

The Mediating Role of Brand Trust Concerning the Impact of Social Media Communication on the Corporate Reputation*

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The study aimed to identify, interpret, and create a scientific resource concerning the effect of social media communication on corporate reputation and the mediation role of brand trust.

Design/Methodology/Approach – In the study, the automotive sector, which is one of the sectors that actively uses social media communication channels, was discussed. The population of the study was composed of the users of 4 automotive companies (Ford, Toyota, Hyundai, Mercedes-Benz) who use predetermined social media channels. In this context, data were obtained from users through a survey form, and the research was analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows 23.0 and IBM SPSS AMOS 21 statistical and modeling package programs.

Findings – According to the findings of the study, it was determined that brand trust takes on a mediator role (partial) concerning the effect of the sub-dimensions of social media communication on the corporate reputation.

Discussion – According to the findings, it is possible to say that the social media communication activities in a business have an impact on the reputation of the corporation. It is also possible to say that the brand trust plays a role in the corporate reputation created by social media communication. It was found that this result was parallel to other studies in the literature. The fact that the study as it is expected to give tips to company managers in both the designated sector and other sectors, and to provide functionality to the management science literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

The communication process, which began with symbols drawn on cave walls, has become one of the most important actors in both the daily life of individuals and the commercial functioning of institutions, with the development of new communication technologies (Mavnacıoğlu, 2015:1). The development of new communication technologies has increased the number of people interested in these technologies, and the interest in social media has been affected in parallel with this increase (Bat, 2012:165). In fact, the phenomenon of social media has recently come to the forefront as the new security blanket of brands (Dilmen, 2012:150).

While social media is advantageous many in ways, it may also be the most substantial threat to a company's reputation if not taken seriously (Al-Yazidi et al., 2022:2). Social media has added new dimensions to corporate communication, with features such as creating active communication between companies and customers, and dialog with social stakeholders. Therefore, the consumers can now change and even control the form of competition, rather than it being done solely by companies. The reputation of the institution will likely be affected by this change. The keystone to the high reputation of an institution is linked to the trust placed in that institution (Genç, 2007: 300). Kadıbeşegil (2006: 30) defined the concept of corporate reputation as "the sense of trust created in society concerning the organization". Therefore, trust in the corporation or brand can affect the corporate reputation. Although several studies in the literature have linked these concepts to different variables, there have been no studies conducted that have addressed these three variables (social

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media communication, corporate reputation and brand trust) together. Hence, the main question of the research was to create a scientific resource to determine the effect of social media communication, which is considered one of the indispensable communication tools of companies today, on the corporate reputation, and the mediator role of the brand trust variable in the effect.

When evaluated as a whole; with the emergence of social media communication as a new dimension of corporate communication, how organizations should manage this form of communication has become important. In this context, the study aims to conduct field research in the context of the automotive sector and to make some suggestions for the ways to be followed. The main reason for selecting this sector is that the selected companies are frequently involved in social media and that it is a sector that is aware of the impact of social media on corporate image and trust. The data of the study were collected in 2019.

The main purpose of the study is to statistically analyze and interpret the effects of corporate social media communications, which is seen as one of the indispensable communication tools of today's companies, on brand trust and corporate reputation variables and to create a scientific resource on the effects of using these variables together.

The study was conducted with the help of world-renowned companies (Ford, Toyota, Hyundai, Mercedes-Benz), which have a very large transaction volume in Turkey, will further increase the importance of the study. In addition, it is aimed that the study will provide clues to the managers of the companies in the specified sector as well as in other sectors and to the management literature in terms of making it operational.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION (SMC)

Today, at a time when technology is developing rapidly, just as with communication tools, applications used for communication purposes have become diversified as well. The most important factor in the spread of these tools and applications is undoubtedly the Internet platform. The Internet, which is used for both publishing and communication purposes in the digitalized world, shapes the structure of society and almost creates a new way of life. The virtual world, which allows people to communicate in a time-independent and non-spatial way within social networks that use the Internet infrastructure, has become an important part of our lives (Karal et al., 2017). The increasing development of social media, as a consequence of the Internet and what comes with the Internet globally, has even brought forward the need to redefine the communication process to the agenda (Sayimer, 2008:57). From a communication point of view, social media can be defined as mobile technologies created on an Internet basis that turn communication into dialogs that are based on mutual interaction (Baruah, 2012:1). As one of the cost-effective and alternative ways used by enterprises, Godes and Mayzlin (2004) referred to social media as the communication between one customer to another utilizing media channels. This communication can be in the form of communication between individuals, or the form of communication between the members of a group. However, in addition to being a form of social communication between individuals or groups, social media is now considered an important tool that businesses use to promote and develop their products and services, as well as for market uptake (Baruah, 2012:1).

In order to explain social media communication and its effects, it is necessary to make a distinction between the Firm-Created social media communication, which has two different forms, and the User-Generated social media communication (Godes and Mayzlin, 2009). While the User-Generated social media communication is independent of the control of the company, the Firm-Created social media communication is under the management of the enterprise (Bergh et al., 2011). social media communication, which is separated in this way, namely the Firm-Created social media communication and the User-Generated social media communication, was examined in more detail below.

