individual to the environment in the administrative decision making and the adopting of the interactional administration understanding.

When corporate communication which affects the communication structure of the corporation comes together with the concept of governance, the necessity of a platform where the opinions are got not only in the corporation but also outside the corporation and regular informing is provided cannot be denied. The only media which can include all the partners in the communication studies of the corporation is the internet.

### **Corporate Governance and Websites**

At present, most of us use primarily the internet as the tool of searching information. One of the most important reasons why we prefer internet is the fact that we can reach the information fast without leaving the environment in which we are. The information that we talk about can be an academic research as well as our effort to know someone better who we have just met via internet. Researches made with the concern of knowing the corporation, also reach the result faster with the information provided by internet. Corporations are also followed or searched on the internet with the similar purposes.

The frequent use of internet by state institutions, civil society organizations and private sector caused the birth of internet governance. Internet governance is perceived differently by different parts and different perceptions give birth to different approaches and expectations. For example telecommunication experts handle internet governance in a more technical meaning, computer experts make an effort for the development of various standards and applications; activists because of freedom of speech, attorneys because of a resolution space for conflict and politicians in terms of security, are interested in internet governance (YeşilveAlkan, 2007; 129). Even though the purpose of use depends on the area of interest, making some de facto definitions regarding the internet governance enables the concept to be understood easily. Internet Governance Forum (IGF) of which establishment were announced by UN in 2006, for this purpose, collected the principles of internet governance under 4 main

titles in its first meeting held in Athens in the year when it is founded ([www.intgovforum.org/cms/athensmeeting](http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/athensmeeting));

- Openness: Freedom of speech, free circulation of information and thought
- Security: Providing cooperation for reliability, methods of getting rid of situations such as spam and viruses.
- Diversity: Multi-linguality and local content
- Access: Compatible operability, access to background, digital gap, costs and open standards

Another fundamental study on good governance is the study titled European Governance White Book of European Commission. Although the study is prepared generally for state institutions, administrative structures of private sector and civil society organizations are adapted into these headings and governance studies are analyzed under these headings. The principles in the White Book are as below ([eur-lex.europa.eu](http://eur-lex.europa.eu)):

- Openness: Corporations should work in an open way and use an open language. This situation helps the increase in reliability to institutions.
- Participation: Development of participation provides corporations which forms the policies and final decisions with more reliability.
- Accountability: It means to explain what you do and take responsibility of it. For this reason, organizations should be accountable.
- Effectiveness: Policies should be effective and on time. Their future effects and if possible past experiences should be evaluated and requirements for specified aims should be met.
- Coherence: Policies and action should be coherent and easily understandable.

Internet is one of the important instruments for the good governance to be applied. Active use of internet supports both for the application and representation of the basic components of governance mentioned above. Many researches up to the present puts forth the fact that internet and web sites play a significant role in communication and especially in social partner relations (Kent, Taylor, White; 2003, Park, Reber; 2008, Esrock, Leichty; 2000). When the hours spent on internet increases, it becomes an obligation to keep the corporate relations with social partners on digital media.

Corporations' effort to communicate with their suppliers, customers and employees on the internet developed primarily via e-mail and then it started to cover such activities as promotion, advertising and public relations. Since internet provides fast and easy access to information, corporations can publish the information which they make an effort to publish in and on mass media, whenever they want and without the obligation of acceptance of any gatekeeper.

Yet internet has some disadvantages. The transparency which internet has brought is more open to crises. Troubles experienced in any kind of organization from state institutions to private sector can be known very easily and can even turn into a crisis in a short time. It would not be wrong to look for the solutions of crises which formed in a short time on virtual platform in the same platform. To place internet within the communication strategy will provide the faster emergence of the solution. It is an important issue that internet is a tool which gets complicated when its area of usage expands, and applications which is suitable for the structure of the tool and overlaps with the corporate identity should be developed by the corporation.

Websites are the areas which corporations form in the direction of their aims and where those who search the corporations on the internet primarily meet them. In the context of corporate communication, one of the areas where the governance can be observed the best is the websites which corporations use as their self-expression tool. Websites, besides its support for the establishment of fast and active communication with target masses, can provide a lot of features such as presents different content according to the different expectations and needs of the users, being able to get immediate reaction, to report interesting topics with confirmation, to set up a continuous relation with the target mass, directing the corporation policy based on the demands.

Websites enables organizations to provide a controlled communication with public and media which we can define as their social partners. From the perspective of social partners, websites are controlled communication channels which they can observe and understand the corporations better (Kent, Taylor, White, 2003; 63). Websites are one of the areas where corporations can close contact with both their present and potential customers with a global perspective. The fact that internet is user-centered and it presents an environment far from

time, space, personal and social pressure which enables its users to feel free can be counted among the reasons why it is an effective platform (Uzunoğlu at.el. 2009; 84). While the control of websites is in the hands of the corporations, the decision and process of surfing are totally in the hands of the user. Content and visual quality which will impress the user will help the active usage of the website.

