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Organizational ımage perceptions of higher education students

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Colleges and universities rely on their image to attract new members. Organizational image is the total of thoughts, emotions and perceptions resulting from clear conclusions of information formed in the minds of stakeholders as a result of communication with the institution about that institution and its elements. The purpose of this study is to determine if the organizational image of university changes according to the gender, programme, academic achievement and socio cultural activities based on the opinions of the students at Education Faculty. The method is a descriptive model research as it measures organizational image of the participants of the research in a specific moment. The population of the study consisted of a total of 5660 students in the spring semester of the 2013-2014 academic year. The sample of the study was 3850 (%68) students studying at the Education Faculty of Uludag University, chosen by random sampling. The instrument was composed of two sections, included the Personal Information Form that was prepared to collect personal data and second section included 60 items aiming to determine the university's organizational image perception. ANOVA, Mann Whitney- U and Kruskall Wallis were used for the data analysis. The organizational image perceptions were varied according to the gender, programme, socio cultural activities and academic success levels of students at each subscale. The organizational image level of the university was "moderate" (X=2.62; sd=0,56) according to education faculty students' perceptions. The students perceived the "general view and physical infrastructure" (X=2.15) and provided services (X=2.45) at very low level. However "educational quality" (X=2.78) and "social responsibility" (X=3.15) at moderate level. When gender and academic success was taken into consideration, there was not any significant difference between students' organizational image perceptions. However for programme and socio cultural activities meaningful significant difference was found. According to the results obtained, in order to upgrade organizational image perceptions of education faculty students, univerity management is required to take the necessary measures.

Key words: Organizational image, perceptions, higher education, students, university.

INTRODUCTION

Today, one of the most important factors affecting the field of higher education is that the competition is gradually becoming globalized in every field. Global competition has become an element of pressure on universities

becoming competitive and increasing their organizational performance both at national and international levels while reviewing themselves in terms of goals, structure, process and outputs and brings new initiatives about how universities should be managed (Flavian et al., 2005). Circumstances in Turkey as many other Euroepan countries, such as financial restrictions, changes in the youth population and their requests, student exchange programmes via Erasmus+, adaptability to the Bologna requirements and quality certification, the increasing number of private universities force almost all univerisites to rearrange their structures and the incorporeal image is a key resource for this purpose. Although universities share some characteristics with their corporate peers, the nature of their business is very different and they do not function under the same parameters (Cerit, 2006; Lewison and Hawes, 2007; Luque-Martinez and DelBarrio-Garcia, 2009). For this reason, this article focuses on perceptions of the students' –the primary stakeholders- internal image of Uludağ university and made some recommendations for the university managers.

Image is commonly considered to be an immediate, more short-term, external stakeholder perception founded on impressions and attitudes toward the organization (Scott and Jehn, 2003; Veloutsou et al., 2004; Brown et al., 2006; Heding et al., 2009). However, organizational image can be defined as the sum of the quality of products and services produced, activities organized and successes achieved by an organization since its establishment until present day, and behaviors in the member-manager relations, relations with the environment and responsibilities felt against the society, personal experiences about the organization, people's level of being informed about the organization, intra-organizational communication, people's experience and works and effects left by the organization on the target audience (Arpan et al., 2003; Roberts, 2005; Melewer and Akel, 2005; Paden and Stell, 2006; Chandler et al., 2007; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Alves and Raposo, 2010). Karaosmanoglu and Melewar (2006:198) define organizational image as, "the set of meanings by which an object is known and through which people describe, remember, and relate to it. That is, it is the net result of the interaction of a person's beliefs, ideas, feelings, and impressions about an organization at a particular moment in time". Organizational image does not only develop based on tangible and physical elements related to appearance, but it is also affected by visual, auditory and behavioral elements.

