

# Understanding the Role of Corporate Social Responsibility on Internal Customer Satisfaction for Sustainable Business Strategy; A Qualitative Research in the Aviation Industry

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## Abstract

In industrial life, where competition is increasingly intense in the globalization process, the efforts of companies to gain an advantage differ. In the 21st century, where competition over economic output and growth and profitability alone does not make a difference, corporate social responsibility projects and strategies to compete by gaining social legitimacy comes to the fore. The inimitable aspect of Human Resources, which is the most valuable resource for a business, has led to the need for deep and different studies on the importance of internal customers. These early-recognizing businesses take measures to retain talented employees, making a difference in competition with internal resources. Social responsibilities, which are the responsibilities of organizations to their employees, their environment, and consumers, form the basis of competition and sustainable strategies today. Based on this basis, the research focusing on the role of corporate social responsibility projects on internal customer satisfaction in the aviation industry wants to reveal organization-based outputs. This qualitative research aims to open a social window to competitive advantage with corporate social responsibility strategies; It is concerned to create an important value to understand the role of the institutions that produce and manage sustainability projects that are sensitive to the environment and society. In this context, qualitative research was conducted with 24 middle and senior managers working at the management level of airline companies operating in Turkey. Within the scope of the research, 7 open-ended questions were asked. All collected data were analyzed using the Maxqda 20 program. Content analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the research and the connection relationship of the parts obtained as a result of the analysis was conveyed according to the direction of configuration.

## 1. Introduction

Under today's increasingly competitive conditions, businesses have to be a few steps ahead of their competitors and be different from their competitors with the competitive strategies they create by identifying new approaches. To achieve this differentiation, it should give importance to both the external stakeholders of the enterprise and the employees, who are the building blocks, namely its internal stakeholders. With the effect of globalization, people have become able to obtain information about businesses and social issues very quickly. Positive or negative news and feedback about the business are extremely important for the future of businesses. A business not only has responsibilities to society and the environment but also has responsibilities to all stakeholders it has direct and/or indirect relationships. Obligations to these stakeholders constitute the concept of corporate social responsibility. Today, it is known that it is an indispensable phenomenon for businesses to be successful in the long run.

The hidden power of businesses is their employees. Labor has become the most important weapon to compete. It is an undeniable fact that the satisfaction of employees, in other words, internal customers, will be reflected in all operational processes in these competitive conditions. Businesses try to influence internal customers with the projects they do in interaction with the external environment.

In the conceptual framework of the study, corporate social responsibility and internal customer satisfaction were investigated. Then, the concept of corporate social responsibility in aviation enterprises was examined. With the MAXQDA qualitative analysis program in the methodology, it has been revealed how and how the employees of aviation enterprises are affected by the corporate social responsibility studies carried out in the institutions they work in.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. Corporate Social Responsibility

Today, businesses have become an indispensable element in society. Since it has become so important in all phases of our lives, businesses have to undertake some responsibilities for society (Dinçer, 2013, p. 186). With the effect of globalization, the expectations of external stakeholders have changed and businesses have had to keep up with these changes. In addition to the wishes of shareholders, customers, employees, and institutions, businesses have faced the fact that they are faced with environmental and social demands from a much broader perspective and have started to carry out their activities in this direction. (Sökmen, 2013, p. 340). From this point of view, besides their economic activities, businesses should strive for a better society and environment and fulfill their social responsibilities.

When considered in terms of strategic management, corporate social responsibility should add value to the organization and its brands as part of the business strategy in the long run. With this added value, corporate social responsibility should provide financial and moral returns to the company and thus lead the company to profitability. It has to support sustainable development in terms of both the society and all stakeholders with the improvement projects. This support can develop the concept of social responsibility in the enterprise (Aydede, 2007, p. 25). Corporate social responsibility is that the business takes into account the expectations of society voluntarily, not obligatory, and takes into account its stakeholders, such as the social and ecological environment, consumers, employees, and the state, in addition to its owners and shareholders, and attaches importance to human values beyond economic values (Yalman and Çonkar, 2020, p.402).