2.1. Firm-Created Social Media Communication (FCSMC)

Communication created by the company can be described as the types of social media communication, such as Facebook posts, tweets, and YouTube videos posted on brand pages, social media accounts, and channels (Bruhn et al., 2012; Gensler et al., 2013; Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013). Unlike traditional sources, this type of communication is defined as a mass phenomenon, where social media communication takes place with an extensive interest (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The social media platform offers both companies and consumers new ways to engage with others. As a result, Firm-Created social media communication has

become an important element of the sales promotion mix of companies over time (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This popularity of social media communication applications among companies can be explained by its greater capacity to reach people when compared to traditional media (Keller, 2009) and the viral dissemination of information through the Internet (Li & Bernoff, 2011). Through social media communication, marketing managers aim to disseminate information about their followers and through learning from their followers, to understand the impact of products on the perceptions of the customers, and to stay connected to their loyal customers (Brodie et al., 2013).

When consumers like the page of a brand, they automatically become customers open to communication created by the company (Beukeboom et al., 2015). The communication created by the company becomes an important element for the brand in terms of the intention of the customer to buy, the perception of the customer, and the message desired to be sent (Scarth, 2017:21). Firm-Created social media communication can offer companies great opportunities to increase the extent of the brand value (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2013:12). In fact, the communication created by the company has been conceptualized as *Social Media Advertising*, *Social Media Promotions*, and *Social Media Interactive Marketing* in the marketing literature of today (Adeyunji et al., 2018:4).

2.2. User-Generated Social Media Communication (UGSMC)

The Interactive Advertising Bureau of America has defined user-generated content as “every material uploaded to and created on the Internet by non-media professionals” (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2008). Daugherty et al. (2008:16) assessed it as a communication database that provides promotion and feedback to many extents, such as likes, demands, requests, comments, and reviews of products and services by individuals on social media platforms. In his book, Wyrwoll (2014) referred to it as the content published by users on an online platform. The content in question is created by ordinary users rather than professional employees over the Internet (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014a). Customer-to-customer communication is now facilitated through social media channels, and the communication between customers is accelerated (Duan et al., 2008).

Potential customers often rely on content created by other users in relation to brands and products, because people think that these users have no commercial purposes (Mir & Rehman, 2013). However, in some research, the content created by the user has brought forth the idea that it is more reliable, useful, and impartial, as it is based on the experiences of the consumers (Jonas, 2010; Mir & Rehman, 2013; Verhellen et al., 2013). Moreover, consumers become brand advocates through the things that they share with other consumers about the brands and products (Daugherty et al., 2008). If the reputation of the business is already high, brand advocates can intervene in the negative news shared about the brand and products, and defend the business (Ayдын, 2015: 11). Recent studies (Goh, et al., 2013; Bruno & Dabrowski, 2015) have shown that user-generated social media communication following the content created by marketers is more persuasive (Sadek et al., 2018: 109).

3. CORPORATE REPUTATION (CR)

Corporate reputation has been expressed as a product of the interaction between corporate values and social values in the context of business, and the more valuable it is for individuals to attain a prestigious status and to be appreciated, the more valuable it is for institutions to be respected. (Karaköse, 2007:3). Weiss et al. (1999) described it as a process related to how a business looks and with which terms it is defined and perceived by its internal and external customers. Fombrun defined it (1996:37) as clear emotional responses of the customers, employees, investors, and society regarding the business, such as good-bad and weak-strong.

Virtual environments and social media tools, which have become widespread today as a result of changes in information and communication technologies, also lead to the fact that businesses that want to create, strengthen, or protect their corporate reputation need to carefully monitor their virtual reputations (Çakır, 2016:27). In virtual environments, it can be quite easy to misinterpret a message or make negative comments about the business. In such cases, it would be in the interest of companies to possess the ability to protect their reputation (Thurlow et al., 2004:17).

A strong reputation means that an institution will provide advantages in many respects. In relation to reputation, in both theoretical and empirical studies it has seemed to provide the following advantages: it ensures a sustainable competitive advantage (Zyglidopoulos, 2005:254); provides positive customer attitudes

and increases in sales (Chun, 2006:64); adds positive value to the products and/or services of the company; reduces perceived risks to the customer who purchases the product and/or service, and supports the customer in making a choice (Dowling, 2002:12; Nguye & Leblanc, 2001:228); increases the willingness of individuals to trust the corporation (Wiedmann & Hennigs, 2006); aids and plays an important role in consumer preferences (Nguye & Leblanc, 2001:228); increases the future stock value of the corporation (Brammer et al., 2006); increases the market share of the enterprise; attracts investors and provides access to global markets (Uzunoğlu & Öksüz, 2008:113); motivates existing employees (Grieg-Gran, 2002:5) and increases the likelihood of attracting skilled employees to the corporation (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:4); highlights the position of the corporation within the competitive system (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990:233); allows the media to cover the corporate news more frequently (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2003:5); and becomes the security blanket for the institution during times of crisis (Eberl & Schwaiger, 2006).

In this respect, concerning the management of the reputation, it is important to not underestimate social media, follow the information about the business itself, and use such tools effectively.