In university administration decisions, it is important to consider image as representations of reality among faculty and students because that universities spend serious amounts of resources to increase their quality and images. To create a successful image, it is necessary to ask organization stakeholders for their comments and determine a communication strategy accordingly. If an organization does not follow its stakeholders continuously and receive feedback regularly at appropriate times and become unsuccessful, it is nearly impossible to create a desired image in stakeholders. Starting from here, it can be stated that university administrators should determine the current image and follow it continuously. It is observed that interest in studies on the organizational images of universities has been gradually increasing starting from the 1990s on both outside such as how institutional image is received and negotiated by audiences (Kazoleas et al., 2001; Ivy, 2001; Arpan et al., 2003; Melewer and Akel, 2005; Paden and Stell, 2006; Chandler et al., 2007; Sung and Yang, 2008; Heding et al.2009; Luque-Martinez&DelBarrio-Garcia, 2009); how institutional image influences college selection (Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001; Palacio et al., 2002; Cubillo et al., 2006; Pampaloni, 2010); and the impact of institutional image on student satisfaction (Helgesen and Nesset, 2007; Alves and Raposo, 2010) and inside Turkey (Saracel et al., 2001; Ors, 2003; Bakan and Buyukbese, 2004; Cerit, 2006; Orer, 2006; Erkmen and Cerik, 2007; Polat 2011).

For the last two decades, the higher education sector in Turkey, similar to as happened in the USA and other European countries, has experienced quite profound changes. As a result, higher education institutions have been left no choice but to give service in a cutthroat market and with decreasing economic resources and, while giving this service, meet the expectations of potential teaching staff members and students giving their choices more rationally at maximum level. In Turkey, a great majority of higher education activities has undertaken by state universities. However, the number of private universities is increasing rapidly. In an increasingly competitive environment and meet the demands of parents and students quality protect, it has become a necessity for higher education organizations to measure their image and be to ascertain how the constructed image is formed and how it can be modified in order to better reflect the intended image. People make up their thoughts about the organization greatly as a result of their interactions with the organization. For institutions of higher education, image is important because it helps create a positive view of the organization, which determines if potential members are attracted enough to want to become affiliated (Pampaloni, 2010:21). For this reason, in the determination of the organizational image level of an organization, it is necessary to get information from all stakeholders who are in intensive reltionship with the organization. From these stakeholders, we have selected the student as the focus of this article. The reasons for this selection, apart from their primary and internal character, students represent a group with great influence capacity and repercussions on the other groups. It is important then for institutions to understand what students desire and expect from the institution they

chose.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to determine organizational image of the university based on the Education Faculy students' views. For this purpose, answers were sought for the following questions:

1. At what level are the organizational image perceptions of the students in relation to the university?
2. Do students' perceptions of organizational image change significantly according to their gender?
3. Do students' perceptions of organizational image change significantly according to their being day classes (morning shift) or evening classes (night shift)?
4. Do students' perceptions of organizational image change significantly according to their academic grade point average (GPA) scores?
5. Do students' perceptions of organizational image change significantly according to their participation in socio cultural activities ?

The limitation of the this study is that it focused solely on undergraduate students' perspective studying at education faculty of Uludag University.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and population

As this is a descriptive research for it measures the image perceptions of the participants at a single time, quantative research methods were used. The population of the research was education faculty students at Uludag University in Bursa. The population of the study was consistent of a total of 5660 students in the spring semester of the 2013-2014 academic year.

Randomly selected 3850 undergraduate students (%68) who provided anonymous responses were the sample of the study. 73.29% (n=2822) of the group was composed of females and 26.60% (n=1028) of males. 63.25 % (n=2435) of the students are attending regular day classes whereas 36.75% (n= 1415) is attending evening classes. The academic grade point avarege scores of the students varied considerably. 9.76% (n=376) of the students have 1.99 or lower. 32.41% (n=1248) have GPA between 2.00-2.99, 42.25% (n=1627) have 3.00-3.49 and 15.55% (n=599) have 3.50 and 4.00. More than ¾ of the students (n=3178) do not participate in any socio cultural activities and a member of a student social union or club at the campus; however 17.45% (n=672) of the students do.