Businesses are a function of their environment. For this reason, businesses should regulate their relations with their environment to maintain the continuity and profitability of the business. While arranging these relations, the enterprise has some responsibilities toward its internal and external stakeholders.

Employees, also called internal customers, are the most basic stakeholders of businesses. In an environment where employees are unhappy, efficiency and success cannot be expected from anyone in the business. For this reason, the primary duty of a business should be to make its employees happy. To create a positive working environment for employees, to be equal in personnel selection, to ensure job security, to improve working conditions, to provide training and career opportunities to its employees, to apply for a fair wage and promotion, to inform employees about business activities and other employees, to give authority and responsibility, should allow them to express their opinions freely. The enterprise that fulfills these responsibilities will add qualified personnel to the enterprise, and thus, the personnel turnover rate will decrease in an enterprise with happy personnel (Bayraktaroğlu, İlter, and Tanyeri, 2009, p. 11).

### 2.2. Internal Customer

The reason for the existence of the enterprises is the customers and to use the competitive advantage, they must understand the demands and demands of the customers well and act accordingly (Torlak and Altunışık, 2012, p. 139). All individuals who benefit from a product or service, whether or

not a certain price is paid, should be considered customers (Çolakoğlu and Gürdoğan, 2017, p. 25). For a business to be successful, it has to meet the needs, wants, and demands of its customers. Therefore, businesses attach importance to customer satisfaction and loyalty. (Cecily, 2022, p. 250)

Businesses have to sell the products or services they produce to maintain their continuity and profitability. The emergence of this buying behavior is directly related to the satisfaction of the customers. For this reason, businesses should be customer-oriented to ensure customer satisfaction, be closely interested in the interests and tastes of customers, and know what is valuable and important for customers. Businesses that determine the focal points of the customers and what the customer requests and demands are can satisfy the customers more (Türk, 2004, p. 274). The purpose of all personnel in the business is to produce products or services that will meet the demands of customers. The fact that everyone, from the owner of the business to the personnel at the lowest level of the business, performs their duties and responsibilities by establishing good communication is an indication that they serve this purpose. These personnel, who are in contact with each other within the enterprise and fulfill their duties and responsibilities, are called internal customers (Taşkın, 2000, p. 23). Internal customers are people who have direct effects on the success or failure of businesses. Internal customers make a direct positive contribution to business success (Akdemir, 2014, p. 22).

The enterprises aim to increase the loyalty of these customers to the business by ensuring the happiness of their external customers, thus increasing their profits, but while doing this, they have to get the maximum support of the employees. The happiness of the employees will be reflected in the business as profit. For this, it is necessary to try to find ways to make the employees happy (Nakip and Çoban, 2007, p. 209).

### 2.3. Internal Customer Satisfaction

The most important source of information for businesses to continue their activities is the employees of the business. Employees who have elbow contact with the customer in all processes of marketing have a lot of information about the customer and they are much more successful than the management staff of the business in knowing the customer well (Acuner, 2001, p. 62). While evaluating in this context, the employees of the enterprise should be benefited and they should be made to feel that they have an important role in ensuring the continuity of the business. Just as a lost customer has huge costs for the business, each lost employee also causes huge costs for the business.

In internal customer satisfaction, there should be sincerity in the connections between employees and management. Intimacy should be ensured with the family atmosphere created in the working environment, all necessary information should be given to the employees in a timely and complete manner, there should be no walls between the managers and the employees, and environments, where they can talk about all kinds of problems, should be prepared. Employees should see themselves as members of the family and tend to share a problem that has gone wrong rather than hide it. Thus, employee satisfaction should be ensured (Toksarı, 2012, p. 166).

Internal customers are also highly affected by corporate social responsibility efforts. Employees who donate their time and talents with implemented responsibility projects are very happy with the benefits these projects provide for people and

the environment. Volunteering for the community and the support of the business encourages individuals to "contribute through their unique skills and creative abilities". This incentive positively affects employees who are internal customers. Employees' morale and motivation increase with these projects (Kotler and Nancy Lee, 2017, p. 171-172).