4. BRAND TRUST (BT)

Developments in the globalized world have increased demand in all sectors, namely health, finance, automotive, and entertainment. In a 'brand-savvy', world where people are becoming increasingly selective and it has become difficult to please them, it is obvious that brands will gain importance. Therefore, a brand should be implemented with a strong vision, offer high quality, and be presented with a commitment to true customer satisfaction (Blackett, 2014:30). At this point, BT comes to the forefront. That is why businesses care more about their reliability, products, and reputation in the market (Harris & Whalen, 2006:31). Trust is the main factor in marketing efforts whose ultimate goal is to establish a solid connection between the consumer and the brand (Hiscock, 2001:32). Under the today's conditions, the concept of 'trust' plays a leading role in customer relations from the beginning to the end. The process of brand trust is evaluated within the context of the credibility, honesty, reliableness, philanthropic activity, and contribution of the company to society (Power et al., 2008:586). Brand trust refers to the belief in the brand and the positive expectations concerning the brand (Luk & Yip, 2008:453) or the belief that the consumers have in the ability of a brand to do a job (Jin & Lee, 2010:674). Aktuğlu (2004:11) refers to brand trust as the common point of the brand, marketing, and advertising activities that directly affect and direct the consumer and their purchasing decision making process, especially when distinguishing concrete products from each other.

If businesses want to build brand loyalty that they will spread over the long term, they need to know that the prerequisite for it is to build brand trust. Trust refers to believing in and being open to information from the company, and accepting this information easily, because this is a situation that cannot be bought, it can only be achieved (Light & Kiddon, 2009: 161–162). From this point of view, all enterprises need to know that the phenomenon of trust is a delicate process that is hard to achieve and easily lost, and that it should be overemphasized (Tomlinson et al., 2004:165).

To reduce the risks when buying products or services, people make sure that what they buy belongs to brands they trust. According to Lau and Lee, (1999:341), the reliability of a brand is associated with the factors of brand reputation, predictability, sufficiency, trust in the enterprise itself, and affinity for the enterprise. Moreover, in building up the trust in the brand; factors of brand reputation (Shapiro, 1983:669), brand recognition (Bilgili, 2007:35), brand quality (Azizi, 2014:21), brand (Song et al., 2012:337) perception of competence, predictability, philanthropic activities, and honesty (McKnight et al., 2002) can also be effective.

As the use of the Internet is inevitable in order to strengthen brands in the digital age we currently passing through, brands should evaluate the possibility of reaching a very wide consumer audience at any time directly, rather than communicating directly with consumers, as was the case before social media, and trying to attract attention through advertising (Baur, 2010:9; Gümüş, 2013:135). As markets become more difficult to predict due to increased competition and the differences between products decrease, the creation, development, and continuity of BT on the Internet have made business marketing plans very important (Ha, 2004). Deari and Balla (2013) evaluated BT as a tool to strengthen the relationship between businesses and consumers on the Internet, because consumers need confidence in the brands they will use. For businesses and their brands, the factor of trust in the social media environment is of great importance. Businesses can gain a significant competitive advantage by developing trust in their customers toward their brands (Hacıfendioğlu

& Firat, 2014:89). According to Ha (2004), 'brand trust' is essential to increase the loyalty of customers through social media. A high level of brand trust has the potential to eventually turn satisfied consumers into loyal customers.

5. METHOD

Concerning the method of this research, the model created within the framework of an analysis of the role of brand trust on the effect of social media communication on the corporate reputation, and the hypotheses developed using theoretical infrastructure, population, and sampling, data collection tools, and methods were used. In the study, face to face survey method, which is among the primary data collection method were used and the automotive sector, which is one of the sectors that actively uses social media communication channels, was discussed. The population of the study was composed of the users of 4 automotive companies (Ford, Toyota, Hyundai, Mercedes-Benz) who use predetermined social media channels. In this context, data were obtained from users through a survey form in 2019, and the research was analyzed using the SPSS 23.0 and AMOS 21 statistical and modeling package programs.

5.1. Purpose and Model of Research

The aim was to investigate whether the brand trust variable has a mediator role in the effect of firm created social media communication and the user generated social media communication on the corporate reputation. The research model (Figure 1.) created for this targeted purpose.

