

# Turkish Students' Perceptions of Social Responsibility and Voluntarism

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## **Abstract**

*This study intends to discover Turkish students' awareness level on voluntarism and social responsibility programs. It is a descriptive study and concentrates on the two subsequent research questions; (1) how do the university students describe voluntarism and social responsibility programs and; (2) do students who study social responsibility course perceive social responsibility and voluntarism dissimilar from those who do not study the course. Convenience sampling is used and data is collected from a state and a private university in Turkey. Results show that women perceive voluntarism as a way to get socially accepted in the society. Similarly, students who have involved in voluntarism activities perceive organizational image as the most important reason. No significant difference is found between students who have taken social responsibility course and the students who have not taken with regard to their attitudes towards voluntarism.*

**Keywords:** Social Responsibility, Voluntarism, Generation Y, Turkey, Business Students

JEL Classification: M12, M14

## **Introduction**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) states main parts of responsibility, such as obeying moral norms and laws, behaving employees equitably, saving the environment, and making contributions to charities (Mohr et al., 2001). Sheikh and Beise-Zee (2011) emphasized that CSR contains a broad range of activities of a company, ranging from human resource management to environmental protection and includes every aspect of the effects of a firm on society. Because CSR is an ethical issue, the ethical awareness will considerably affect a person's point of view and action towards CSR.

There are various examples of successful CSR practices, like The Body Shop's activity with anti-animal testing. Although The Body Shop's products' prices are a little higher than its competitors, but consumers still ready to pay for it (The Body Shop, 2011). McDonald's which is the world famous fast food company also has notable

activities about CSR strategy such as community projects and help poor children to have a chance to study. McDonald's also encourages their workers to volunteer participate in community work and provide enough training (McDonalds, 2008). As a result, goodwill of the company will be created and directly enhance McDonald reputation. In Turkey, Snowdrops (Kardelenler) Project organized by Turkcell and the Association in Support of Contemporary Living in 2000. "Snowdrops Project" is a cooperative educational project created and directed by Turkcell, Turkey's one of the most important GSM operator and the Association in Support of Contemporary Living (Turkcell, 2000). Another important Project in Turkey is the Project of 81 forests in 81 provinces. The Project has been supported by Isbank that is one of the most important banks in Turkey. In the context of Isbank's Project, the forests' lands in Turkey have been extended. In most of the provinces, tree planting which is one of the most effective methods preventing global climate change is still going on (Isbank, 2011).

Because being socially responsible is a part of doing business, companies prefer to hire employees who have a higher awareness for social responsibility and willing to volunteer. Thus, universities offer social responsibility programs and courses to their students. This study aim to explore the Generation Y's point of view on social responsibility programs and voluntarism since they will shape and change the way of doing business in the future.

## **Literature Review**

### **Corporate Social Responsibility**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) represents an interest with the needs and goals of society not only economic but also ethical and legal. The concept of CSR refers to the societies' expectations that a business should not harm to the society, it also should contribute to the society for well-being of them. (Mercer, 2003). There are 37 definitions for CSR concept (Dahlsrud, 2008), and they mainly refer to five components of CSR. However, CSR was categorized into four components by Carroll in 1979. "*The economic component* is about forcing corporations to being well-performed and meet consumption needs. Demanding that corporations are to perform their economic duties within the law is *the legal component*. *The ethical component* is about inviting companies to stick to the communities' ethical rules. The final component is *philanthropic and benevolent* in nature" (Wong et al., 2010). To be socially involved for a company is closely associated with different stakeholder expectations, especially consumers' expectations. They look forward to companies pursuing ethical standards not only providing superior products and services at an affordable price. The "benevolent and philanthropic naturally" dimension of Carroll is an "expected" dimension, rather than a "desired" dimension (Alcaniz et al., 2010).

Since the companies have an influence on the environment, communities, consumers, employees, shareholders and stakeholders, it is their ethical responsibility to care about their interests (Sharma and Sharma, 2011). Companies should satisfy both the shareholders' interests by profit maximization and the stakeholder interests by allocating resources for CSR activities. Stakeholders expect that every company should be responsible and contribute to the society (Moorthy et al., 2010). Since stakeholder concept includes customers, shareowners, employees, suppliers, lenders and society, all of those

groups and individuals can influence or are influenced by the accomplishment of organizational purpose (Payne *et al.*, 2005).

A company provides its profit from the society. So, if the company's operations lead to destruction of the environment, or the community, it will not be approved by the community. Sharma and Sharma's study (2011) about CSR perceptions of the Indian youth shows a different thinking way of the youth on the activities of the corporations that they should consider the interests of the communities, sustainable development, the protection of the environment, the wellbeing of the workforce. According to the result of the study (Sharma and Sharma, 2011), a healthy and successful business facilitates "creating a healthy community" and "a healthy environment".

From the components of corporate social responsibility, ethical responsibility refers to the norms of the society, not the law. Companies are not necessarily to be ethically responsible. This is the philanthropic responsibility, where the company attempt to be good corporate citizen on voluntary basis (Moorthy *et al.*, 2010). According to Clarke and Butcher (2006), voluntarism should be adopted by organizations as a potential organizing principle for "responsible organizations". Thus, understanding CSR's ethical concept, one should know about voluntarism.

### **Voluntarism**

"Voluntarism is the synthesis of a managed and a non-coercive process of participation." (Clarke and Butcher, 2006). Voluntarism is different from spontaneous helping that happens in some situations; for instance in emergency situations. Voluntarism is one type of continuous helping. Voluntarism offers a satisfactory tool for social change and lowers social helplessness. So, it is important to both individual well-being and organizational efficiency.

