

Instrumental Use of Corporate Social Responsibility and Capitalist Activism

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Abstract

This study highlights how the concept of “social responsibility” has been transformed into “corporate social responsibility” (CSR) which is detached from its both etymology and epistemology, and investigates how and in what ways the concept of “corporate social responsibility” in which the concept of “social responsibility” has been transformed as an invention of instrumental reason, is implemented by organizations for their own purposes to ensure their sustainability within the capitalist system. The objectives found out and identified in this study are examined under four headings; CSR for brand image, CSR for reputation management, CSR for exchange value and CSR for symbiosis. Among these four objectives, the concepts of “exchange value” and “symbiosis” are associated with the concept of “corporate social responsibility” for the first time in this study. It also brings a critical perspective to the concept of corporate social responsibility within the framework of “capitalist activism”, a concept proposed in this study for the first time and constitutes the grounded theory of the study, which argues that society is also instrumentalized for corporate purposes. In this study, Critical Discourse Studies have been conducted through the texts and visuals of corporate social responsibility projects implemented in Turkey in digital media and in line with the news in digital media related to projects and the brands which realize the projects. In this context, this study is expected to contribute to the critical political economy perspective, the disciplines of public relations and business administration regarding to the concept of corporate social responsibility.

Keywords: Capitalist activism; instrumental use of corporate social responsibility activities; social responsibility and its instrumental transformation

1.INTRODUCTION

Social responsibility has been conceptually hollowed out by institutions and businesses and “institutionalized” within the scope of practices which serve their own purposes and legitimized on a global scale in line with the phenomenon of economic growth and profit which are at the basis of capitalist production. Therefore, the concept of “corporate social responsibility” which has been legitimized instead of social responsibility, has gained a place as a set of communication activities implemented by businesses for their interests in line with the capitalist economic system. For this reason, the problematic of this study is what the concept of “social responsibility” is before it has been institutionalized and monopolized by the system, and how and for what purposes it has been transformed into the concept of “corporate social responsibility”. Besides, the aim of this study is to reveal the purposes for which corporate social responsibility projects are instrumentalized to benefit corporations, and at the same time to reveal that society is made a participant of corporations through these projects. Furthermore, it is to show that the concept of “social responsibility” has conceptually been legitimized in the historical process in line with the capitalist economic system by detaching it from etymological, epistemological and theological contexts and for which purposes it is “institutionalized” to serve the interests of corporations.

This study is analyzed in line with the critical political economy approach, in the light of interdisciplinary theories and concepts. The concept of “corporate social responsibility”, which is the subject of the research, covers a number of interactive processes in which the material production powers of the society are integrated with the society in general in order to ensure sustainable development as two-way communication studies that are frequently implemented by today’s businesses and institutions. Therefore, these practices make it easier for businesses and organizations to enter into areas such as health, education, environment, culture, etc. in line with their economic goals. In this study, social responsibility is examined within the scope of the theory of historical materialism, which examines how it has been shaped and transformed into the concept of corporate social responsibility by being institutionalized until today, while it is essentially a concept that is contrary to the structure of businesses and institutions.

The interdisciplinary nature of the study stems from the fact that the concept of corporate social responsibility is addressed by both public relations and business and its areas. With

this importance, although corporate social responsibility has gained functionality as an application of public relations studies in practice, in the theoretical framework, it has gained more space in the literature in line with the studies of business and business-related disciplines due to the economic-based reasons of production forces. For this reason, the theoretical framework of this study is handled by various disciplines that may be related to business and business fields. In this respect, Milton Friedman's neo-classical perspective, which is one of the first approaches to the concept of corporate social responsibility in economic theories (the assertion that corporations have only one social responsibility, which is to produce profit) and instrumental theory of CSR have been guiding principle for the interdisciplinary analysis of this study.

It is also noteworthy that the concept that intersects both disciplines in the context of corporate social responsibility is "sustainability". While the discipline of public relations realizes the concept of sustainability within the scope of "communication studies", business and the aforementioned disciplines deal with the concept of sustainability in the context of "sustainable development". Therefore, it is seen that business disciplines and its areas work in partnership with the discipline of public relations. In this context, this study examines the concepts of "brand image" and "reputation management" related to the concept of sustainability in public relations and business disciplines, as well as the concept of "exchange value" related to the theory of value in the critical political economy approach and the concept of "symbiosis" used in biology terminology. The "symbiosis" in question has been associated with corporate social responsibility activities for the first time in this study and has been analyzed in line with "industrial symbiosis". At the same time the concept of "exchange value" has been associated with corporate social responsibility for the first time in this study.

The problem and analysis of the study are presented in relation to the critique of instrumental reason (Horkheimer, 2013). At this point, this study is examined within the framework of the concept of "capitalist activism", which is put forward for the first time in this study as the grounded theory of the study, in order to reveal how and for what purposes the concept of corporate social responsibility, which is an invention of instrumental reason, is applied within the capitalist system, and how society is also instrumentalized by making it a participant for these purposes.

Primary and secondary sources are used in the literature review and research of the study, which uses qualitative and quantitative research methods. In the research, a sample of the current corporate social responsibility projects among the domestic brands implemented in Turkey is selected and the four titles categorized within the scope of the study (1) corporate social responsibility for brand image, (2) corporate social responsibility for reputation management, (3) corporate social responsibility for exchange value, (4) corporate social responsibility for symbiosis are analyzed under van Dijk's (2009) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), both written and visual data of the projects in the digital media are examined within the scope of media reflections that can be associated with the projects of the brands carrying out the projects. At the same time, visual data are analyzed in Saussure's (1998) signifier/signified plane within the analysis models of semiotics. In line with the subject of the research, the projects analyzed have been (1) owned by local brands in Turkey, (2) not an extension of any international project, (3) four samples are selected on the grounds of timeliness and (4) each project is carried out by brands representing different sectors. Each sample that meets these justifications is analyzed under the four headings mentioned above through the theoretical framework of the research.¹

2. RESULTS

2.1. The results based on the meaning of the concept of corporate social responsibility.

2.1.1. The concept of social responsibility has been transformed into corporate social responsibility.

The concept of "social responsibility" has been transformed and legitimized into the concept of "corporate social responsibility" in line with capitalist economic system by detaching it from its etymological, epistemological meanings.