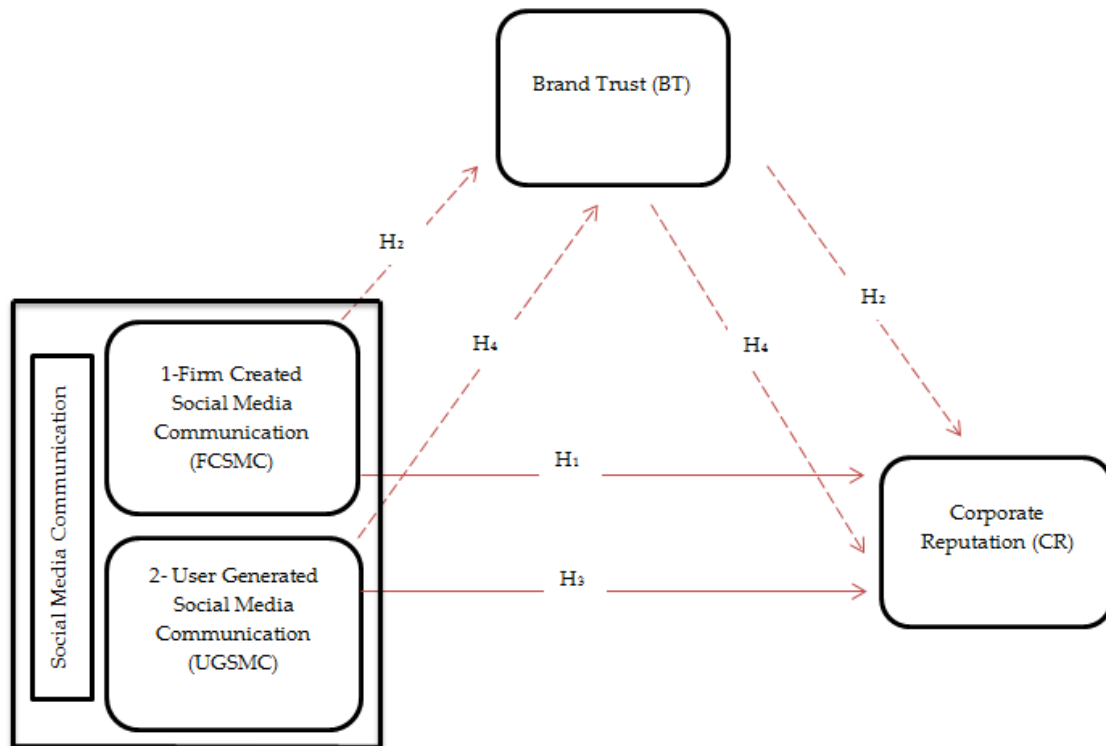


Figure 1. Research Model.

5.2. Theoretical Basis of the Research and Developed Hypotheses

It takes a long time for businesses to gain credibility. If adequate precautions aren't taken, this reputation can be lost within a very short time. Therefore, it has been expressed that businesses should manage their reputation effectively, and that the opportunities and threats that emerge due to innovations arising from new communication technologies should be well perceived. As one of these innovations, it has been seen that social media can have a significant impact on the reputation of corporations (Ada & Abul, 2014). Thus, corporations that desire to create, strengthen, or protect their corporate reputation today feel the need to follow their virtual reputations within the framework of social media communication (Çakır, 2016: 27). Furthermore, user generated social media communication and common applications of firm created social media

communication, which are components of social media communication, can offer organizations great opportunities to increase the brand value extent (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2013: 12). However, the 'trust' parameter is the basis for the high reputation of a corporation. Trust in the corporation and brand can bring the loyalty of the customer with it (Genç, 2007: 300). Kadıbeşegil (2006: 30) defined corporate reputation as "the sense of trust created in society regarding the organization".

Some studies are available in the literature that have addressed the relationship between social media communication and corporate reputation (Gümüş & Öksüz, 2010; Koçak, 2010; Mavnacıoğlu, 2011; Coşkunkurt, 2013; Ada & Abul, 2014; Aydın, 2015; Boateng & Okoe, 2015; Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016; Kaul & Chaudri, 2017; Scwajca, 2017; Tokatlı et al., 2017; Zheng et al., 2018; Özmelek Taş, 2019; Perçin, 2019; Yüce & Taşdemir, 2019; Çelebi, 2020; San Sungunay, 2020; Yağcı Tanışık, 2020). Studies addressing the relationship between social media communication and brand trust are also available (Bat, 2012; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014a, 2014b; Khalid, 2016; Sadek et al., 2018; Alvarez et al., 2020). Finally, according to our research just a study (Walsh & Beatty, 2007) focused on the relationship between the corporate reputation and brand trust. Hence, as a result of the literature review, we haven't found any study focused on especially social media communication, as well as corporate reputation and brand trust. Although there are studies in the literature that have covered social media communication and corporate reputation, there has been no research that widely covers social media communication and its sub-dimensions and measures the mediator effect of brand trust extent. However, these variables were found to be the subjects of other studies. Considering the interaction of the subject variables not found in the literature and the importance of social media communication, corporate reputation, and brand trust variables for companies, it can be said that theoretical and practical research is needed in the subject being researched. Thus, the aim was to contribute to the literature by partially filling the gap concerning this study. Within the framework of these studies, which constitute the theoretical basis of the research, the following hypotheses were developed:

H₁: Firm-created social media communication, has a statistically positive and meaningful effect on the corporate reputation.

H₂: Brand trust has a mediator role in the effect of firm-created social media communication on the corporate reputation.

H₃: User-generated social media communication, has a statistically positive and meaningful effect on the corporate reputation.

H₄: Brand trust has a mediator role in the influence of user-generated social media communication on the corporate reputation.

5.3. The Population and Sample of the Research

The population that the research covered was composed of car brands (Ford Otomotiv Sanayi A.Ş., Toyota Motor Manufacturing Turkey, Inc., Hyundai Assan Otomotiv San. ve Tic. A.S., and Mercedes-Benz Türk A.S.) in Turkey. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT), the number of vehicles registered in Turkey is over 22 million. Accordingly, it was found that the number of vehicles registered in traffic that belong to the mentioned brands is 160,741 (TURKSTAT, 2018). However, due to the difficulty of reaching all users in this context, it was deemed appropriate to make an accurate sampling, because the research should aim to choose a good sampling instead of a large one. This requires being systematic and sensitive in the sampling processes (Karasar, 2005: 127).

Using convenience sampling method, attention was paid to the creation of a sampling size and people that could represent the population. Thus, it was attempted to reach individuals in different regions. Questionnaires were used to collect the data of the research. By taking into account the size of the population, the number of samples to represent the population was calculated, and it was concluded that this number should be at least 384 people. Moreover, questionnaires twice the number of samples determined were distributed, considering the possibility of better representation of the population ($384 \times 2 = 768$ pieces) and taking into account the fact that there may be lost data and extreme values. As a result of the exclusion of 164 questionnaires that contained errors, a total of 604 surveys were deemed suitable for the data entry.