The organization of the websites based on governance requires primarily forming useful websites. Making an effort on the thing to be reached of more than two clicks is nothing more than a waste of time for the most of the users. The existence of the identity and the mission of the site on the homepage tell us what it is for and why we are there. Homepage gives hierarchical information about content and the feature. It is very important that users can reach what they search for. For this reason, it will be helpful to use a visible search button on homepages. Even in the sites which do not need continuous visitors, a link which will convey to current media bulletins will give an impression of aliveness. Homepage is the best opportunity to create a good impression on most users. For this reason, something that will appeal to all users is needed (Krug, 2007). As it can be seen, forming functional websites depends on the co-existence of a lot of component. From the perspective of corporations, it is possible for their websites to reflect their philosophy with the design of their websites. That an organization asserting accountability does not publish any financial or social report or news regarding their past, can cause the questioning of its mission.

The reflection of the fundamental elements of governance on the websites of the organizations is important in terms of supporting words by visual quality. Websites are the carriers of the name and thus the whole identity of the corporation. Information on the homepages of corporations' websites is important for users or a lot of part of the public because it carries information about the corporation. The biggest mistake made designing the websites is that the elements such as easy mobility in the websites which are necessary for the double way communication, reaching the content demanded and feedback features. A corporation which aims at being interactive has to place these features on the homepages of their websites. Researches have proved that organizations handle media and the investors as the primary target groups in the process of forming their websites. Moreover, in the studies made about websites, it is mentioned that, it is necessary for the corporations to establish relations on websites they need to place features related to dialogue and information which is

helpful for the users. Besides, the websites of the organizations should be easy for the visitors to find what they look for (Kent, Taylor, White, 2003, Esrock, Leichty, 2000). There are a lot of points which is to be given attention in the design of websites, and each feature closely affects the corporation perception of the users.

Regulations related to the internet applications of the corporations in Turkey was specified in New Turkish Trade Law of which latest version was accepted in 2011. The obligation which was brought in the scope of electronic operations and information services, of opening internet website, allocating some of this site to the information society services, typing the address of the internet site under the title of company, is handled in the frame of public enlightenment and transparency principles. Within this frame, primary contents which should be published on the websites of the corporations are as below (Altaş, 2011; 145):

- a) Announcements which should be made by the company,
- b) Documents, information and explanations which are helpful for partners and stakeholders to protect their benefits and use their rights consciously,
- c) Decisions made by Board of Management and necessary to be announced by law,
- d) Evaluation reports, declaration of founders, commitments regarding the public offerings of the shares and related assurances and guarantees; resolution texts regarding the postponement of bankruptcy or related issues; general assembly and board of management resolutions regarding the acquisitions, explanations, information and documents related to these operations.
- e) Information, tables, documents presented to the analysis of partners and stakeholders in the case of cooperation, separation and change of type; documents and decisions regarding main contract changes including the increase or decrease in capital; decisions of special assembly of privileged stakeholders, reports prepared due to operations such as issue securities.
- f) Documents, reports, board of management announcements regarding all kinds of calls including the ones belonging to the general assembly.
- g) Information which is required to be given in terms of transparency principle and information society.
- h) Questions asked in the scope of being informed, replies to them, issues presumed for the enlightenment of stakeholders or partners in other laws.

- i) Financial tables, subsidiary tables required to be shared by law, balance sheets made with special purposes, financial reports required to be known by stakeholders and their footnotes and attachments.
- j) Annual report of management board, annual evaluation announcement regarding how much the principles of corporate administration are obeyed; every kind of money paid to the head and members of board management, costs of representation and travel, compensations, assurances and such kind of payments.
- k) Reports of inspector, special inspector and operation inspector.
- l) Information regarding the issues which authorized institutions and ministers demand and interesting stakeholders and capital owners.

New Trade Law's primary study about the developing technology and the use of new communication tools and functionalization of websites according to some criteria is an important study. Moreover, the law introduced is such as to emphasize the information sharing and the developing technology in this sharing. Application of the law is promising in the point of the increase and improvement of the websites in the future.

### **Methodology**

Governance is such a concept that should be analyzed not only by mentioning but also in the frame of applications. In the corporate communication and in the analysis of reflections of governance, internet is an important examination platform. Within this frame, the research questions are as below:

- Is it possible to observe the accountability and participation among the principle of governance on the websites of the corporations?
- Which applications do the corporations benefit from to make their websites interactive?