2.1.2. The concept of social responsibility has been detached from its theological context in Turkey, and re-edited accordingly to global adaptation.

During the Ottoman Empire, the concept of "social responsibility" has been associated and applied as the concept of "hayr" which means "goodness" derived from the Arabic word "ḥayr". The concept of "hayr" has been accepted as one of the most important acts of earning

¹ This study has been transcribed and shortened from the dissertation. The analyses of this study in detail can be found in this resource: Öztürk,2023.

good deeds as part of Islam to gain God’s (in Islamic discourse Allah’s) appreciation and reward”. The concept of “hayr” in Ottoman Turkish has been blended by the Turkish-Islamic approach of “what one hand gives, the other does not hear” and it has been essential that the good deeds are carried out within the framework of the principle of confidentiality. After the collapse of the Empire, the economic and politic changes that followed have detached the concept of social responsibility its theological and epistemological contexts.

Table 1

Transformation of the concept of “social responsibility” into “corporate social responsibility” in Turkey

PERIOD	IMPLEMENTER	IMPLEMENTATION	PURPOSE	COMMUNICATING POLICY
Ottoman Period (Before 1923)	Ahıs, Guilds and Foundations	Social Responsibility	Helping and supporting those in need.	Based on the principle of confidentiality.
The Establishment Period of the Republic of Turkey and After (1923-1960)	Social State	Social State Concept Practices	To provide development with industrialization and to meet the needs of the society.	To make audio and written announcements about social assistance.
Development of the Private Sector (1960-1980)	Businessmen and Family Holdings	Corporate social responsibility focused on state management.	To provide legitimacy by supporting the state and society.	To make audio, written and visual promotions for promotional purposes.

Beginning of Globalization (1980-1990)	Institutionalized Corporate Holdings, Holding Foundations	Corporate Social Responsibility	To strength legitimacy with internal and external strategic practices in line with corporate pressures.	To use the written, audio and visual media.
From the Period of Widespread Internationalization and Right Struggles to the Present (1990-present)	National and International Corporate Holdings, Foundations, Associations and International Networks	Corporate Social Responsibility and International Corporate Social Responsibility	To maintain the legitimacy they provide in line with brand awareness, reputation, and loyalty in global competition.	To use and benefit from all means of communication, not only at the press level but also in all media channels.

Note. The table has been developed with inspiration by the table in (Alakavuklar et al., 2009).

2.1.3. Sustainable development in line with capitalist economy has shaped today's corporate social responsibility.

Sustainable development has played an active role in the development of corporate social responsibility along with its economic and social impact; it has determined which areas (environmental, social, etc.) should be concentrated in line with a common goal not only for companies, but also for governments and non-governmental organizations.

2.1.4. Corporate social responsibility has been instrumentalized by businesses.

In the light of instrumental reason and instrumental theory, today's businesses have used the corporate social responsibility projects as a tool in line with the purposes of "brand image, reputation management, exchange value and symbiosis" to continue their sustainability in the global economic competition.

2.1.5. Today's businesses have realized "capitalist activism" together with the corporate social responsibility projects.

"Capitalist Activism" is a concept introduced for the first time in this study as the study's grounded theory. It refers that today's corporations manipulate their target audiences in post-industrial and post-modern activist movements which they support or produce themselves for their own benefit, and turn them into supporters of the corporations. Accordingly, while businesses use corporate social responsibility projects as a kind of tool for the above-mentioned purposes, they also use the society as a tool for their own interests.

2.2. The results based on the analysis of the corporate social responsibility projects in Turkey.

2.2.1. Corporate social responsibility has been used for brand image.

"ETİ Yellow Bike" project has been implemented by ETİ, a well-established Turkish brand and producer of ready-to-eat food. As a result of the screening of the projects carried out by the same or similar food producing brands: Unlike competing ready-to-eat food brands in Turkey with the same product inventory, ETİ has developed a project focused on healthy living for the first time. All of the brand's product range consists of packaged ready-to-eat food products. ETİ has a "brand association" that causes and sustains an unhealthy life based on the sector it is in. For this reason, with this project, ETİ has built a brand image that promotes healthy living over the brand connotation that triggers unhealthy living or sells unhealthy living. In this direction, ETİ has created this corporate social responsibility project to regulate and renew its brand image as a brand that carries out healthy activities in response to its ready-to-eat food production.

At the same time, the basis of this project, which appears positive in perception under the name of healthy living, that is, for the benefit of the society, lies in the fact that the society is manipulated for the sake of creating a corporate image and an activism is carried out in favor of the company. In the creation and public reinforcement of the image, the imposition on the brand's consumers to move collectively on bicycles with the brand logo and the project spot as part of an event (on a certain day, at a certain time and in a certain location) is an indicator of the "capitalist activism" that this study proposes as an grounded theory.

2.2.2. Corporate social responsibility has been used for reputation management.

Vestel, a manufacturer of various electronic products including TVs, audio and white goods, has hold the “Manisa Half Marathon” as the event of its corporate social responsibility project in Manisa where is one of the largest factories in Europe, where all production is carried out. Vestel has targeted visually impaired students in its corporate social responsibility project. In this project, Vestel has aimed to produce smart canes which is called WeWALK for visually impaired individuals under its own brand with the proceeds from the marathon organized for the benefit of visually impaired students during the week of the visually impaired and to deliver them to visually impaired students. When the news about Vestel and the project have been analyzed within the scope of the study, it has been determined that Vestel has unfairly dismissed workers during the pandemic and carried out such a corporate social responsibility project while the lawsuit processes are ongoing. Accordingly, Vestel’s reputation has been damaged due to its unhealthy working environment and layoffs within the scope of Covid-19. In order to take the perception in a different direction in line with reputation management, Vestel has carried out such a corporate social responsibility project in Manisa where the factory is located and where the workers have been laid off.

