

# THE PERCEPTION OF REALITY AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE IN THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*The aim of public-relations is to effect thoughts and behaviors of human in the context of communication management. That the thoughts and behaviors are effected is dependent on how the realty is perceived. The purpose of this study is to acknowledge about the structure and characteristic of the target mass in the process of the mass being effected. Therefore, it will shed a light on how people manipulate knowledge in material preparation concerning target mass.*

**Keywords:** *Perception of the Reality, Behavior Changing, Target Mass, Public-relation, Communication Management.*

## ÖZET

*Halkla İlişkilerin amacı, iletişim yönetimi bağlamında insan düşünce ve davranışını etkilemektir. Düşünce ve davranışların etkilenmesi ise gerçeğin nasıl algılandığına bağlıdır. Bu çalışmanın amacı hedef kitlenin etkilenme sürecindeki yapı ve özellikleri konusunu tanımak ve ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu bağlamda bu çalışma insanlar hedef kitleye dönük materyal hazırlama sürecinde bilgiyi nasıl manipüle ettiklerine ışık tutacaktır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Gerçeğin Algılanması, Davranış Değişikliği, Hedef Kitle, Halkla İlişkiler, İletişim Yönetimi.*

## Introduction

The whole main aim of human behaviors is satisfaction and benefit oriented. Human beings undergo a period of communication so as to reach their aim. In this study, communication, reality and the perception of reality and the

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transfer of language which is the unique medium to perceive reality and the usage of these so-called facts in the field of public relations are mentioned.

## **1. Communication**

Communication is the basic value of human life. This is because communication takes place in every phase of life no matter which profession people have. Namely, communication and the concept of life are principally interrelated. People can stay current on the condition that they improve their level of communication. When the situation of developed societies is examined, their being culturally conscious about the shared values and having sound relationships among the individuals raise valid proofs for their level of development. Therefore, it is likely to become a developed society when utmost attention is paid to improve communication skills. The role of communication extends beyond its simplest function of making people arrive at negotiations in their daily lives. Every single distinction between people such as the generation gap between youngsters and elders, the gender distinction, the status distinction between the rich and the poor hinders communication. Another main challenge to communication is the lack of understanding between sides. The reason of being unable to communicate is generally referred as the fault of the other side. Besides, people claim that the other side lacks understanding due to ignorance, bad intentions and carelessness. In order to overcome the communication gap between all varieties of social strata, genders and generations the concept of communication should be well-defined with regard to its great importance in social relations since all the clash between individuals is a reflection of being unable to improve better strategies of communication.

What are the main reasons of conflict and lack of communication?

## **2. Perception and Reality**

People lead their lives in a social and natural environments and derive a way of living which is peculiar to themselves. Everything that surrounds people constitutes the environment and it becomes the reality of people which is sensed, heard, seen or smelled. People perceive reality via senses and they have an image of the environment in their minds.

The reflections of the sensory organs in the brain stimulate signals most of which keep their existence. These signals result in a world of imagination and

memories. Nevertheless, the faculty of perception is never the same with a camera since people's perceptions exhibit a variety. It can not be said that everything that is seen is perceived. Two very different responses can be obtained when people are questioned about their perceptions on the same image. In brief, the way a person perceives forms his difference. Perception is something beyond a physical being and many important clues can be obtained through examining what a person perceives and the way he perceives it (Adler, 2002, 66).

In other words, people may perceive things in a different way and form a variety of ideas from these perceptions. The underlying reason of difference between perception and meaning difference can be better internalized through the findings that Professor Manfred Zimmermann of Heidelberg University, Medical Institute. Zimmermann has a very effective point. The human eye has 26 billion bytes of squares (Sinnesindrücke) per second and only 10 million of those bytes can reach the brain through neurons. Approximately 1 million bytes are transmitted via ears, several hundred thousands via nose and tongue. In addition to these, 12 million bytes of information is transmitted to the brain through the remaining parts of the body. However, the brain has the capacity to process 40 bites of all (Braun, 2004). The general opinion about the brain is that the more information is received the more is perceived. What can be drawn from Zimmermann's research is that the brain does not process information in this way. On the contrary, less input is of great importance. That is to say, level of perception is clear and dense when the brain can filter more. It filters many images coming through the eyes and perceives certain stimuli. These so-called stimuli are the ones that attract the attention of the individual or are the ones that the individual believes that he needs and relates with his past experiences.

In this respect, it is clear that two people who are exposed to the same environment display a different way of perception and thought and behavior models as their needs, fields of interests, backgrounds, social and psychological patterns are not the same. To conclude, 'truth' is subjective.