5.4. Data Collection Tool and Method

The data required for the research were obtained by face-to-face survey method, which is among the primary data collection methods. The was why this method was chosen, as it has important advantages, such as a high response rate and the availability it provides in making an observation.

The first part of the survey consisted of demographics and items aimed at revealing the social media profile of the user. The second part covered the items for measuring social media communication. The survey form ended with the third part, Corporate Reputation (8 items), and the fourth part, Brand Trust (4 items). All of the expressions that made up the scales were 5-point Likert-type scale questions (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The scales used to measure the variables in the research model were those in which the validity and reliability had been tested.

The SMC Scale was taken and adapted from the studies of Magi (2003), Tsiros et al., (2004), Bruhn et al., (2012), and Schivinski & Dabrowski (2013). Later, Manap & Adzharudin (2013), Schivinski & Dabrowski (2014a, 2014b), Khalid (2016), Khajuria & Mahajan (2017), and Sadek et al., (2018) again used this scale in their studies, and its validity was tested. The Corporate Reputation Scale was the scale used by Fortune magazine to rank the reputation values of institutions through the conversion of the issues of management quality, product and service quality, long-term investment value, innovation, financial robustness, ability to attract, develop, and keep qualified employees in the organization, and the use of corporate assets. As well, each of the dimensions of social and environmental responsibility were formed into question statements by Fombrun & Shanley (1990). The reliability and validity of this scale were tested in a study conducted by Fryxell and Wang (1994). For the Brand Trust Scale, the scale developed by Chaudri & Holbrook (2001) was used. As a result of the relevant literature research, it was deemed appropriate to use it due to the fact that the scale was previously used in the studies of Şahin et al. (2011) and Laroche et al. (2012), and that the reliability levels were above the desired level.

A pilot implementation was conducted on a group of 72 people who had similar characteristics to the sample to test, to determine whether the questionnaire was prepared appropriately, and later the questionnaire form was finalized.

6. FINDINGS

The data obtained with the research were analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows 23.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) and IBM SPSS AMOS 21 (Chicago, IL, USA) statistical and modeling package programs. Frequency analyses were performed for the demographic factors and social media profile sections. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed through the SPSS 23.0 and AMOS 21 structural equality modeling (SEM) package programs for the social media communication, brand trust, and corporate reputation scales. SEM was used to test the hypotheses.

Before analyzing the data, in order to determine the tests to be used in the analyses, the normality test and histogram graphs were checked to see whether the collected data showed normal distribution. As a result of the normality test, it was found that the p (Sig) values of all of the scales were 0.000 (Sig <0.05). However, one of the conditions for the analysis of numerical data is the normal distribution of the data (Karagöz, 2017:104). After the normality test, the reliability levels of the variables were checked. Accordingly, it was found that the variables used within the scope of the research and the scales of intrinsic consistency reliability of these variables were as showed in Table 1.

Table 1. Inherent Consistency Reliability of Scales.

Scale(s)	Number of Expressions	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
1. Social Media Communication	8	0.91
1.1. Firm-Created Social Media Communication	4	0.85
1.2. User-Generated Social Media Communication	4	0.86
2. Corporate Reputation	8	0.81
3. Brand Trust	4	0.91

It is possible to say that the scales were ‘highly reliable’ (Karagöz, 2017:25), since the Cronbach alpha values, which measure the internal consistency reliability of the scales, were between $0.80 \leq \alpha \leq 1.00$.

When the gender status of the sample representing the research population was analyzed, it was found that 84.1% (508 people) were male and the remaining 15.9% (96 people) were female, whereas when their marital status was analyzed, 55.6% (336 people) were married and 44.4% (268 people) were single. When their age group was analyzed, 54.3% (328 people) were aged 18–30, 30% (181 people) were aged 31–40, 9.6% (58 people) were aged 41–50 and the remaining 6.1% (37 people) were aged over 50. When their level of education was analyzed, 29.8% (180 people) were high school graduates and 28.3% (171 people) had a Bachelor’s Degree, 20.5% (124 people) had an Associate degree, 11.4% (69 people) had a secondary school degree, 6% (36 people) were elementary school graduates, 2.5% (15 people) had a postgraduate degree, and the remaining 1.5% (9 people) had no degree. When their daily use of the Internet was analyzed, 7.5% (45 people) used it for less than 1 h, 21.2% (128 people) used it for between 1 and 2 h, 19.7% (119 people) used it for between 2 and 3 h, 13.1% (79 people) used it for between 3 and 4 h, 38.6% (233 people) used it for over 4 h, and when the time that they allocated to social media when using the Internet was analyzed, 40.4% (244 people) spent 1 h or less, 25% (151 people) spent 1–2 h, 13.4% (81 people) spent 2–3 h, 7.8% (47 people) 3–4 h, and the remaining 13.4% (81 people) spent over 4 h.

6.1. Analysis Concerning the Research Model

In this section, confirmatory factor analysis on social media communication, brand trust, and corporate reputation variables were discussed. Explanatory factor analysis was not required since the study scales, which constitutes the dimensions of the study, had been tested in previous studies; thus confirmatory factor analysis was carried out concerning the scales.

Table 2. Results Concerning the Study Scales.