The project’s event, the “International Vestel Manisa Half Marathon”, has been organized for both individual and corporate participants, and with its international character, it has been open to participation not only from Turkey but also from all over the world. Although there is no age limit for participation in the run, children under the age of 18 have participated with parental permission. Accordingly, the participants have participated in the capitalist activism practiced by Vestel by running on a marathon course decorated with Vestel logos and emblems. While in the eyes of the participants, the project has benefited students with visual impairment through participation fees and donations, Vestel, in order to repair its damaged reputation, has carried out a capitalist activism in the city where its factory is located by involving both the authorities as partners in the project and the community as runners in the marathon event.

2.2.3. Corporate social responsibility has been used for exchange value.

Maylo, one of the cleaning paper brands of Lila Group, which operates in the cleaning paper, energy and textile sectors, has realized a corporate social responsibility project in which it will donate the income from the cleaning paper it produces. In line with this project,

Maylo has transferred the paintings made by students from an educational foundation which it donates to product packaging. Maylo has stated that it will donate a certain amount of each sale of packaged products with the paintings made by the students to this organization that supports education. Therefore, Maylo has created a corporate social responsibility project only through the sale of these products. Maylo has constructed the exchange value with this project and provided C-M (commodity-money) circulation. In this context, Maylo has realized its corporate social responsibility project for the purpose of exchange value.

Maylo has directly realized capitalist activism with the completion of the purchasing process by inviting its main and potential consumers with the calls “donate to education by buying this package” and “contribute to the education of children with Maylo” on the product packaging.

2.2.4. Corporate social responsibility has been used for symbiosis.

DEHA, as an enterprise produces with industrial symbiosis produces biodiesel from waste oils. DEHA, a brand whose production is based on industrial symbiosis, has designed various corporate social responsibility projects with a single slogan, “Don’t Spill”, to make the masses a part of this production in order to meet the need for raw materials. In line with the analysis of this study, it has been determined that companies engaged in industrial production gain profit by using waste materials as raw materials compared to raw material supply. In this direction, DEHA, which is one of the entrepreneurs engaged in this type of production, has been found to provide raw material supply through various corporate social responsibility campaigns such as environment, education, etc. The importance here is that the waste of the society constitutes raw material for the enterprise (symbiotic relationship), and DEHA has realized all its corporate social responsibility projects in order to provide symbiosis by prioritizing its profit.

DEHA has carried out corporate social responsibility projects in order to maintain industrial symbiosis based on ecological production which is the basis of its corporate identity, and through capitalist activism, it makes the masses its suppliers.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. From social responsibility to corporate social responsibility.

The concept of social responsibility is a frequently used concept today and is used as a synonym for the concepts such as charity or philanthropy. However, when these concepts are considered etymologically, epistemologically and even theologically, it is seen that the concepts differ from each other. First of all, the term of charity as a virtue means both theologically and etymologically the “highest love of human in Christianity”. According to this definition, charity is connected to religion of Christianity. Because of this religious limitation, it is inadequate to explain the concept of social responsibility properly. On the other hand, the term of philanthropy has been found to be insufficient as well as charity in defining social responsibility due to its etymological and epistemological structure. In Greek, the word of “philos” means “love” and the word of “anthropos” means “human”. In short, philanthropy etymologically refers to “love of humanity”. In sectoral descriptions, the concept of philanthropy is also used as a synonym for social responsibility. However, it is seen that the two concepts are not synonymous; the concept of social responsibility encompasses not only the love of humanity but also all living beings from plants to animals. When we look at the etymological structure of the word of “social responsible”; it is seen that the word of “socius” as a term derived from “socius responder” in Latin, means “companion or partner”, and the word of “responder” means “respondent” (<https://www.etymonline.com>). In this respect, the etymology of the concept of “social responsibility” refers to the respond of one to another. For this reason the concept of social responsible is associated with helping each other in the aim of this study. Because, the term of “helping each other” seems to be more appropriate than “philanthropy” whose root word is “love of humanity” or “charity” whose etymology is “Christian love in its highest manifestation”, to define the concept of “social responsibility” which is the research topic of this study. It is understood that both “philanthropy” and “charity” in the direction of their etymologies are two different concepts which are belonged and associated with the humankind in the context of human love and Christianity. In other words, both “philanthropy” and “charity” are inadequate to explain the real meaning of social responsibility. In the light of this information, the concept of social responsibility has been handled in the context of “helping each other” in the study, with this results not only the etymology of the concept, but also its epistemology as can be seen in the content of the study. The expression of “helping each other” (as different from “philanthropy” and “charity”) is neither is limited with human senses nor activities. For this reason, helping each other is not

unique to human beings; it is a common characteristic of all living things. Plants, animals and all living things help each other. Because all living things survive on two fundamental needs: nutrition and reproduction. While the first need drives them to fight each other, the need to reproduce brings them closer together. In this context, solidarity between living beings is much more important than struggling with each other. If we look at mammals, for example elephants, we also see them living together; they feed, move and fight together. They have families and herds. For this reason, living together is no exception for them. Because it is a law of nature. Each creature also has roles in its own herd to sustain its own species. These roles or tasks are part of living together, so cooperation is needed to live together (Kropotkin, 2018). At this point, it is understood that although there is competition between different species, “helping each other” is a kind of rule for the same species to live together. This rule is genetically coded as a motive for all living things. Therefore, helping each other is an instinct which humans have too.

For example, when we look at the first traces of humans in history, we see that they have lived together. All the data shows that they have discovered the advantages of hunting, sharing, eating and in short, living together to survive. It is understood that early humans have sought cooperation to survive and that the cooperative lifestyle has taught them to help each other (Şenel, 1982).