#### 2.4. Corporate Social Responsibility in Aviation Businesses

The aviation industry is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. With the advancement of aviation, the focus has changed as private airports have been built, and state-owned airports have also been privatized and become more commercial venues in line with increasing demand. Thus, it has created negative externalities. Due to this negative externality in the aviation sector, regulators have taken some precautions and created mechanisms at different levels. In addition, businesses have shaped their activities under the influence of regulators and corporate social responsibility (Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, 2006, p. 245).

Relationships between corporate social responsibility criteria in aviation enterprises are handled within the scope of 10 alternative programs (Journal Of Air Transport Management, 2008, p. 191):

- Fuel and resource efficiency,
- Environmental Protection,
- Security, transportation, and service process design,
- Financial transparency,
- Improvement of relations with employees and well-being of employees,
- Leisure activities with communities,
- Support for voluntary social work,
- Charitable offerings,
- Considering consumer interests and rights,
- Providing flights at reasonable and affordable prices.

With the help of corporate social responsibility in aviation enterprises, the reputation of the enterprise increases and they strengthen their appearance in the social environment. The corporate image of businesses increases. For example, with a corporate social responsibility project carried out by THY, it becomes a company that knows its responsibilities in the eyes of the public and has a reputation in society, which makes the company profitable, efficient, and superior to its competitors.

At the same time, they can manage risk management more clearly with the help of corporate social responsibility. Since Corporate Social Responsibility carries businesses to a more respected position in society, it is avoided to make a final judgment about the business in case of any risk, and it provides the business with time to manage the risk.

It leads to job satisfaction among employees. Working in businesses that have solid foundations and are respected by society is very important to employees.

It tries to define new market opportunities by encouraging innovation and creating a new perspective for the employees within the organization. It tries to help create more effective business processes and maintain competitive power.

### 3. Methods and Findings

In this study, a qualitative research technique was used as a research method. Although there are many definitions of qualitative research, the most general definition is; It is the holistic presentation of the data collected by techniques such as observation, interview, and document review. Qualitative

research is a technique that gives very important results in social sciences despite its difficulties.

The nature of this technique is not based on statistical or empirical calculations (Brink, 1991). For this reason, as Sandelowski and Barroso (2002) stated since the epistemological diversity in qualitative methods is too wide to be represented by a single criterion, it is necessary to avoid looking for general criteria such as validity and reliability for qualitative research. Instead, it is recommended to evaluate the quality of each study separately with a more rhetorical approach. From this point of view, it can be concluded that the quality of qualitative research cannot be determined by following the "predicted formulas", therefore, good qualitative research depends on the scientific worldview and these preferences may change over time. Although measuring quality in qualitative research is a controversial issue, it does not seem possible to determine a precise criterion that increases quality in qualitative research (Arastaman et al., 2018). One of the main distinctions here is that quantitative research generalizes according to the positivist approach, while qualitative research focuses only on the qualitative characteristics of the group in which the research is conducted.

At this point, questioning the information produced is a technique in which the method cannot be singular and the finding and theory are independent of the method. The more productive and versatile social sciences facilitate efficient interaction and play a more active role in interdisciplinary research (Tanyaş, 2014, p. 11). The data obtained by the interview method in the research were made using the content analysis technique developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Thanks to the content analysis technique, the data were coded and separated into themes. The main subject in content analysis; is to select and categorize a small number of words that are critical for the subject out of a large number of words in the answers given to open-ended questions (Miles and Huberman, 2015, p. 58). Interview answers were reviewed in the MAXQDA Pro 2020 program. The purpose of using this program is to obtain systematic and meaningful results by putting the data obtained in the focus group interviews on a solid basis in the sample. The answers are made meaningful by establishing a connection between all the answers given. (Türk A., 2021, p. 31)

Interviews with employees working in airline companies operating in Turkey and management positions were transferred to the MAXQDA Pro 2020 Qualitative Data Analysis program. In line with the opinions of expert analysts, coding was done using the code key and the analysis was defined in the program. The interview results were arranged as texts and read in detail for coding, and the meanings of each interview text such as words, sentences, or paragraphs were analyzed and coded. As a result of the coding process, "Trust", "Organizational Reputation", "Organizational Socialization", "Support", "Participation", "Satisfaction" and "Organizational Justice" codes emerged. The resulting codes were analyzed in the MAXQDA program.