To find answer to the research questions, the features that can be described as the counterparts of accountability and participation which are among the important components of governance on websites were determined. In the table below there are basic features which meet the component and which can be observed in each website.

Table 1: Basic governance features which meet the component and which can be observed in each website.

Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Publicity information of corporation and product</li><li>• Activity reports</li><li>• Media bulletins/news/announcements</li><li>• Social responsibility studies</li></ul>
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Links providing the social sharing sites of the corporation/social media usage</li><li>• Communication channels which will be used to reach the corporation</li><li>• Educatory information/courses on the corporate or individual level</li><li>• Materials which will provide the continuity of the website and/or feedback</li></ul>

The criteria mentioned above are searched on the platforms which can be reached on homepages or one or two clicks in order to analyze the discourse of governance on websites. The fact that the data which are demanded to be reach are placed in the sections which can easily attract the users and the fact that users usually want to reach the things fast caused the specification of these criteria.

In order to observe the activity of governance on websites, websites of the biggest 100 industrial institutions, according to 2011 data of Istanbul Industry Chamber, were analyzed. In the study, primarily the quantitative data were collected and qualitative evaluations related to accountability and participation are tried to be reached. In the study, 90 out of 100 websites are reached.

## Results

In the study, 90 out of 100 websites are reached. Among the websites of the corporations which couldn't be reached, the two of them couldn't be reached after the search, one of them is under construction, and the other companies do not have a website but their information is

given on the website of the holdings which they are connected to. Websites were reached in Dec, 2012.

In order for the corporations to be defined as accountable/open/transparent, first of all, general information about them, their products and services should be placed on their websites. Apart from that, it is important that activity reports which will provide investors and later all social sharers with forming an opinion about the corporation, as specified in the law are placed on the websites in terms of opinion forming about the corporation in the future. News about the corporations should be considered as important data about the image forming. Moreover, also in terms of relations with media, and media workers' reaching the information they want, media bulletins/news/announcements are information required to be placed in websites. Social responsibility studies are platforms in which especially product or service users and investors are possibility interested. All the heading specified for accountability/openness/transparency were tried to be specified in the way to cover the interests of all social partners; moreover most of the financial and social data belonging to the corporation are in the quality of reachability with these headings.

The issue of participation takes place in the work field both of governance and internet. The most apparent feature of the new communication technologies is the fact that they let mutual interaction of information trade between user groups and individual users and thus developed mutual communication (Karayel Bilbil, 2008;71). The fact that the content of internet is formed by the user, users can contribute to content and data can be formed thanks to the feedbacks coming from the users quickly makes "participation" demandable. Various features are placed on the websites of the corporations for the purpose of supplying feedback, continuous usage of websites and the information exchange. Social sharing sites/social media are the platforms which has big numbers of users. Corporations both expands their target masses by directing web site users to the social sharing sites and informing the new members of social media extensions of the corporation about the innovations and supply continuity in the relation with the corporation. The fact that facilities of direct communication to the corporation are present on the website means that corporation pays attention to the website users. Other applications which shows that corporation cares about the participation and continuity in the relations are educatory information on corporate or personal levels, surveys

providing data and publications which corporations formed for organizational employees or communication with the outside target mass.

Table 2: The frequency of usage of the criteria which will provide corporations with the determining of the accountability on their websites

<b>Component providing accountability</b>	<b>Homepage/frequency</b>	<b>Reached with 1 or 2 clicks/frequency</b>	<b>Ones without the specified criteria on the website</b>
Publicity information of corporation or product	88	2	-
Activity reports	2	37	51
Media bulletins/news/announcements	60	28	2
Social responsibility works	32	20	38

According to the research results, corporations give information about the dates and the products and share the materials they use in the media relations. This situation shows that websites are commonly used for the purpose of promotion. Social responsibility works generally does not take place on the homepage. The fact that social responsibility works take place less than media bulletins, news and announcements on the homepage can stem from the fact that corporations see their works as charity therefore do not show off about them, but they also may want to keep them in background because they qualify their works as insufficient. The most interesting result is the reluctance of most corporations in publishing their activity reports. Activity reports either does not take place on the pages or they can be reached with too much effort.

Table 3: The frequency of use of components that allow participation.

<b>Components providing participation</b>	<b>Homepage/frequency</b>	<b>Reached with 1 or 2 clicks/frequency</b>	<b>Ones without the specified criteria on the website</b>
Usage of link providing reach to the social sharing sites of the corporation/social media usage	30	-	60
Communication channels to be used to reach the corporation	14	76	-
Educatory information/courses on corporate or personal level	32	1	57
Materials providing continuity on the usage of website and/or feedback	21	4	65

Corporations which provide links to social sharing sites from their web pages are only one third of the companies analyzed. Among them, 21 corporations only made links to facebook and twitter. This situation shows that corporations are mostly beginner users, besides the limitation of social media usage.