In line with the above-mentioned explanations, the awareness of “social responsibility” in line with its etymology and epistemology has been associated with biological evolution. But the concept of social responsibility has started to change over time with the changing social and economic order in ancient times; the cooperation between the nobles and the people has undergone a transformation in the form of “noblesse obligé” (noblesse oblige) in order to “ensure the sustainability of the nobility” in a one-way from the nobles to the people. During this era, it has been seen that the “common good” which is known in Ancient Greek through Plato and meant the welfare of society, has been changed to “noblesse oblige” as a French term of aristocracy refers that nobles have to take on certain responsibilities in order to maintain and promote their privileged position in society (Mintzberg, 1983; Crouch, 2008). Besides, in the Middle Ages, guilds have been established to keep merchants and artisans together and to ensure their professional continuity and sustainability. This has transformed the sustainability of daily life provided by cooperation into the sustainability of commercial

life that can be realized through economic competition. In this context, social responsibility has moved away from helping without self-interest and started to turn into a concept that is made between commercial groups for self-interest. With the beginning of industrialization, government policies and deadly wars have changed societies and lives. Fertile lands have been plundered, art and knowledge have declined, and the monopoly structures of European governments over all activities and mechanisms have encouraged individual lives. These individual lives have damaged collective life. This has distanced people from the consciousness of helping without self-interest. While the single most important thing expected of human beings in primitive times has been to help each other, the individual lives have limited the human being to being a good citizen who obeys the rules and pays taxes regularly. For this reason, people have lost their basic human responsibilities such as sharing, helping and protecting each other due to increasing citizenship responsibilities, individual lifestyles and material obligations of big cities. While liberalism has encouraged the construction of new institutions and companies, these institutions and companies created in the capitalist system have broken the common spirit and solidarity of society and increased the class divide. The collective life in which security, livelihood and needs of the community provided by the conscious of helping without self interest in previous periods, has come to an end, and it has passed to the individual life in which the right to live (residence permit, security, health, education, etc.) granted in return for citizenship duties, and class distinctions deepened. Accordingly, human beings have been abstracted from helping without self-interest and responsibilities that all living beings owe to each other for their collective solidarity and collective survival. The individualistic lives of liberalism have focused on the power of capital, so new trade strategies have required new and faster transportation routes. The search for new trade routes have resulted in the establishment of railroads in America in the late 1880s. This new formation has paved the way for the establishment of companies (Chandler, 1977). When we look at its background, it is seen that the birth of the corporations has emerged by reshaped ideologies. Economic and socio-political issues, such as the collapse of feudalism or the weakening of the power of the church, have influenced the process of reshaping ideologies. The transition from feudalism to capitalism and the new social, economic and political structures of nation states have supported private property. Thus, all these processes have influenced the constitutional states which protects the corporatization of capital and given capitalists the opportunity to open their own companies.

In this context, the era of “corporate capitalism” in which “a capitalist market economy dominated by hierarchical and bureaucratic corporations that control the factors of production and the amount of profit they generate”, has begun (Misachi, 2017)

The increase in competition in the free market system has increased corporate social responsibility projects both quantitatively and qualitatively in parallel. When we look at the research in the academic literature on the concept of corporate social responsibility; although there is no clear starting date for social responsibility, it is seen that it has originated from the increasing industrial production of companies at the end of the 1800s. The increase in industrial production, together with new means of transportation such as railroads, has led to an increase in competition by supporting the free market economy. This situation has supported the establishment of private corporations by encouraging the privatization of the market economy, where the prices of goods and services are determined within a free price system.

For the private corporations, the concept of corporate social responsibility has become a global phenomenon with the landmark speech of the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the “World Economic Forum in 1999”: “I propose that you, the business leaders gathered in Davos, and we, the United Nations, initiate a global compact of shared values and principles, which will give a human face to the global market”(<https://press.un.org/en/1999/19990201.sgsm6881.html>). As Annan has explained one year later at the “World Economic Forum” in 2000, the concept of social responsibility has been institutionalized “as corporate social responsibility” and legitimized on a global scale which is transformed into a different concept creating a human face for global companies towards society. For this reason, corporate social responsibility projects have become an advantage for organizations to mask the social and environmental destruction they cause, and at the same time to highlight their human characteristics.

3.2. The relationship between corporate social responsibility and sustainability.

Sustainable development is defined as economic growth in which the negative environmental and social effects of development are alleviated (Roper, 2012). Sustainability has been examined not only in terms of economic but also social and cultural fields. In this direction, sustainability envisages the change of intangible elements as well as a change that includes material elements, in other words, it also includes a socio-psychological change

(Kılıç, 2012). For this reason, “sustainable development” is conceptually trying to change some elements of the society, and it is instilling many subjective thoughts into the society. The most obvious supportive example of this situation is the continuity of the consumer society. In this respect, “sustainable development” does not mean the change in purely economic or purely social policies; it is a process that is based on economic interests and affects the social structure and policies. According to Kılıç (2012) sustainability, “stems from a necessary change and transformation on the understanding that the hegemonic policies established by economic policies on the environment are unsustainable”. For this reason, the basic elements and studies in ensuring sustainability are based on the creation of the continuity of natural resources, in other words, the non-renewable environment. “Sustainable development” has played an active role in the development of corporate social responsibility along with its economic and social impact; it has determined which areas (environmental, social, etc.) should be concentrated in line with a common goal not only for companies, but also for governments and non-governmental organizations. In this direction, businesses and organizations have started to constitute their own corporate pragmatic and deontological elements by taking the environmental, social, etc. areas in which sustainable development organizations work and envisage as a source while creating their corporate social responsibility projects.

3.3. Instrumentalization of corporate social responsibility practices by businesses.

Corporate social responsibility activities, which are used for the benefit of the corporation, express the instrumental use of reason. The concept of reason has both subjective and objective aspects (Horkheimer, 2013). Objective reason is purposive and meaning-oriented, while subjective reason is instrumental and pragmatic. Since reason is reduced to a tool in industrialized societies, it becomes powerless and subject to ideological manipulation. In societies dominated by this type of subjective reason, individualism and self-interest prevail. In this context, the instrumentalization of corporate social responsibility projects by the ruling class in line with its own interests is an indicator of the dominance of subjective reason.