Data collection

The organizational image perceptions of the students at education faculty in relation to the university were determined through an instrument developed by the researcher with the aim of measuring images of higher education institutions and by taking into consideration the related literature (Kazoleas et. al., 2001; Pampaloni,

2010; Polat, 2011) and the unique dynamics of Uludag University. When preparing the instrument it was examined by a specialist group of 8, composed of three teaching staff members, 61 students and the researcher in terms of readability, understandability and grammar; then it was revised and necessary corrections were made. After having evaluated the items in the data collection instrument one by one in the direction of the specialists' opinions, necessary modifications were made and the instrument was made ready to use. The instrument was composed of two sections. The first section included the Personal Information Form prepared to collect personal info about the students and the second section included 60 statements aiming to determine the organizational image perception of the university.

To measure the organizational image 5-point Likert type with 1 being 'strongly disagree'and 5 being 'strongly agree,'grading was used. In the study, in order to determine the factor structure, the exploratory factor analysis technique was used. Moreover, for the whole of the scale, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was determined to be $\alpha=.921$. Furthermore, the factor loads of the items included in the scale were calculated through using the varimax method and they were found to vary between $\alpha=.62$ and $\alpha=.84$. Although in the factor analysis employed the image scale was gathered under 8 dimensions, in this study 4 of the sub dimensions were examined. These are I.general view and physical infrastructure ($\alpha=.871$) II.provided services ($\alpha=.925$) III.educational quality ($\alpha=.786$) and IV.social responsibility ($\alpha=.902$).

Data analysis

In order to determine the image perception of the students, a mean analysis was carried out. When interpreting means, the intervals were taken as 1.00-1.79 "very low", 1.80-2.59 "low", 2.60-3.39 "moderate", 3.40-4.19 "high", 4.20-5.00 "very high". ANOVA, Mann Whitney-U and Kruskall Wallis tests were applied. The significance of the difference between the groups was looked into through Tukey HSD and Levene tests.

RESULTS

According to the students of the Education Faculty, the organizational image of university was at "moderate" level (X=2.62; sd=0,56). The students perceived the "general view and physical infrastructure" sub-dimension of the organizational image belonging to the university at the lowest level (X=2.15; sd=0,81), and this was followed, in order of frequency, by the images of, "provided services" (X=2.45; sd=0,67), "educational quality" (X=2.78; sd=0,79), "social responsibility" (X=3.15; sd=1,12) (Table 1).

No significant difference was found between the female and male students' organizational image perceptions [U=3601,2; p>0.05] related to the university. In the sub-dimensions of general view and physical infrastructure [U=1678, p=.295], educational quality [U=1617, p=.056] and provided service [U=1534, p=.071] there is not a meaningful significance among male and female students. However on social responsibility there is a meaningful significance among male students [U=1531,5 p=.032]. Males (X=3.51) have more positive image perception than females (X=3.21).

Table 1. Organizational image and gender.

	Scale	Gender	n	X	U	p
Sub dimensions	Organizational ımage	Female	2822	2.57	3601,2	.064
		Male	1028	2.77		
	General view and physical ınfrastructure	Female	2822	2.18	1678.0	.295
		Male	1028	2.46		
	Educational quality	Female	2822	2.85	1617.0	.056
		Male	1028	2.54		
	Social responsibility	Female	2822	3.21	1531.5	.032
		Male	1028	3.51		
	Provided service	Female	2822	2.86	1534.0	.071
		Male	1028	2.67		

Table 2. Organizational image and programme.