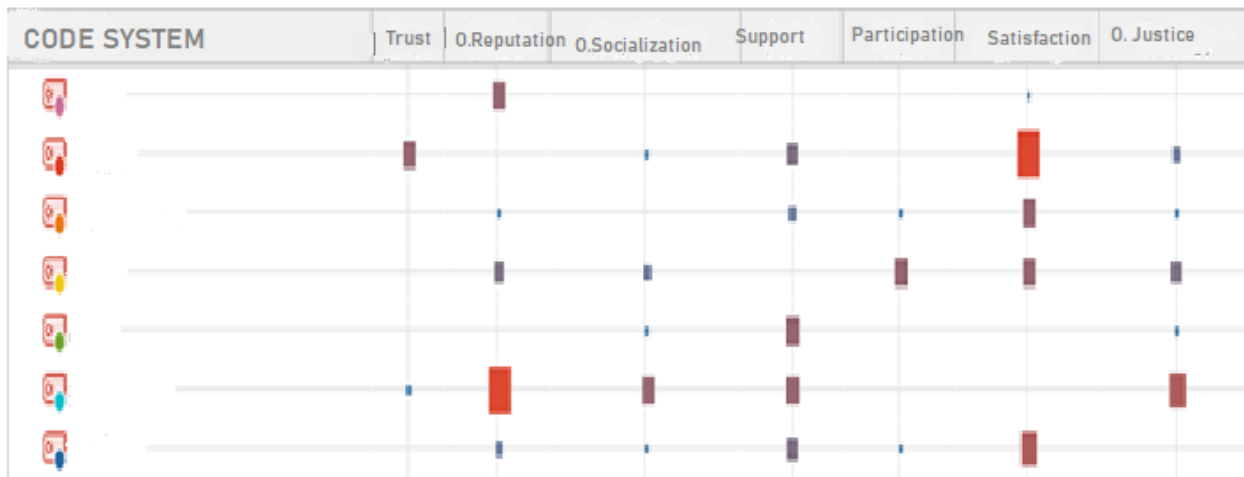


Figure 1. Code Relationships Scanner

To determine the relationship between the codes given through the MAXQDA 20 program, the frequency of the codes used together in the same sentence or paragraph was analyzed. As a result of the analysis, the matrix in Figure 1 was obtained. The interaction between the code relations scanner and different codes is quantitatively transferred. At this point, the aim is to interpret the relationship between the codes qualitatively and quantitatively. Relationship ties revealed the elements used by the airline managers included in the study in their evaluations. According to this matrix; “Organizational Reputation” and “Satisfaction” 20 times, “Organizational Justice” and “Satisfaction” 14 times, “Organizational Reputation” and “Trust” 11 times, “Organizational Socialization” and “Satisfaction” 11 times, “Support” and “Satisfaction” 11 times” 10 times, “Support” and “Participation” were used together 11 times, “Organizational Reputation” and “Support” 7 times. In this context, at the point of ensuring corporate social responsibility and internal customer satisfaction of airline managers operating in Turkey; It can be said that the fulfillment of the responsibilities of the institutions towards the environment and their stakeholders creates the organizational reputation when evaluated from an external perspective, and as a result, it can be said that the internal customers, namely the employees, are satisfied. It can

be said that another factor that creates satisfaction in the internal customer is the fair attitude within the scope of corporate social responsibility premises. Another point is that the fulfillment of corporate social responsibility and external responsibilities can be said to be effective in creating satisfaction by creating the confidence that the institution will fulfill its responsibilities to its employees. In addition to these effective relations, the codes that are less in relation with each other in terms of effect; “Organizational Reputation” and “Organizational Socialization”, “Trust” and “Satisfaction”, “Organizational Socialization” and “Participation”, “Organizational Justice” and “Participation”.

