

Chapter 14

The Status of Digital Culture in Public Relations Research in Turkey: An Analysis of Published Articles in 1999–2017

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ABSTRACT

As the number of internet users has increased, communication scholars have started to pay attention to the internet applications, and the research related to digital content has increased in the field of public relations. However, there is no systematic literature review about public relations research related to digital content in Turkey. Therefore, this chapter analyzes this topic through content analysis of published articles between 1999 and 2017. Findings suggest that even if the number of articles has increased in the field of public relations in Turkey, future research needs to go further and examine different research topics, apply different theoretical frameworks, provide balance in methodological approaches, and use various sample types.

INTRODUCTION

The number of Internet users has been increasing over the years around the world. For example, the Global Internet Report (2016) shows that individual usage of the Internet grew steadily between 2005 and 2015. As of March 31, 2017, over 3 billion people in the world were using the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2017). The situation in Turkey reflects the same growth. A report from 2017 indicates that the number of Internet users in Turkey has increased %4 since January 2016. The total number of active internet users is 48 million, and 60% of the total population in Turkey uses the Internet (We Are Social, 2017).

Although the Internet was developed for military purposes (Johnny, 2010), statistics show that internet use grew rapidly, and it has had significant effects on various aspects of people's lives and societies. For

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instance, shopping (Rigby, 2011), education (The Economist, 2014), and games (Stuart, 2016) have all become digital. Also, communication practices such as public relations and advertising have evolved with technological advancements. For example, Grunig (2009) states that digital media makes public relations more global, strategic, two-way and interactive, symmetrical or dialogical, and socially responsible.

The growth of Internet usage has drawn the attention of communication scholars and influenced articles in the communication field. Research (Cho & Kang, 2006; Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012; Kim & Weaver, 2002; Pasadeos, Berger, & Renfro, 2010) indicates that the number of studies that focus on new communication technologies has increased rapidly. However, it is unclear how research studies in the field of public relations examine digital culture in Turkey. An analysis of the articles will provide a general picture of the development of research related to digital content and insight about digital culture in the field of public relations there. Therefore, this study aims to reveal topics, methodological trends, and theoretical frameworks featured in research articles which focus on digital culture that have been published in peer-reviewed journals in the public relations field. For these purposes, this study analyzes articles published between 1999 and 2017 in order to determine trends in public relations studies focusing on research related to digital content.

BACKGROUND

Digital Culture in Communication

The print culture of the 19th century shifted to the electronic culture of the 20th century to the digital culture of the 21st century (Deuze, 2006). This transformation has not simply been about technological advancement however, nor does it mean to replace the old one with its digital counterparts (Lavender, 2010). It is cultural in its applications (Lavender, 2010) and is a blanket concept that refers to a change in the way we interact, behave, think, and communicate as human beings in society (d'Arnault, 2015). Deuze (2006, p. 1) addresses digital culture as “an emerging set of values, practices, and expectations regarding the way people (should) act and interact within the contemporary network society.”

Communication is one of the characteristics of human beings, and the transformation of communication affects everything in an individual's life (Castells, 2013). There have been transformations in the way that people, companies, and governments communicate and handle information via digital technologies (Lavender, 2010) and the society of the 21st century has become a network society “whose social structure is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies” (Castell, 2004 p. 3). These developments have had broad effects and one of them is the change in “our exchanges as participants within a culture” (Lavender, 2010 p. 127), because in a network society, the social structure also refers to the communication which is coded by culture (Castell, 2004). Therefore, we can state that digitalization not only affects the way of communication but also the culture of the network society that we live in.

Indeed, digitalization has transformed different aspects of communication. For example, companies can access public information via the Internet so that they can better customize their business communication by focusing on their customers' demands as well as the companies' objectives (Patritui-Baltes, 2016). It also has changed the way of recording and distributing the things that people watch and listen to such as movies, radio programmes, newspapers, and books (Lavender, 2010). Furthermore, individuals have started to participate in digital culture by using devices and gadgets (e.g., computers, mobile phones,

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