Factor(s)	Sub-Factor(s)	Items	Factor Loads	Standard Error	t	p	AVE	CR
Social Media Communication	Firm-Created SMC	FCSMC1	.662	.050	16.443	***	0.57	0.84
		FCSMC2	.724	.049	18.339	***		
		FCSMC3	.811	.049	21.030	***		
		FCSMC4	.809	-	-	-		
	User-Generated SMC	UGSMC1	.784	.051	17.510	***	0.61	0.86
		UGSMC2	.788	.049	18.905	***		
		UGSMC3	.742	.051	17.703	***		
		UGSMC4	.798	-	-	-		
Corporate Reputation	-	CR1	.324	-	-	-	0,49	0,88
		CR2	.788	.135	8.073	***		
		CR3	.773	.140	7.640	***		
		CR4	.794	.145	7.704	***		
		CR5	.791	.138	7.699	***		
		CR6	.497	.156	6.861	***		
		CR7	.787	.143	7.646	***		
		CR8	.703	.131	7.532	***		
Brand Trust	-	BT1	.785	-	-	-	0,70	0,90
		BT2	.879	.048	22.029	***		
		BT3	.848	.044	24.624	***		
		BT4	.827	.047	21.034	***		

***p<0.05

For the reliability of the measurement model, each factor on the scale was tested by checking the individual average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) values. According to Hair et al., (2010:124), the composite reliability value of implicit variables in the measurement model should be higher than 0.70 and the average variance extracted value should be higher than 0.50. As shown in Table 2. The average variance extracted and composite reliability values were above the threshold values except the value of corporate

reputation’s average variance extracted. It’s only slightly less than desired. According to Lam (2012), if AVE value is less than 0.5 but CR value is more than 0.6, convergent validity of the construct is acceptable. Also, when inter-variable correlations are examined, the factor loads of the items were above 0.30 (Hair et al., 2010: 124) and all of the correlation relations were determined to be meaningful ($p < 0.05$).

According to confirmatory factor analysis, the structural equation model result of the scales was found to be significant ($P = 0.000$). When improving the model, variables that reduced cohesion were determined, and covariances were created starting from the one with the highest covariance among the residual values. Table 3. shows that the values of the fit indices provided the desired values in the calculations of the subsequently renewed fit indices. It can be seen from data in Table 3. that all values were within desired intervals.

Table 3. The Goodness of the Fit Results of the Model for Multi-factor CFA of the SMC Scale.

	Structural Model Values			The Goodness of Fit Intervals	Acceptable Goodness of Fit Intervals
	SMC	CR	BT		
χ^2/sd	2.753	2.620	1.545	$0 \leq X^2 / sd \leq 2$	$2 < X^2 / sd \leq 3$
RMSEA	.054	.052	.030	$0 \leq RMSEA \leq 0,05$	$0,05 < RMSEA \leq 0,08$
GFI	.983	.982	.999	$0,95 \leq GFI \leq 1,00$	$0,90 \leq GFI < 0,95$
NFI	.983	.979	.999	$0,95 \leq NFI \leq 1,00$	$0,90 \leq NFI < 0,95$
CFI	.989	.987	1.000	$0,97 \leq CFI \leq 1,00$	$0,95 \leq CFI < 0,97$
SRMR	.020	.0233	.0046	≤ 0.05	≤ 0.08
$X^2/(CMIN)$	44,047	44,535	1,545		
p	.000	.000	.214		

X^2/sd (CMIN/DF)= Relative Chi-Square; RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; GFI: Goodness of Fit Index; NFI: Normed Fit Index; CFI: Comparative Fit Index; SRMR: Standardized Root Mean Square Residual

6.2. Path Analysis of the Firm-Created Social Media Communication Dimensions of the Research Model

The path analysis of the model that emerged when the mediator role of brand trust was added to the effect of the firm created social media communication on the corporate reputation, which is the sub-dimension of social media communication, is as follows.

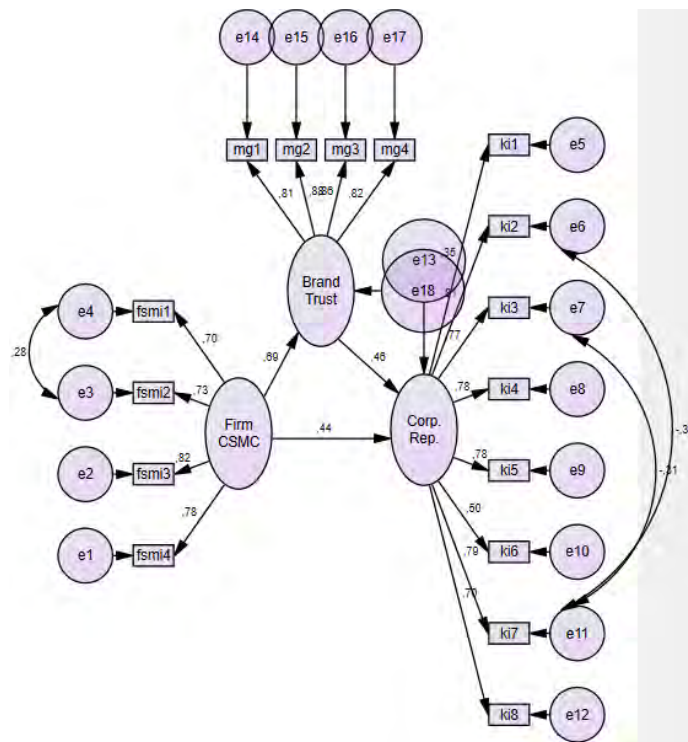


Figure 2. Path Analysis Regarding the Role of BT as a Mediating in the Influence of the FCSMC on the CR.