	Scale	Programme	n	X	t	p
Sub dimensions	Organizational Image	Day Class	2435	3.34	1.318	.039
		Evening Class	1415	2.17		
	General view & Physical Infrastructure	Day Class	2435	3.14	2.393	.018
		Evening Class	1415	2.11		
	Educational Quality	Day Class	2435	2.87	2.492	.014
		Evening Class	1415	2.46		
	Social Responsibility	Day Class	2435	2.87	1.776	.005
		Evening Class	1415	2.34		
	Provided Service	Day Class	2435	2.46	2.860	.023
		Evening Class	1415	2.09		

A meaningful significant difference [t(3849)=1.318, p<0.05] was found between the day and evening class students' organizational image perceptions related to the university. In the sub-dimensions of general view and physical infrastructure [t(3849)=2.393; p=.018], educational quality [t(3849)=2.492; p=.014], social responsibility [t(3849)= 1.776; p=.005], provided service [t(3849)= 2.860; p=.023] day class students perceive significantly more positive images (Table 2).

Since Levene Test indicated that there was not a significant difference between the variances of the score series of the GPA groups [F=1.739, p>0.05], from the result of the one-way analysis of variance, it was determined that the GPA groups had no significant effect on general view and physical infrastructure [F=1.136, p>0,05]. On the other hand, the GPA factor had a significant effect on educational quality [F=1.230, p<0,05].

According to Tukey multiple comparison test, the significant difference was found between the 2.00-2.99 mean (X=2,45) and the 3.00-3.49 mean X=2,90 [p=,021]. On social responsibility subscale [F=1.224, p<0,05] the significant difference was found between the 2.00-2.99 mean (X=2,45) and the 3.00-3.49 mean (X=3,13) [p=,043]. On provided services subscale [F=1.245, p<0,05]. the significant difference was found between the 1.99 and lower mean (X=2,17) and the 3.00-3.49 mean (X=2,84) [p=,038] (Table 3).

A meaningful significant difference [t(3849)=1.318, p<0.05] was found between the students who participate in social activities and the ones who do not. In the sub-dimensions of general view and physical infrastructure [t(3849)=1.185; p=.000] the students who participate in social activities have more positive image perceptions (X=2.03). However on educational quality [t(3849)=1.776;

Table 3. Organizational image and GPA.

	Scale	GPA	n	X	F	p	
Sub dimensions	Organizational Image	1.99 andlower(A)	376	2.12	1.739	.617	
		2.00-2.99(B)	1248	2.48			
		3.00-3.49(C)	1627	2.93			
		3.50 -4.00(D)	599	3.21			
	General view and Physical Infrastructure	1.99 andlower(A)	376	2.30	1.136	.875	
		2.00-2.99(B)	1248	2.41			
		3.00-3.49(C)	1627	2.87			
		3.50 -4.00(D)	599	2.93			
	Educational Quality	1.99 andlower(A)	376	2.43	1.230	.021	B-D
		2.00-2.99(B)	1248	2.56			
		3.00-3.49(C)	1627	3.18			
		3.50 -4.00(D)	599	2.90			
	Social Responsibility	1.99 andlower(A)	376	2.05	1.224	.043	B-C
		2.00-2.99(B)	1248	2.45			
		3.00-3.49(C)	1627	3.13			
		3.50 -4.00(D)	599	3.21			
	Provided Service	1.99 andlower(A)	376	2.17	1.245	.038	A-C
		2.00-2.99(B)	1248	3.01			
		3.00-3.49(C)	1627	2.84			
		3.50 -4.00(D)	599	2.78			

p=.009]; social responsibility [t(3849)=1.591; p>.007]; and provided service [t(3849)=1.096; p=.004] the students who do not participate in social activities have more positive perceptions about the university image (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

The main results obtained from this research is that the organizational image of university is measurable. The results yielded that the perceived organizational image of Uludağ University is moderate among education faculty students. Of the image dimensions, general view and physical infrastructure and provided services were perceived "low"; while educational quality and social responsibility images were perceived "moderate".

Although gender did not cause a significant difference in total organizational image perception, general view and physical infrastructure and educational quality subscales the male had higher perception than the female. On provided services subscale the female had higher perception. However on social responsibility subcale male students had significantly more positive image perceptions than the female students. Organizational

image perceptions did not show any statistically significant differences by gender similarly, in the studies made by Uğurlu and Ceylan (2013) and Cerit (2006). However, Sisli and Kose (2013) found out that male students have significantly more positive perceptions of organizational image towards their university where as in Polat's (2011) and İbicioğlu's (2005) studies female students share more positive perceptions.