Accordingly, two different periods of perceptions reveal:

**Emotional perception:** When we perceive an object, we not only draw a parallel between the image in our minds and itself but also make subjective evaluations such as love or hate and good or bad etc... In this context, perception functions as a cumulative of the past life experiences, informational background and the stimulating faculties of a person. One's vision of life is made up of

symbols, beliefs, ideologies, faith and life experiences. Selective perception is a subjective reflection of life that people lead and directs individuals' education cultural beliefs and traditions. In general, life itself is the core of an individuals tendencies and has a great influence on relations. Every individual perceives things according to his needs, expectations, values and culture" (İnceoğlu, 1999: 44-45).

Everybody has his own reality; in other words, everyone's mind map is different from one another. We have a variety of mind maps that serves for our education, career planning, political opinions, religious beliefs, work lives, economic backgrounds and our relationships with our families, colleagues and customers. Our mind maps are of vital importance for us. Therefore, we are ready to reflect our inner world by frowning or raising our tone of voice for very minor issues and we can even start battles. To summarize, these mind maps give a meaning to our lives and this is the beginning of the problem (see Braun, 2004: 33-34).

How are these mind maps formed and why are they so important?

During the period of perception individuals regard themselves both similar to the physical world around and constitute a form of physical world in which his individual rules play the dominant role.

It can be inferred that we have another concept of world in our minds that is formed through our perception of the world around us. From time to time, these two perceptions may take each other's place. In fact this is our own style of perception and may be regarded as a reflection of what we understand from truth. This reflection is smaller and very different from the real one since we ignore most of the reality consciously. This helps us to organize ourselves and world easily. Communicational problems emerge in the stage of mind mapping. We, in fact, lead our lives not in the real world but the world we formed. We sometimes act in a way that our world is the mere reflection of the reality. We defend the values of our world and never tend to negotiate when our behaviors are concerned. 'The most significant reason of having beliefs, being in pursuit of different political ideologies and serving for specific goals is that all of them belong to ourselves. This means more or less the same with what Erdoğan states: All these rules and regulations are of great importance neither because they bring us joy, justice or virtues nor they are sent by God, church, a sultan or members of

the parliament but they are valuable since they belong to us or our society' (Erdoğan, 2002: 73).

This attitude is the main reason of lack of communication since what we mean by an object may not be same with another's. 'Even though we live in the same environment, every one of us live in a different world' states Schoppenauer. Additionally, Paul Valery has another remark on the same subject matter: "I live a different world within me" (Braun, 2004: 34).

Every person perceives the world in a subjective way from the others.

### **3. The Effect of Perception on Human Behavior**

Human experiences are subjective. We have to benefit from our mind maps by freeing ourselves from prejudices. In this way, we gain the chance to select things and a broad perspective which serve as the basis of a successful communication.

We can only have a meaningful period of communication on the condition that we share our ideas with others, pay attention to other's ideas and give enough space to different perceptions. While doing this we must bear in mind that there is always the possibility of misunderstanding and misperception. In addition, this necessitates a change in behavior and attitude. However, it needs a great amount of effort to alter our behaviors and attitude.

"An individual's perspective of life is made up of his experiences, his knowledge about the world and the responses he receives from the questions he asked himself. As a result of this an individual's perception and truth he gained from both internal and external world defines his physical output of internal life. The more stratified the relationship is, the more an individual participates human activities" (Elias, 1993).

In fact people live in their inner world not in the physical world outside and his inner world determines his relationship with the world outside. Therefore, they make inferences out of their inner world.

Our prejudices determine our relationships and behavioral patterns. What people think about what they see and how they behave do not reflect reality but are the scheme of their inner world. In a way they see what is in their mind.

Besides all these, people are incapable of perceiving the environment completely. People's being selective in perception stands on an individual basis, such as insufficiency of sensory organs, inability to perceive magnetic waves, radiation and UV rays and it also has a social basis such as an individual's being incapable of sensing the outside world or ignoring his environment (Schulz, 1989: 240).

#### **4. The Formation of Reality**

Human behaviors are formed according to their way of perceiving the environment. In today's world artificial social environments provide societies with a variety of behavior patterns. To illustrate, the mass media figure out its own reality and put forward brand new physical and social realities and the needs, behaviors and ideas of people change accordingly. The main reason of these changes is people's being influenced by the newly formed physical and social environment. Another underlying idea behind this change is the possibility to change people's mind maps and behaviors and ideas by means of sign systems.

While perceiving the environment, an individual selects the most charming, important and necessary thing for himself. In this respect, there is an urgent need to form the messages in the most attractive way. People need to feel the difference. Trying to think and feel in the way that target people do is essential.

Our perceptions and thoughts are organized by means of variance management. In this period, giving an identity to the differences that the people figured out successfully plays a major role. These important differences regarding the society itself are related to life and behaviors and the societies get their start with these differences to solve the problems.