Another data obtained with the MAXQDA program; was a code-based frequency analysis which is illustrated in Figure 2. Code-based frequency analysis; It is to show how much it emphasizes each code assigned to the answers quoted in the answer text. The response texts of the airline managers operating in Turkey were analyzed. When the data obtained from the research is examined, it has been determined that different rates are concentrated on 7 codes. It is seen that 92% of the people included in the research emphasize "Organizational Reputation", 88% "Satisfaction", 68% "Organizational Justice", 60% "Support" and 44% "Trust".

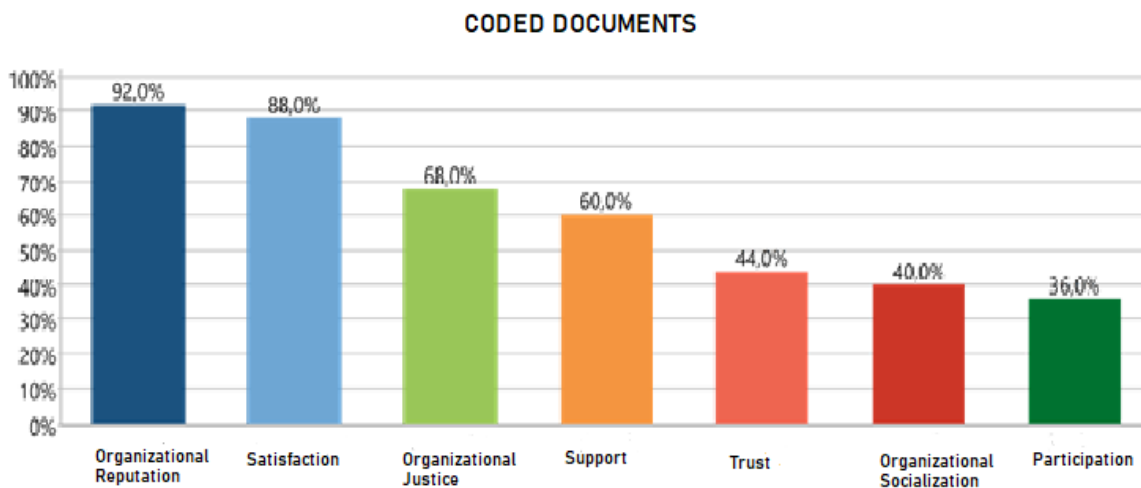


Figure 2. Code-Based Frequency Analysis

In addition, the most important feature of the analysis; can be said that it is to reveal the tricks of the work they are doing by making use of the expertise of the focus group employees with whom the interviews were conducted. With this perspective; It means that the key point in ensuring corporate social responsibility and internal customer satisfaction of airline managers is based on organizational reputation and satisfaction. Another data obtained as a result of the analysis made with the MAXQDA program; is a single case model analysis. The model is based on the evaluation of the answer

texts obtained as a result of the interviews as a single text. In another saying; The aim is to reveal a single structured code relationship by evaluating the texts as a single source. In this context, all of the codes assigned while coding were evaluated as if they were obtained from a single text, and the general point of view of the interviewed group was revealed. While code-based frequency analysis evaluates each document one by one, the single case model is the evaluation of all documents. The single-case model is presented in Figure 3.