In the capitalist system, reason is instrumentalized to ensure that the goal is achieved in the most profitable and shortest way. According to Weber, instrumental reason is the main factor

regulating human behavior in modern industrial society (Bauman, 2005). Instrumental reason expresses the totalitarian form of domination and is based on how to exploit the world. In this context, companies also use the things they produce as tools along with the reason they instrumentalize in order to maintain their domination in the consumer society. In this direction, corporate social responsibility projects, a strategic communication practice that ensures company sustainability, are also used as tools in various fields in order for the ruling class to achieve its goals. It is understood that corporate social responsibility projects are used by public relations specialists serving organizations as a tool to realize the objectives briefly described above. In the following, it is handled that businesses instrumentalize “corporate social responsibility projects” for the purposes in which the sub-headings (brand image, reputation management, exchange value and symbiosis) created and determined in this study in the light of instrumental theory.

3.3.1. Corporate social responsibility for brand image.

According to the basic and short definition of the American Marketing Association, “a brand is a name, sign, symbol, shape and combination of these that identifies a seller’s goods and services and aims to distinguish them from their competitors” (Wood, 2000). But, a brand is far beyond being a name or a symbol, it includes all kinds of elements perceived and felt by the consumer on behalf of the product or service (Pirtini, et al., 2006).

In the global competitive market, the number of brands owned by corporations increase as much as the difference and diversity of products or services increases. In this direction, corporations launch different and diverse brands by “deepening product mix depth” (e.g. a corporations offering many types of chocolate such as almond, pistachio, etc. under the chocolate brand) and “broadening the product line” (e.g. the same chocolate brand producing coffee, biscuits, confectionery, etc. in addition to chocolate products). This is because corporations need to sell their products and services to more consumers in order to ensure their sustainability in the market while at the same time staying ahead of their competitors. As it is understood that the corporations need good branding for their sustained profitability. In this context, corporations categorize the brands they create according to the demographic characteristics of main and potential consumers, as well as other socio-economic or psycho-social criteria. Therefore, due to based on the products and services that consumers purchase,

consumers themselves are also classified by corporations in terms of brands. For this reason, corporations need strategic communication activities in order to maintain and improve their “images” (to become more popular, to have more consumers, etc.), which is formed in line with consumers’ own perceptions of the main or potential consumers that they classify their brands, and to raise themselves to the top of the list in the market. The brand which is enriched with social issues and universal ethical principles created within the system increases the value of the brand and the profitability in parallel. In line with the instrumental theory, it is understood that corporate social responsibility activities that add value to the brand, are effective public relations practices used to create the image. Good brand positioning in the eyes of society puts the organization ahead of its competitors and makes it easier to gain loyal customers and other stakeholders. For this reason, corporate social responsibility activities, which announce to the society that the brand is aware of an event or phenomenon related to the society and the world we live in, and that they are working towards it, are a plus value which increases the value and brand image of the corporation. This indicates that corporate social responsibility projects are easily used as tool to create, renew and maintain a brand image. In the analysis of “corporate social responsibility for brand image”, the corporate social responsibility of ETİ which is a well-established Turkish brand and producer of ready-to-eat food has been handled (Öztürk, 2023). It has been proven by scientific studies that various food additives are added to the content of packaged ready-to-eat food products in order to extend shelf life, color, increase aroma or for similar purposes and that these added food additives cause different effects on various organs of our body (Çalışır & Çalışkan, 2003). In particular, it has been observed that the consumption of such foods from infancy to childhood causes health problems in later ages (Küçük et. al., 2019). That is why ETİ has a “brand association” (Aaker, 1991) which causes and sustains an unhealthy life with the reason of ready-to-eat products it produces. For this reason unlike competing ready-to-eat food brands in Turkey with the same product inventory, ETİ has developed a project which is called “ETİ Yellow Bike” (<https://www.saribisiklet.com/>) focused on healthy living for the first time to recreate its image which attaches importance to healthy life. In other words, the corporate social responsibility has been used as a tool for the brand image.

3.3.2. Corporate social responsibility for reputation management.

While there is no generally accepted view on the concept of corporate reputation, there are various definitions (Olegario and McKenna, 2013). Reputation is a concept based on trust and belief, and in this direction, corporate reputation is expressed as the collective output of gaining belief and trust (Budd, 1994). Although some studies use the concept synonymously with corporate image, there is a difference between the two concepts. Image is the perception created by the business itself, which is desired to be positively adopted by the stakeholders. It is a necessary phenomenon for a business to create a brand. According to Aaker (1991), corporate reputation is a concept that increases the market value and profit margin of businesses. Strategic management theory also argues that corporate reputation increases corporate performance by creating sustainable competitive advantage (Devine and Halpern, 2001). Corporate reputation is a set of values that vary in order of importance depending on the priority expectations of different stakeholders of a business. Just as corporate reputation expresses the result in the eyes of the society as a result of the activities of a business, corporate social responsibility also refers to the practices which enable the formation of the feelings of belief and trust that will positively position that reputation in the consciousness of the society, and affect the economic return of the company. Today, if a business does not attach importance to corporate social responsibility studies, the corporate reputation of that business is seen as weak. This situation shows that businesses aiming a strong corporate reputation in line with their interests use corporate social responsibility studies as a tool. In the analysis of corporate social responsibility for reputation management”, the corporate social responsibility of Vestel which is a well-known Turkish multi-industry manufacturer has been examined (Öztürk, 2023). At the beginning of the covid pandemic, 7 workers have died at the Vestel factory in Manisa due to insufficient precautions². Subsequently, it has started laying off workers without justification³. As a result of all these events, lawsuits against Vestel have been reported in the press. In order to repair its damaged reputation,

²<https://ilerihaber.org/icerik/vestelde-iscilerin-cani-hice-sayildi-tepki-gosteren-isci-cikarildi-hic-kimse-asla-yalniz-yurumeyecek-129128.html>

³ <https://bianet.org/haber/vestel-100-verdigi-kadini-isten-cikardi-performansin-dusuk-235594>

Vestel has organized an international marathon⁴ in Manisa where its factory is located for the students with visual impairments during the week of the visually impaired. Vestel has announced that it will donate the proceeds from this marathon to visually impaired students by producing WeWalk, a smart cane which Vestel has developed for the visually impaired. In line with the news analyzed within the scope of the research, it has been determined that Vestel has tried to cover up the negative news about it and attracted the perception of its stakeholders to the marathon in order to repair its damaged reputation. In doing so, Vestel has also advertised its smart cane through this international marathon. It can be seen that Vestel has implemented a corporate social responsibility for its reputation management.