The results obtained in the road analysis of the model that occurred when the mediator role of brand trust was added to the effect of firm created social media communication on the corporate reputation, which is one of the variables of the study, are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Results Regarding the Model of the Mediating Role of the Brand Trust Variable in the Effect of the FCSMC on the Corporate Reputation.

Impact	Prediction (β)	Standard Error	T	p	Result
FCSMC → CR	0,759	0,094	7.825	***	Accept
Direct Impact	Estimation	Standard Error	T	p	Result
FCSMC → BT → CR	0,437	0,068	6.374	***	Accept
Indirect Impact	Estimation	Confidence Interval			
FCSMC → BT → CR	0,316	(0.222- 0.410)			Meaningful

Fit Indexes:

CMIN/DF:2.505, GFI: 0.950, NFI: 0.957, CFI: 0.974, RMSEA: 0.050, SRMR: 0.0307

***p<0,001

In the model in which it was aimed to determine the mediator role of brand trust in the effect of social media communication on the corporate reputation, first the effect of the firm created social media communication (independent variable) on the corporate reputation (dependent variable), which is the sub-dimension of social media communication, was analyzed. As a result, it was understood that the firm created social media communication had a statistically significant and positive effect on the corporate reputation ($\beta = 0.759$; $P < 0.001$).

While the impact of the FCSMC on the corporate reputation was significant, whether brand trust played a mediator role in this effect was analyzed. According to the results obtained from the model, the fact that the values in the 95% reliability intervals were in the desired range (they did not contain 0) indicated that there was a mediator role (0.222–0.410). In order to decide the type of medium, when an analysis was conducted to determine whether the direct effect was significant, it was concluded that there was a statistically significant and positive effect, but the impact coefficient value decreased ($\beta = 0.437$; $P < 0.001$), and that the type of the medium was partial medium. Among the goodness of fit indices for the model, it was concluded that the X^2/sd value (2.505), GFI value (0.950), NFI value (0.957), CFI value (0.974), RMSEA value (0.050), and SRMR (0.03) were all in the interval of a good fit value. It also explained the 48.1% of the change in the brand trust variable ($R^2: 0.471$) and 67.9% of the change in the corporate reputation variable ($R^2: 0.679$).

As a result of the analysis at this stage, it was observed that the H_1 and H_2 hypotheses were supported.

The path analysis of the model that emerged when the mediator role of brand trust was added to the effect of the firm created social media communication on the corporate reputation, which is the sub-dimension of social media communication, was as follows.

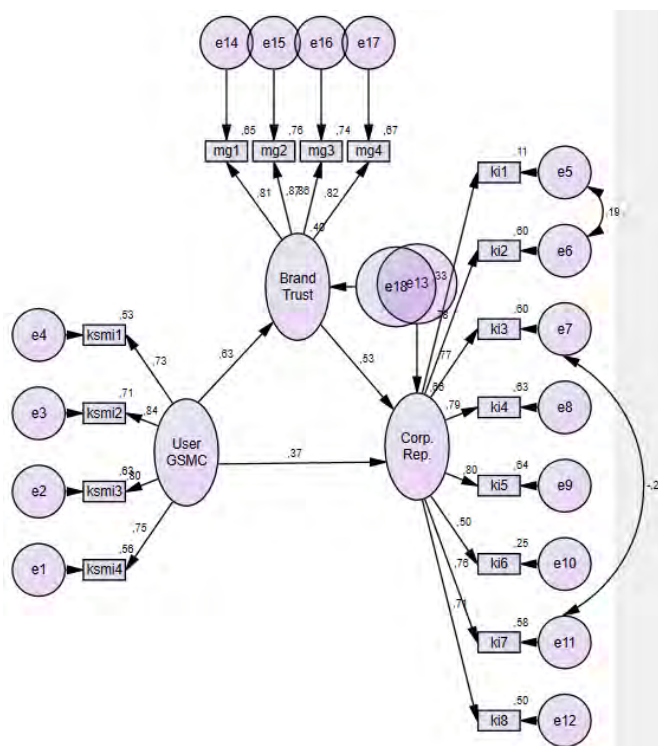


Figure 3. Path Analysis Regarding the Mediating Role of BT in the Influence of the UGSMC on the CR.

The results obtained in the road analysis of the model that occurred when the mediator role of the brand trust was added to the effect of the firm created social media communication on the corporate reputation, which is one of the variables of the study, are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Results Regarding the Model of the Mediating Role of the BT Variable in the Effect of the UGSMC on the CR.

Impact	Prediction (β)	Standard Error	T	p	Result
UGSMC → CR	0,701	0,086	7.246	***	Accept
Direct Impact	Estimate	Standard Error	T	p	Result
UGSMC → BT → CR	0,367	0,056	5.833	***	Accept
Indirect Impact	Estimate	Confidence Interval			
UGSMC → BT → CR	0,333	(0245- 0417)			Meaningful

Fit Indexes:

CMIN/DF:2.903, GFI: 0.945, NFI: 0.950, CFI: 0.966, RMSEA: 0.056, SRMR: 0.0378

***p<0,001

In the model in which it was aimed to determine the mediator role of brand trust on the effect of social media communication on the corporate reputation, first the effect of the user generated social media communication (independent variable) on the corporate reputation (dependent variable), which is the sub-dimension of social media communication, was analyzed. As a result, it was understood that the UGSMC had a statistically significant and positive effect on the corporate reputation (β = 0.701; P < 0.001).