The programme that the students attend was very important. Both on total scale and at all subscales students' perceptions of organizational image showed a general tendency to decline on every sub dimension at evening programme students. This is not a very surprising result for the university. Evening class students come to univeristy between 17:00 and 23:30. The level of interaction with the teaching staff, to get service from the other staff at the faculty, to benefit from the opportunities of university is very limited for the evening programme students. This suggests that the university is not able to present the same conditons for the evening programme students.

When academic success was taken into consideration, it was determined that the GPA groups had no significant effect on total scale and general view and physical

Table 4. Organizational image and socio cultural activity

	Scale	Participation	n	X	t	p
Sub dimensions	Organizational Image	Yes	672	3.64	1.023	.002
		No	3178	2.61		
	General view and physical Infrastructure	Yes	672	2.03	1.185	.000
		No	3178	1.86		
	Educational Quality	Yes	672	2.14	1.776	.009
		No	3178	2.34		
	Social Responsibility	Yes	672	1.97	1.591	.007
		No	3178	3.01		
	Provided Service	Yes	672	2.00	1.096	.004
		No	3178	2.47		

infrastructure subscale, whereas had a significant effect on educational quality, social responsibility and provided services. In all these three subscales the students who had higher GPA scores had more positive perceptions about the universities' organizational image. University image differ for each group of academic success. This finding corroborates the theoretical background whereby each group builds an image regarding its own interests and contacts established with the corresponding institution.

Another important finding of the study is that social responsibility caused a significant difference in perceived image between the students who participated in socio cultural activities and who did not at total and general view and physical infrastructure subscale. While the students who participated in socio cultural activities, student clubs and unions perceived image of university was higher, the case was just the opposite for the ones who did not participate in socio cultural activities. Moreover at educational quality, social responsibility and provided services subscales the students who never participated in socio cultural activities had significantly higher perceptions than the other students. Bolat (2006) cited universities attention to social responsibility is very influencal on organizational image. Also Helgesen and Nesset (2007) have found that university's contribution to the society via socio cultural avtivities and social responsibility projects is quite important on organizational image. Therefore, the universities are required to be in a healthy relationship with the community to create an impression that may be perceived in a positive way they. University administrators should meet the cultural needs with a variety of activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If higher education institutions have to compete through

image, the first step to take is to measure the university image held by its students. The results of organizational image studies have gained interest among policy makers and university administrators for planning, resource, allocation, budgeting, and even accreditation efforts. These measures should be taken to increase the quality of education.

Therefore, organizational image is perceived by internal and external stakeholders of the educational organization and implementation of relational and causal research on organizational image is recommended. The images were formed by students, will be effective in assessment related to the university. Therefore, universities are required to create a positive and strong image to perform their functions. As well as in other service areas a competitive environment is composed among universities. Due to the reduction of public funding to succeed in competition between educational organizations has become even more important. That competition reveals the necessity to develop different strategies except for teaching and research for universities. One of that strategy is to create a positive organizational image.

Physical infrastructure of schools can be improved and should be updated continually to keep up with changing conditions. Univerity managers should pay attention to the campus esthetic and social needs of their students. The service quality (education, accommodation, etc.) should be improved. Schools should participate more in social responsibility projects. Libraries, sports facilities and social facilities could be improved. The quality of staff should be improved. The corporate image of schools should be measured and evaluated continually; good image dimensions should be maintained and lacking dimensions should be improved.

Image management is fundamental to good governance of universities. It is therefore necessary to know the image that students have and know how that has been

built, knowing what attributes are used, and weights allocated. This study has identified these at one university. Based on the obtained models, other institutions might consider whether these attributes are those their students value and how they should address the building of their images.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflicts of interest.

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