3.3.3. Corporate social responsibility for exchange value.

The concept of exchange value has been associated with the concept of corporate social responsibility for the first time in this study (Öztürk, 2023). Before indicating this association, it will be beneficial to clarify the exchange value.

The commodity has two basic characteristics: use value and exchange value (Marx, 2011). Although use value constitutes the material content of capital, it also constitutes the material carriers of exchange value. While use value is a utility-oriented value, exchange value is a quantitative value which varies according to time and place, in other words it is money. In Marx's (2011) words, as the value form of the commodity is developed, it has begun to function as money and become money-commodity. The main reason why the price of a product or service for the same benefit in the free market varies according to different times and places is that the exchange value varies according to time and place. Marx (2011) emphasizes that nothing can escape being purchasable by stating that everything is converted into money. In this context, the exchange value of everything subject to circulation appears as price. As Wallerstein (1983) puts it, "everything is commoditized". Today, everything is transferred into market relations. For this reason, social, social, environmental, etc. relations and values that are objectified within the market, as well as all phenomena that are in the public interest are commodified.

⁴ <https://www.vestelmanisayarimaratonu.com/tr>

As Marx (2011) points out, use values gain exchange value as they are subjected to circulation, in other words, as they pass from hand to hand (from the hands in which they have exchange value to the hands in which they acquire use value), and in this direction commodity formation takes place. Since the process of exchange involves a paradoxical set of relations, the gap between product and exchange value widens. At the same time, since exchange connects commodity producers, it integrates the global economy and directly increases the profits of the owners of capital. In this respect, commodity producers, whether large or small enterprises (and they feed off each other), always win. On the other hand, consumers are the ones to whom the final form of use value is transferred in exchange for exchange value. They are also the unconditional recipients of whatever is assigned to the exchange value, whether or not it is equivalent to use value.

Businesses make great use of public relations practices in order to gain exchange value. The most effective use of these practices, which facilitate various marketing and marketing communication activities, is corporate social responsibility activities. Corporate social responsibility mediates the exchange of goods and services for money. Just as money-commodity is the tool of exchange of quality into quantity, corporate social responsibility is the tool of exchange of quantity through which qualitative surplus value is transferred. The important thing in competition is to stand out among products with the same usage value, for example, in a supermarket and to be able to transfer the product to the consumer. For this reason, a product which has signed a corporate social responsibility project on the same shelf makes it easier to get ahead of its competitors. This is because, although corporate social responsibility activities do not add use value to the commodity, they provide exchange value. Market-serving research focuses on the question “how is the consumer affected?” In this direction, they work on added values for emotions and motives in addition to the quality that increases the use value of the commodity. For example, a commodity on the shelf with slogans such as “it is in your hands to save the environment with this product” comes forward the conscientious feelings triggering rather than its use value. Commodities with corporate social responsibility can be purchased not only by the target or potential audiences who use commodities with the same use value, but also by audiences who have never used that commodity in their lives, but are solely motivated by social sensitivity. For this reason, corporate social responsibility activities that mobilize social, environmental, etc. phenomena and conscientious senses are used as a tool of exchange values of commodities.

In this analysis of “corporate social responsibility for exchange value”, the corporate social responsibility of Maylo which is just one of the cleaning paper brands produced by Lila Group in Turkey has been handled in the light of C-M (commodity-money) exchange value (Öztürk, 2023). In the analysis, it has been searched that Lila Group, as a paper towel manufacturer, has different paper towel brands such as Sofia and Berrak in line with the consumer profile and product classification, except the Maylo brand. As a marketing strategy, it has been seen that Maylo, Sofia and Berrak brands are classified according to different consumer profiles. For this reason, corporate social responsibility related to education has been realized only for the Maylo brand in line with its consumer profile. The same corporate social responsibility has not seen in Sofia and Berrak brands of Lila Group. This means that in the context of strategic communication work in line with the consumer profile and product classification of the Maylo brand, a corporate social responsibility project has been developed for the C-M exchange value. In this direction, it can be seen that Maylo has realized the C-M exchange value with the CSR project implemented over the slogan “you can support education by purchasing this product” on its product packaging.

3.3.4. Corporate social responsibility for symbiosis.

The concept of symbiosis has been associated with the concept of corporate social responsibility for the first time in this study (Öztürk,2023). Before indicating this association, it will be beneficial to explain this concept.

Symbiosis which is a biological term, refers to the coexistence of two living things by helping each other as a single organism (Chertow, 2000). Although it is a biological term, the capital industry has adapted the term symbiosis to its own functioning as a result of the destruction of the environment, and the reduction of the natural resources used, especially by the technological and industrial transformations realized in the second half of the 20th century. The concepts of “industrial ecology” and “industrial ecosystem” which express that industrial activities are similar to ecological systems have been developed for the first time in 1989 by Frosch and Gallopoulos (Özkan, et al., 2018). Industrial ecology has been handled with different dimensions over time and interpreted in different ways. In 1995, Garner has stated that “industrial ecology” brings a systematic view to the interactions between industrial and ecological systems it covers an approach involving more than one discipline, and makes industrial systems resemble more effective and sustainable natural systems

(Özkan, et al., 2018). Expressing the same approach as industrial ecology, “industrial symbiosis” is defined as the exchange of matter and energy between two different and independent industrial enterprises, similar to that in nature (Chertow, 2000). In this direction, industrial symbiosis is a kind of industrial management system that brings together two or more industrial enterprises that are physically close to each other but work independently of each other, and which is a system making the input of the other one’s output, and that increases both environmental performance, competition and, as a result, economic power. This industrial system which is considered to support regional development, maintains both resource use and economic power.