According to the data of Turkey Statistics Institution's research of Domestic Information Technologies Usage which are held in April, 2012, 47.2% of houses in Turkey have the potential of access to internet. According to Socialbakers which gives measurement service in social networks globally, in Turkey there are more than 31 million users of Facebook (<http://smgconnected.com/turkiyede-facebook-kullanimi>). LinkedIn, defined as a professional social network, announced that it has more than 1 million users in February, 2013 (<http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25321165>). These numbers show that social sharing platforms

are commonly used in Turkey. Data gained from the research shows that corporations have difficulty in catching the speed of social network usage.

One or all of the applications of telephone, fax, e-mail and communication form which we can describe as traditional communication channels can be reached in every corporations. 14 corporations give place to communication channels on their homepages with the application of consultancy line, 76 corporations usually placed their communication information on the sections which can be reached with one click under the title of contact. In the websites where there are corporate or personal educatory information, corporations give information about the usage of their products or the usage aim of their product. This information which usually addresses to the users of product or service takes place in the homepages of the corporations. Instruments which will provide continuity in the usage of websites are usually corporate journals. For example, Tüpraş has been publishing a corporate journal called “Dergi Rafine” since 2007 and it provides access to the old volumes on the websites. Corporations usually benefit from the short surveys on the homepages for the feedback. Only on the website of Unilever Turkey, there is a long survey compared to the other surveys consisting of 4-5 questions about whether the website is useful or not. Surveys are elements of collecting data from the internet, which is the most effective way. It is seen that such elements are not benefited from on the websites sufficiently.

### **Evaluation**

Increase in the usage of internet causes corporations to work harder to use the internet more effectively. Real time activities are demanded to be transformed to the virtual platform and corporations try to get ahead of others on the internet. Internet plays a significant role in strategic communication activities. The feature of websites is that companies can determine the content and the features of them by themselves. Corporations can publish their contents with the acceptance of the gatekeepers. At present when the information expands fast it is a must to benefit from all the pros of these platforms which social partners can perceptively manage.

Governance is a concept which both public and the private sector make emphasize on. Governance aims at the total change of administration. Corporate communication studies which take place among the administration strategies of the corporation get their share of

governance. Together with governance, symmetrical communication is applied actively and they can find a place among the social partners communication strategy. Internet and websites are the most suitable platforms for symmetrical communication. Whether the elements reflecting the governance take place on websites or not depends totally on the preferences on the corporations. For this reason, websites are one of the most effective methods of knowing the corporation.

According to 2012 data, 92.5% of the enterprises in Turkey have internet access. 62.8% of the enterprises which have internet access have a web page. In 2005, this percentage was 80.4 in internet access and 48.2 in having a website ([www.tuik.gov.tr](http://www.tuik.gov.tr)). Numeric data shows that the usage of internet and websites are improving. For this reason, within the research a general assignment in the point of websites' governance perspective was tried to be made. Within the study, according to data of Istanbul Industry Chamber, the top 100 corporations of 2011 were analyzed and their rates of application of governance on their websites are tried to be interpreted. Naturally, websites are only one of the indicators and it is very hard to reach concrete data on the websites. Yet, as mentioned above, websites are communication sources on the side of the corporation.

The most general judgment which can be mentioned as the result of the research is the fact that websites are seen as extensions of traditional media and the benefits with which it provides the corporation especially in the context of interactivity are usually ignored. Corporation publicity, media bulletins and announcements shared with traditional media takes a broad place also on the internet. Together with this, activity reports (of which publication becomes obligatory), social responsibility works remains in the background. Corporations see the websites only as a promotion tool.

A similar situation is observed in the placement of elements which will encourage participation and provide continuous communication with the corporate on the websites. Although there are communication channels which existed before the internet usage on all the websites, the ones of which users increase fast such as social sharing platforms cannot find a place. Sections which will provide feedbacks which are effective in the development of the corporation are also limited in number on the websites. Corporate journals which will address both to employees and target masses on corporate webpages and which will provide a

continuous relation with the corporation are the most important sources which can be analyzed under the title of continuity; however, journals also cannot find a place even though they are easy to prepare and publish.

It is fact that the corporations analyzed use internet facilities on the minimum level. Websites, just like newspapers or television, are seen as a promotion platform and its usage are realized in the same way. This situation prevents governance from being reflected on websites. To know websites and to be aware of its contribution to the corporation will provide possibility of transmission from administration to governance on the internet.

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