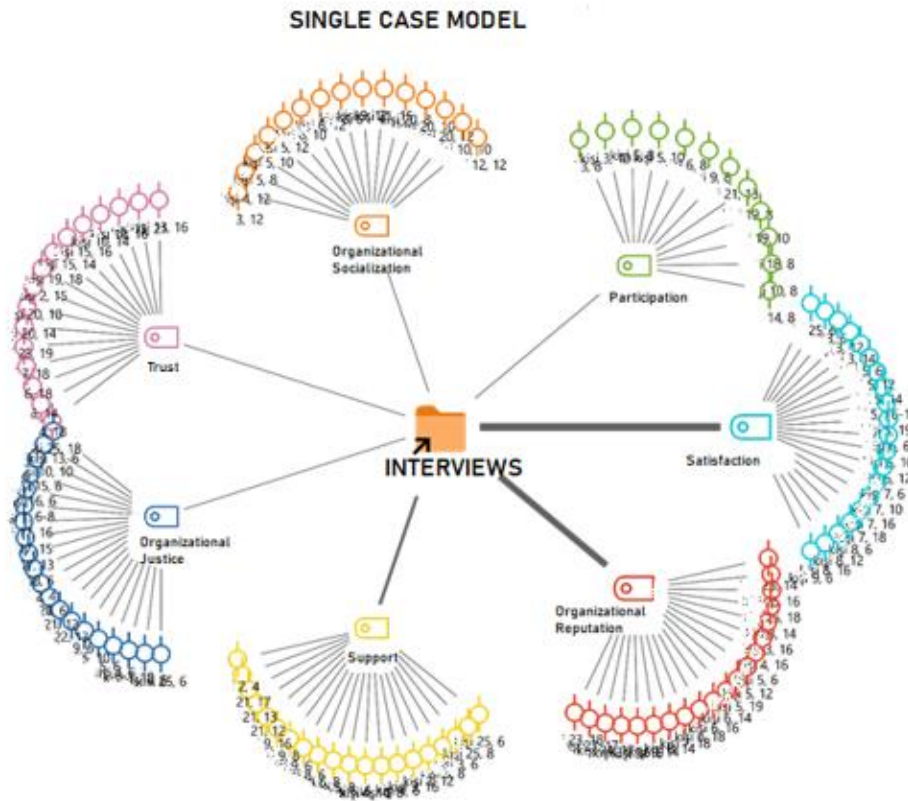


Figure 3. Single Case Model



Figure 4. Word Cloud

By creating a word cloud, the analysis of the relationship between corporate social responsibility and internal customer satisfaction was revealed with the most used words in the texts. The size and thickness of the words quoted in Figure 4 mean that the related words are used more frequently by the interviewed airline managers. In this context, while conveying the relationship between corporate social responsibility and internal customer satisfaction; It can be seen that factors such as employee satisfaction, corporate attitudes, and behaviors, responsibilities towards the environment and stakeholders,

corporate reputation, communication, and support take place. This is the group interviewed; It supports that corporate social responsibility has an inclusive perspective of all elements included in its general responsibilities.

#### 4. Conclusion

The fact that people are more sensitive and access information faster thanks to technology reveals that businesses should be more sensitive about their responsibilities. Under these conditions, developing and renewing the responsibility strategies of the enterprises is to understand the external and internal environment of the enterprise well and act accordingly. In this context, it is understood that corporate social responsibility provides positive benefits to businesses from both internal and external perspectives of their businesses to fulfill their legal responsibilities towards their customers, their environment, their employees, and their legal responsibilities. In the research, it has been determined that the fulfillment of the responsibilities of the enterprises will add value to the brand value and put the enterprises in a more successful position thanks to the image they will gain from both their internal and external environment. The first practical results of the research show that the level of "reputation", "respectability", which is the value that institutions see by their

external customers, has an important place in fulfilling their responsibilities.

The hidden power of businesses is their employees. Human, the most important building block of businesses, plays a key role in businesses. Of course, the company's reputation increase is also reflected in the internal customer. It is seen that the increase in satisfaction resulting from working in a valuable company from the outside is significant. The important role of labor in competition is even more vital in the aviation industry. It requires technical knowledge and skills, where it is difficult to find and maintain competent employees under competitive conditions. Therefore, businesses have to care about their employees, in other words, the satisfaction of their internal customers. The satisfaction of the internal customer is very important not only for the staff to stay in the company but also for the entire operation of the business.

Other practical results of this study; Employees believe that the business they work in is not just a mechanical place and that it is supported as a result of organizational socialization and that justice among employees will be ensured by participating in all business decisions make. As a result of this study; It is recommended that airline companies include their corporate social responsibility studies in their strategic plans and that other businesses in the aviation sector for the academic community contribute to the literature in understanding the importance of the subject by supporting them with quantitative data.

### Ethical approval

This study protocol received ethical approval from the Istanbul Gelişim University's Ethics committee chairman, dated 09.09.2021 and numbered 2021-28.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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