While the effect of the user generated social media communication on the corporate reputation was significant, whether brand trust played a mediating role in this effect was analyzed. According to the results of the resulting model, the fact that the values in the 95% confidence range were on the desired plane (they did not contain 0) indicated that there was an intermediary role (0.245–0.417). In order to decide the type of medium, when an analysis was conducted to determine whether the direct effect was significant, it was concluded that

there was a statistically significant and positive effect, but the impact coefficient value decreased ($\beta = 0.367$; $P < 0.001$), and that the type of the medium is partial medium. Among the goodness of fit indices for the model, it was found that the X^2/sd value (2.903) and CFI value (0.966) were in the interval of acceptable fit, whereas the GFI value (0.945), NFI value (0.950), and RMSEA value (0.056) were all in the interval of a good fit value. It also explained the 39.5% change in the brand trust variable ($R^2: 0.395$) and the 66.1% change in the corporate reputation variable ($R^2: 0.661$). As a result of the analysis at this stage, it was observed that the H_3 and H_4 hypotheses were supported.

7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

For businesses, communicating with their current and potential customers through social media has turned out to be a critical strategy and become one of the business policies. The importance place of social media in the lives of Internet users has compelled businesses to keep up with this change (Kara, 2012:125). The fact that the corporations must take part in social media poses both opportunities and threats, such as establishing a strong connection between its brands and consumers, gaining sales support and enabling more effective communication with customers, increasing or damaging the corporate reputation due to online sharing, and increasing or shaking confidence in the corporate brand.

The fact that the model fit indices concerning the research model developed within the framework of the purpose of the study remained in the value range of a “good fit” and “acceptable compliance” showed, as a conclusion, that the research model was compatible with the data. It was found that all of the hypotheses developed within the scope of the theoretical infrastructure of the study were supported and that the size of the brand trust played a partial mediating role in establishing the corporate reputation of both the firm created social media communication and the user generated social media communication. Accordingly, it is possible to say that the social media communication activities in a business have an impact on the reputation of the corporation. It is also possible to say that the brand trust plays a role in the corporate reputation created by social media communication. It was found that this result was parallel to other studies in the literature. In the literature, Walsh & Beatty (2007) associated corporate reputation with trust variables. The result of this study also supports this finding. Therefore, it can be stated that trust is an important variable in the formation of corporate reputation. In the studies of Floreddu and Cabiddu (2016) and Coşkunkurt (2019), it is stated that corporate reputation is positively affected by social media use and social media communication strategies. Social media is an important support tool in the reputation management of organizations (Tokatlı et al., 2017). Yağcı Tanışık (2020), Çelebi(2020) and Perçin (2019) states in their studies that consumers' perceptions of social media communication have a significant effect on their perceptions of corporate reputation. It can be said that these finding is in parallel with the study finding. Businesses should have an innovative structure according to the requirements of the age. Using social media does not mean innovation, but not using it is equivalent to not being innovative. In fact, Ada and Abul (2014) and Aydın (2015) consider being present on social media as a necessity. Because being present here can have a significant impact on the formation of corporate reputation. Schivinski & Dabrowski (2014a/2014b) and Kaul & Chaudri (2017) showed that user-generated social media communication and firm-generated social media communication (Khalid, 2016) have a positive effect on the overall brand variable. Haudi et al. (2022) show that social media marketing has a positive impact on brand trust. It can be stated that the brand trust variable, which is considered as an intermediary variable in the research model, is correctly selected as a related variable. Because these studies are supportive. In the study conducted by Sadek et al. (2018), while firm-created social media brand communication had a positive effect on brand trust, unlike the literature, user-generated social media brand communication had no effect on brand trust. This result does not match the findings of our study. Scwajca (2017) argues that social media has a great importance in the process of building reputation. However, within the framework of his study, he stated that social media is used like traditional media. Therefore, social media is used as an additional marketing communication channel. In Turkey, most companies accept social media as an additional marketing communication channel, not as an independent tool to create new ways of operating or new business model.

Since the research was conducted with limitations, such as economic limitations (the population is very wide), choice limitations (4 car brand selection), time limitations (the effort to fit in a certain time), and location limitations (research made in some places across the country), whether the research variables would lead to different findings in different sectors, countries, regions, and provinces can be tested in further research concerning the subject to be carried out following the results of the hypotheses developed within the scope of

the study. Moreover, the scope of the research can be extended by adding different variables to the existing variables in the research and by evaluating them in terms of different occupational groups. Thus, it is believed that this will benefit in terms of generalizing the research findings and results.

Social media is a field that can communicate directly with the targeted group, and it has been seen that it has many advantages when compared to traditional methods. For a company that uses social media effectively, it is easier to get to know both its current and potential customers. As a field where people listen to each other's ideas and advice, social media has an increasingly important position, where the ideas, advice, and experiences that users share about the company can be decisive for other users (Solmaz & Görkemli, 2012). Feedback from consumers constitutes an important source of information. Numerous ideas for subjects such as new products, new experiences, or social responsibility (Scott & Jacka, 2011: 41–42) have shown the advantages of social media communication. In conclusion, it has been seen that social media platforms offer many ways for consumers to create, share, report, and interact with content about products and brands. This fact, which presents great opportunities for the brand trust of the corporation and the promotion of the corporate reputation, needs to be managed well. It should be noted that institutionalization in social media communication requires a holistic understanding and a strategic approach.

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