There is an inevitable need to point out the perceived truth within different perspectives to make essential changes in thoughts and behaviors of people. As soon as the perspectives change, the perceptions, thoughts and behaviors will change accordingly.

#### **5. The Role of Language in the Perception of Truth**

The truth can be limited by the help of symbol concept, however, the conflict between daily experiential truth and concrete world emerges. The reality

can only be experienced or learned and transmitted through symbols.” Signs are not only simple transmitters of knowledge. On the contrary, they function as interactive medium of communication.” The so-called reality” is a result of communication” states Watzlawick (Watzlawick 1977).

Berger and Luckmann pay attention to the meaning of truth that is transmitted through symbols and claim that reality is not directly perceived via experience but rather through a symbolic meaning. It can be stated that several models are organized formerly (Watzlawick, 1977).

Language is static itself- it can never change the place of an object or it can not go through a period of process. Nonetheless, when a meaning form is transmitted it has the capacity to stimulate action since the productive characteristics of concepts result in human behavior both in a positive and negative way.

In this way, people form their lives, renew their lives or improve their lives (...). They learn about themselves through relationships between themselves and their environment. At the same time they understand the world by means of relationships between concepts. They make distinctions in their environments and form a harmony. All of these reveal an “I” and a “you” and an understanding of the world. The major function of the language demonstrates itself in here: The words and concepts provide a classification of life and realizes the dynamic harmony between people and environment. The type of concept and its function form a kind of world within the minds of people. Language has an effect on spiritual life and it is the bridge between the inner and the outsider world (see Aeble, 1981).

## **6. The Rationale behind Public Relations**

The main aim of Public Relations is to change the opinions and behaviors of the target people. The change is only possible if people are persuaded towards change. There are various theories on persuading people. The very beginnings of the researches were conducted by Hovland and they focused on behavioral change as basic dependent variable. The other researches emphasized the availability for the message, perceiving, understanding, keeping of the message in mind and transferring it into human behaviors. The current researchers conducted researches on the distinction between behavioral concepts and behavior-oriented intentions, beliefs and attitudes (Oktay, 1996).

Public Relations is a composite of periods involving studies, actions and changes. It is a period of searching, planning, implementing and evaluation (feedback) (Kogan, 1973).

If the performers of public relations form their relations with the target people on a systematic basis, they can have a long term positive image of their institutions. Public Relation experts may not be able to revolutionize the world but they may alter people's perspectives and worlds.

In today's world of finite possibilities, all the companies, institutions, organizations and associations have to have a well-planned program of public relations. The experts are both representatives of their company's benefits and they strive to form an effective image and maintain it. To conclude, there is a need for positive atmosphere. The experts enlighten people about the goals and the practices of the company concerned. They have to draw people's attention to the company and constitute a positive atmosphere. (...)

"Public Relations is the management of communication" (Schmidt, 2000). However, all the relations and efforts depend on language.,,He who wants to be influential on others has to use their language and the information transfer should be parallel to the receivers' reality.

All those aims are verbal and nonverbal at the same time. Realities and new perspectives have to be formed and introduced to the target people by means of language.

## **7. The Role of Language in Public Relations**

People make communication and agreement difficult since they lead their lives within their frame of realities. People's opinions and behaviors are in fact their perceptions. Their perceptions are an accumulation of the reflection of their minds and previously gained knowledge. The recognition of difference and perceptive selection is realized through symbols. The symbols are public means that carry meanings and opinions (...) The external world of the contemporary people – apart from natural environment- is totally artificial and virtual, in other words, it is man made. According to this approach people -in fact- perceive an artificial environment and their behaviors are dependent on external factors as a result.

This shows us the availability of change in human behavior and attitude. This also relies on the change in the world of perceptions and the structure of the environment. The change in the environment will lead to the change in the world of symbols and the change in the behaviors and the reality gains a concrete vision.

Humans' having the capacity to change their mental and social behaviors has had an effect on public relations and made it more functional.

'People form their mental reality models by relating their own realities and their inborn mental systems. Nevertheless, they employ models which involve symbols basing on social contracts while revealing reality. Therefore, they are often not competent enough to express their inner world with their own symbols and transmit it to others.'

## **Conclusion**

Public relations aims to direct human behaviors. Our behaviors are closely related to the way we perceive our environment. How people perceive reality is of great significance. All this period is the period of communication. The basic medium of communication is verbal and nonverbal language. Verbal language and body language, and an effective diction dominate the message. When all the symbols that carry the message are considered as language being competent in language is the primary element of public relations. The messages have to be shaped in a way that pays attention to the expectations, needs and social, economic and emotional conditions of the target group. Meanwhile we have to make sure that the target group is not a standardized form but a composite of variable forms of groups.

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