



## Short communication

# MA and doctoral public relations research in Turkey (1984–2007): A quantitative study of dissertations contribution to public relations field

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, MA and doctoral dissertations (673) on public relations written at Turkish universities (1984–2007) are examined in order to gain an understanding of the level of the theses within the discipline and that subjects are studied, too. The conclusion is that their contribution to public relations' improvement and especially theory building has been negligible. Written theses are standing out the practical or operational, and no existence any dissertations related to public relations theory.

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## 1. Introduction

There is postgraduate study about public relations in Turkey, offered by major universities, especially in metropolises. The purpose of this study is to identify, find the contribution to public relations field, and content analyze the stream of MA and doctoral theses which are written about public relations.

## 2. Method

All of the MA and doctoral dissertations on public relations submitted at state and foundation universities in Turkey from 1984 (the date of the first thesis presented in the field YÖK Thesis Centrum catalog) to 2007 (1 April) partially were selected and total 673 theses were analyzed. We also selected those dissertations that make express reference to historical, theoretical, instrumental, strategic and tactical aspects of public relations, even when the name public relations is not explicitly used in titles. SPSS Version 11.5 for Windows is the statistical software used for data analysis.

Firstly, the following keywords were used to identify the dissertations: *public relations* and *communication sciences*. In the second stage of this content analysis was to draw up a list of topics and categories in order to classify each of the theses studied.

In this research, a coding sheet consisting of three categorical variables based on the existing literature were used. They are *introspective dissertations*, dissertations related to *practice and application of public relations*, and dissertations related to

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*theory development in public relations* and 36 subcategorical variables. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, timeline analysis, bibliometric analysis, and log-linear analysis were run to explore.

### 3. Findings

This research reveals that the year when the most research was submitted 60 MA theses in 2003 and 15 doctoral theses in 1999. At MA levels, one thesis has been prepared in 1984 but at doctorate degree, no thesis has been prepared between the years of 1984–1989. In total, it has been determined that in terms of prepared theses, the maximum number has been achieved in 2003, with 12.1% ( $n = 74$ ) and the minimum number was in 1984, with 0.2% ( $n = 1$ ). It can be observed a very big increase in terms of MA and doctorate thesis between the years of 1992–2007 with 93.2% ( $n = 570$ ). It has been ascertained that 468 (82.1%) of 570 MA theses and 102 (97.1%) of 105 doctoral dissertations have been prepared within this period. Between the years of 1984–1991, 41 (6.8%) theses were prepared. None of the foundation universities' public relations doctorate program has been opened up and no thesis has been prepared as well until today. Only one MA thesis was prepared up to the date we carried out our survey.

Marmara University is the first location for the submission of theses with 22.5% of the MA dissertations ( $n = 114$ ) coming from this university. Istanbul University is the second, making up 18.2% ( $n = 92$ ) of the MA dissertations written. The third university is Gazi University which is submission of the theses with 14% ( $n = 71$ ) of the MA dissertations. From the points of view the doctoral dissertations, Istanbul University is the first location for the submission of theses with 27.6% of doctoral dissertation ( $n = 29$ ). Marmara University is the second with 21.9% ( $n = 23$ ), and the third is Selçuk University with 17.1% ( $n = 18$ ) of the doctoral dissertations, respectively.

It was come into view that in terms of MA theses, they have been prepared with professor at the rate of 46% ( $n = 233$ ), with associate professor at the rate of 27.7% ( $n = 140$ ), with assistant professor at the rate of 23.9% ( $n = 121$ ) and 2.4% of them is unknown, on the other hand in terms of doctoral dissertations, they were prepared with professors at the rate of 77.1% ( $n = 81$ ), with associate professor at the rate of 16.2% ( $n = 17$ ), with assistant professor at the rate of 5.7% ( $n = 6$ ) and 1% ( $n = 1$ ) of them is unknown. Major part of the theses has been prepared with professors. However from the point of whether or not the thesis supervisors have studied in the field of public relations and have published any book or article within this field, it has been observed that 69 academician (65.7%) who are acting as doctorate supervisor and 345 academician (68.2%) who are acting as MA thesis supervisor had not been in any study within this field. It would not be very accurate to expect these academicians with such a low degree of study within public relations field to guide and act as a supervisor to the theoretical and other studies which contributes to the public relations. Therefore, it is certainly true to say for public relations teaching in Turkey, "some 'professors' of public relations with zero academic training in the subject area".