Corporate social responsibility projects, which are public relations practices that are used effectively in the communication activities of this whole process, are the perfect fit for this job. As the purpose of the business is to generate profit from the commodity, corporate social responsibility projects ensure that the environmentally sensitive product is purchased by the environmentally sensitive consumer. These kind of productions have been reached to the consumers through corporate social responsibility over green marketing, ecologic marketing or zero-waste campaigns. Therefore, it can be seen that businesses which produce with industrial symbiosis directly engage in corporate social responsibility.

On the other hand, symbiosis is not only a concept that the industrial industry instrumentalizes in its corporate social responsibility projects based on recyclable production (circulation of raw material and waste), but also for other industrialized sectors. To reduce the symbiotic relationship of corporate social responsibility projects to the marketing communication of environmentally sensitive products would be to underestimate the power of the capitalist economy. This is because symbiosis can be seen in every field of capitalist industrialization. In this context, it is possible to see the symbiotic relationship of corporate social responsibility projects in various industries (sports industry, digital industry, health industry, fashion industry, etc.).

In this analysis of “corporate social responsibility for symbiosis”, the corporate social responsibility and production system of DEHA which is a recycling and recovery company in Turkey has been examined together. DEHA recycles the waste oils into biodiesel so that it is known as an environmentalist brand. However, since its earnings, profits, all income and expenses depend on this recycling facility, it is seen that its project aims to increase the profit of the enterprise by collecting and recycling waste, which is someone’s output but the

raw material of the enterprise. According to the report of the Biodiesel Industry Association (2019), “The amount of biodiesel obtained from vegetable waste oils collected from workplaces and homes in our country is 34 million liters and the economic value of this amount is 155 million TL”, the economic value of biodiesel converted from waste oils in our country is presented. When we look at the content of the project in this context, DEHA realizes the need for waste oil, which constitutes the basis of its business, in other words, the raw material has required for its production and trade, through the corporate social responsibility projects it has designed. The corporate social responsibility projects used by DEHA as a tool are expressed in environmentalist language in the context of collecting waste oil, providing food for stray animals (<https://www.skb.gov.tr/sakin-dokmeyin-kampanyasi-sokak-hayvanlarina-besim-sagliyor-s25063k/>) or protecting the seas (<https://images.app.goo.gl/Hi2g38iMwzrnszQV9>).

4. Capitalist activism and corporate social responsibility.

“Capitalist Activism” is a concept introduced for the first time in the purpose of this study. It refers that today’s corporations manipulate their target audiences in post-industrial and post-modern activist movements which they support or produce themselves for their own benefit, and turn them into supporters of the corporations. In this section, capitalist activism is clarified and it is explained that “capitalist activism” is also practiced in the activist movements that businesses support or produce themselves within the scope of corporate social responsibility activities, which are the subject of the study.

Since the starting point of this concept is activism, the concept of activism will firstly be examined and how it is transformed into capitalist activism will be explained. Activism is not limited to a certain ideology, but refers to all kinds of individual and social, public or informal activities that aim to create change in people’s lives (Bayat, 2006). Activism draws its power from collectivism, and for this reason, it has been seen in the literature review that the concept is also considered as social movements. From the historical process to the present, social movements have emerged from class struggles (Touraine, 1999).

Çoban (2009) sees activism in two forms: mainstream activism, which aims to transform power in a certain way, and micro-activism, which aims to dismantle power. While micro activism supports social movements against global capitalism and the global companies it

creates, mainstream activism supports social movements against making changes in the current order. In this regard, it would be correct to position post-industrial and post-modernist social movements within mainstream activism. Therefore, it can be understood that today's new social movements within the scope of mainstream activism are also produced, supported, managed or directed, covertly or overtly, by global businesses.

Public relations professionals play a role in the production, management or direction of an existing activist movement. The ways in which public relations professionals can direct an activist movement against the system for the benefit of business can be seen in the historical process. In 1913, nine thousand mine workers of the Rockefeller-owned Colorado Oil and Iron Company have gone on strike because of the poor working conditions and the deaths they suffered. As a result of their strike, mine workers have been evicted from the houses allocated for themselves so they have been obliged to build tent cities for themselves. A year later, twenty workers have been burned to death in a fire in one of these cities because of the cause of which is unclear. In this incident which is called "The Ludlow Massacre" in history, the Rockefellers' corporate reputation has been damaged. That's when Ivy Ledbetter Lee, one of the pioneers in the history of public relations, has been hired by the Rockefeller family to fix this damaged corporate reputation (Smith, 2005). Lee has directed worker activism in favor of the business, influencing newspaper editors and then public opinion leaders, in order to turn negative public opinions into positive ones. As can be understood from this case which has left its mark on history, it is clearly seen that public relations professionals directly serve the purpose of their stakeholders.

On the other hand, when it is in-depth looked at "capitalist activism", which is the concept put forward in this study, reveals that activism has shifted to the axis of capitalists and has accordingly been taken over by the ruling class. Accordingly, the main criteria for the formation of capitalist activism determined in this study are as follows: (1) Carrying out within post-industrial and post-modern movements of the capitalist activism as it is mentioned in the definition of capitalist activism. (2) Joining of businesses and institutions such to the macro activist movements as "activists" or formulating a new macro movement in line with their own views. (3) Creating "the perception that the businesses and institutions are together with society, that they agree with society's views" through the post-industrial and post-modern macro activist movements which by businesses and institutions instrumentalize for own benefits. (4) While creating this perception, being able of businesses

and institutions to make revisions or adjustments in their products and services, corporate identities, communication channels and designs for a certain period of time or permanently according to the macro movements they are involved in or have created (for example such as Mercedes-Benz’s designing of its logo in rainbow colors for “Pride” which is LGBTQ pride month” or Nike’s producing of the sneakers with Kapernick’s embroidered portrait for “Colin Kapernick’s anti-racism movement”). (5) Attracting of the businesses and organizations the attention of their target audience and stakeholders by creating awareness through these movements. (6) Being of businesses and institutions in a position of router and guider in these movements in order to realize their own objectives. (7) Instrumentalizing of businesses and institutions to their target audiences by making them stakeholders by mobilizing them over these movements in line with the goals they plan to achieve.