This research reveals that both MA and Ph.D. programs in Turkey dominated by women, who account for 60.7% ( $n = 307$ ) of MA theses written compared to 39.3% ( $n = 199$ ) of men. In Ph.D. program women submitted 53.3% ( $n = 56$ ) of doctoral theses, and men submitted 46.7% ( $n = 49$ ) of theses.

With regard to the content analysis for the topic categorization of the MA and doctoral theses, the vast majority dealt with issues relating to the practice and application of public relations (MA 66.6%,  $n = 337$ ; Ph.D. 52.4%,  $n = 55$ ), far outweighing those codified as introspective (MA 3.6%,  $n = 18$ ; Ph.D. 7.7%,  $n = 8$ ), noexistence the theory building dissertation, and the others that can be examined communication sciences (MA 29.8%,  $n = 151$ ; Ph.D. 40%,  $n = 42$ ), respectively. There is obviously preference for theses on applied public relations and there is not any dissertation about theory development of public relations.

In terms of all thesis ( $n = 611$ ), the rate handling public authorities of MA and doctorate theses were respectively 31.2% ( $n = 158$ ) and 28.6% ( $n = 30$ ). The rate handling private sector enterprises of MA and doctorate theses were respectively 21.3% ( $n = 108$ ) and 12.4% ( $n = 13$ ).

As we apply log-linear to the subject of whether or not the theses which were prepared by using of public relations expression in its title are aimed to public or private sector, a positive directional relation has been determined between public or private sector variant and existence of public relations expression in the title.

In terms of log-linear analysis of universities and thesis categories, no meaningful result has been determined. However, existence of a relation which is introspective in some universities in which thesis studies are made with a limited number and a reverse directional between the thesis categories handling public relations applications has been ascertained.

The prepared thesis types and introspective and public relations applications from the test categories have been found statically meaningful. Also there is a positive directional relation between MA theses with introspective and public relations applications. Briefly, as the number of MA theses increases, the number of public relations applications will be increased too.

Public relations and history, two of the subcategories, are efficient and statically meaningful categories. Since their coefficients are marked as (–), they are effective to negative direction. In has been determined that there is a positive directional interaction between women and public relations applications with respect to the log-linear evaluation realized between thesis categories and gender. Namely women have prepared more theses aimed to public relations applications. Furthermore, women with introspective thesis categories as well as public relations applications out of gender and thesis categories are meaningful. Dispersion of men as to the thesis categories is not important.

It has been observed that there is no interactivity in terms of log-linear analysis between gender and subcategories. Only social responsibility and ethics as well as public relations applications are important.

Of the 611 theses analyzed 58.1% ( $n = 355$ ) used the term “*public relations*” in the title. It is occurred that especially with respect to application theses, the studies are made by putting the word of public relations next to any word. E.g. public relations in construction sector, public relations in librarianship, archive and public relations, etc.

#### **4. Conclusion**

A general increment has been occurred in terms of MA and doctoral dissertations after 1990s. However this increment was mainly emerged with the theses relating to public relations applications. This indicates that public relations is still rated as a application area and communication media and no doctorate thesis has been prepared regarding to theoretical development in public relations. Although introducing date of public relations into Turkey is coming across to 1960s, it is not possible the studies relating to other subjects of public (such as developing theory) exclusive of public relations application to be performed due to the increment of academic studies relating to this subject mostly in 1990s, rareness of educated academicians on this subject, in spite of increasing the number of communication faculties, distribution of very limited number of lecturer between the faculties and increasing of their work loads. In consequence of these factors, theses concentrate on public relations applications. Practice and application dissertations are rather well-developed with a dominant focus on implementing specific programs and campaigns and a predominantly technical approach to public relations.

It was determined that MA and doctorate programs regarding to public relations had been prepared in the universities which do not have public relations MA and doctorate programs as well. And this issue appears as a matter which needs to be put emphasis on in terms of quality and contributions of theses which were directed by thesis supervisors that have not studied sufficiently about public relations and students that have not received any education on the subject of public relations.