Table 2

The difference between activism and capitalist activism



Note. As seen at the table above which has been created in this study; while activism expresses oppression from the bottom to the top, in other words, from the ruled to the rulers, on the contrary capitalist activism expresses the oppression from the top to bottom, which is from the rulers to the ruled.

It is obvious that corporate social responsibility practices bring added value to businesses in areas such as brand building, corporate reputation, marketing, etc. Businesses exhibit defense against any situation that confronts them and will harm the business. The proactive aspects of businesses have enabled them to put their planned corporate social responsibility activities on their agenda before a problem arises, and even if it does, without being exposed

to activist pressures.⁵ Businesses can measure how long it will take for any problem they have caused to spread to the public and how much economic damage the negative situation will cause them. For example, they can launch a corporate social responsibility activity within the framework of an issue, whether the goods or services they produce are related to the environment or not, before activist pressure on the environment that the business harms. In these efforts, the enterprise itself assumes a kind of activist role. In this direction, the businesses give the message that “as a business, we are also sensitive, we are sensitive to the demands from the grassroots like an activist”. In fact, it would be more accurate to call this work “capitalist activism” rather than activism. Instead of confronting activists with their corporate social responsibility activities for capitalist activism, businesses somehow involve them in their own planned corporate social responsibility activities. Through corporate social responsibility, the reputation of the organization is not damaged, new customers and other new stakeholders are gained, and economic gains are made, while activist pressures are prevented. In this direction, corporate social responsibility implemented as professional by businesses, serve as a tool for capitalist activism.

CONCLUSION

This study with critical political economy perspective and interdisciplinary approaches has clarified that the concept of “social responsibility” has been transformed into the concept of “corporate social responsibility” in line with the capitalist economic system by detaching it from the contexts of etymologic, epistemologic and theologic. Besides, this study has handled CSR projects as an instrument for the purposes of the corporations in the light of instrumental use of reason and instrumental theory. In this direction, the purposes of corporate social responsibility activities that are instrumentalized for the benefit of corporations have been examined in line with the four titles determined and created in the study, and at the same time, the concept of “capitalist activism”, which clarifies that society and other stakeholders are instrumentalized by making it a participant of corporations through these CSR projects, has been put forward for the first time in this study.

⁵ Public relations practices are both proactive and reactive. In other words, work done before a problem occurs is proactive, while work done after a problem occurs is reactive.

In this study it has firstly been clarified that the concept of social responsibility has been eviscerated, institutionalized and legitimized in the historical process; therefore, the definitions of corporate social responsibility that have reached today have been shaped qualitatively and quantitatively according to the interests of corporations in both practical and theoretical terms. In this context, it has been proven that simultaneously with the definitions that have been transformed and legitimized within the capitalist economic system, corporate social responsibility projects are used as a kind of tool that serves the goals of corporations and that society is manipulated and transformed into a kind of participant for them through these projects. In this direction, in this study, a sample of the current corporate social responsibility projects implemented in Turkey is selected and examined to see how they are instrumentalized in line with the four objectives (brand image, reputation management, exchange value and symbiosis) identified in this research.

While this study brings a critical approach to corporate social responsibility projects which is an application of public relations studies, it has showed that today's corporations realizes "capitalist activism" which is a concept put forward for the first time in line with corporate social responsibility practices. Accordingly the concept of capitalist activism has indicated that the corporations make the society and other stakeholders a participant of the corporation by depending on the conditions and preferences they are in, with or without their consent (such as voluntarily or involuntarily / consciously or unconsciously / actively or passively / arbitrarily or compulsorily, etc.), in other words they make the society a kind of tool for the interests of the corporation. In this direction, "capitalist activism" has also been associated with the context of corporate social responsibility projects in this study. Therefore, in line with the objectives and practices of the analyzed corporate social responsibility projects, it has been determined that the institutions realize "capitalist activism" by making themselves "supporters, affiliates or suppliers" on the basis of manipulating the society to act in their interests.

Accordingly, it has been observed that "capitalist activism" is practiced in each corporate social responsibility project analyzed in this study. In addition, just as various categories and groupings have been made for the "concept of activism" in line with the studies conducted by different academicians in terms of conceptual aspects, it has been seen in this study that the concept of "capitalist activism" can be categorized and grouped within itself. For example, while ETİ and VESTEL have carried out "capitalist activism" within the activity

of their corporate social responsibility projects, MAYLO has carried out capitalist activism in the context of sensory branding “based on children’s education” within the scope of the marketing technique applied in its project. On the other hand, DEHA is seen to directly engage in “capitalist activism” by making industrial symbiosis based on ecological production. Because through its project, every individual or institution that provides recycling for its production becomes a collaborator for the company in parallel with its corporate social responsibility project. This indicates that the concept of “capitalist activism” can be classified and categorized within itself. As a result, the “capitalist activism” proposed in this research is associated with corporate social responsibility within the scope of the subject of the study. However, as stated above, since the concept can be grouped within itself and in line with various fields, it is envisaged that the concept of “capitalist activism” put forward in this study will be studied in future studies with a multidisciplinary approach (by considering it together with sociology, psychology, ecological production, industrial production, etc., as well as its sub-branches such as advertising and marketing within the disciplines of public relations and business administration) as it has been done in this study “in research that may be subject to each post-modern social movement in which individuals are made participants in line with the interests of businesses”.

In addition, in the context of another future research: In line with the analysis of this study, it has been seen that critical political economy research is needed to reveal how “doing good” in Islamic philosophy is transformed into today’s “Islamic Corporate Social Responsibility (ICSR)” projects.

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