Companies give importance to employee volunteer programs because they recognize their employees as valuable resources and natural extensions of their corporate contributions or philanthropy to improve conditions in the local communities. However, people can be a volunteer for different reasons: "to provide a public good, to enrich human capital, for awards or social contact, and for purely altruistic reasons" (Unger and Thumuluri, 1997).

A large body of research identifies personality characteristics that differentiate volunteers from non-volunteers. Volunteers appear to be more sociable and other-directed. They have been found to be more self-actualizing than non-volunteers. Volunteers score higher on trust and self-esteem. Volunteers were also found to be higher on social responsibility (Unger and Thumuluri, 1997). Derryberry *et al.* (2009) contributed this view stating that volunteerism emerges due to both social (e.g., culture, and family) and personal influences (e.g., empathy and sympathy). According to them, it is important to address moral judgment development and self-structure in the curriculum of ethical education to move the students' skills to the beneficial activities to the communities and volunteerism (Derryberry *et al.*, 2009). Particularly, after Arthur Anderson, Enron, Bernard Madoff Securities, and Worldcom scandals happened, the USA citizens have accused business schools of neglecting in preparing and supporting their students to act in ethical and socially responsible manners (Seider *et al.*, 2011). As a response, business schools (and also

universities in general) gave importance on ethics programs in their curricula, and they provided an opportunity to students to take part in the public service learning and other community attachment forms (Seider *et al.*, 2011).

To be able to provide awareness of being volunteer and socially responsible, a number of universities present Social Responsibility course in Turkey. For example, in Yeditepe University, Social Responsibility course is presented to the students. Since the focus of the study is on university students aged between 17-25, understanding their characteristics might provide direction for their orientation toward CSR and voluntarism.

### **Importance of Generation Y and Its Education**

Generation Y (sometimes referred to as "Millennials" or "Echo Boomers" refers to a particular group of people born, approximately, between 1980-1994 (Shapira, 2008). Generation Y is technologically savvy; career minded and highly educated driven to high expectations because of being raised in educational accessibility and the age of technology. The technological availability for accessing information, different views, and freedom, united with them being most educated age group in history have shaped the new generations informative, to be aware, and skillful (McCrinkle Research, [http://www.quayappointments.com.au/email/040213/images/generational\\_diversity\\_at\\_work.pdf](http://www.quayappointments.com.au/email/040213/images/generational_diversity_at_work.pdf)).

According to NAS (a company specialized in the field of human resource management) Recruitment Communications research on Generation Y: The Millennials (2006), Generation Y is less pessimistic and more responsible with the social matters than Generation X, although whether to take actions on those emotions is permanently a question (NAS, 2006, <http://www.permanentsearch.com/GenerationY.pdf>). Generation Y is a distinctive age group of volunteers who are regularizing an innovative way to life, volunteering and work and distinct in four ways (Mian, 2008:10):

- 1 *High self-esteem*: Generation Y has been raised up with commendation and encouraging support, and, thus, are always expecting criticism.
- 2 *Educationally-minded*: Voluntarism does not only mean good feelings. Gen Y members know the importance of building skills and altering their backgrounds to gain a competitive superiority.
- 3 *Paving the way to a more open, tolerant society*: Generation Y members recognize talent as the main motivation of achievement and are less interested in explanations among ethnic, racial, or religious tracks.
- 4 *Leading a new wave of volunteerism*: Y Gens are looking for purposeful participation through duties that are critical to an organization's mission and goals.

Astin and Sax (1998) did a research based on 3.450 students participating 42 institutions that provide federally funded public services. The effect of attending these institutions on undergraduate student development was examined in this study. The results pointed out the student's academic and life skill development and sense of community responsibility considerably improved because of attending in service for the period of their undergraduate years. At the same year, in Gautschi and Jones's research (1998), it is also found that compared the students who do not study such a course, students joined

in a business ethics course practiced significant advancement in that ability.

Wong et al., (2010) studied on perception dissimilarities in CSR among business students in China, the United States, and India. The study found out that Chinese participants gave more weight on social responsibility's economic components than Indian and American participants. Additionally, the US students gave weight to legal responsibilities while Indian students put more weight on philanthropy. Moreover, researchers found that there are commonly slight differences between the three distinct groups in the choice of business targets. The participants selected these two core objectives: taking care of the needs of consumers and the interests of owners. The study presents implications for multinational corporations, business school curriculum, and public policy.

Turkish population is relatively young which with 15-64 years old accounting for 68 % of the whole population (TUIK, 2013). It means that this young generation is the workforce of now and future. "The number of Generation Y population' members between 18-35 years old is 25.5 million in Turkey" according to Conento's specialized "webnographic" research among a broad range of young adults (MediaCat Special Supplement, 2011, p. 35). Generation Y is generally divided into four groups: Individualists, Success-Oriented, Idealists and Family Oriented. Different groups become visible at different life phases (MediaCat Special Supplement, 2011, p. 35). Among 5 million respondents, 38% of them are individualists, 19% of them are success-oriented, 15% of them are idealists, and 28% of them are family oriented according to the research. Individualist values consist of autonomy, love, catching the moment, energy, entertainment, discovery, sex, the search for new experiences, and traveling. Success-oriented values consist of target-orientated, money, achievement, knowing what they desire, shopping, and concentrated work. Idealist values consist of questioning, chasing their dreams, and ideals. Finally, Family-oriented values consist of being pleased with what they already possess, their spouse, children, peace, using their time to be with the people they love (MediaCat Special Supplement, 2011).

Conento's researchers emphasize that they see Gen Y's images in Western sources as being focused on the Individualist when made a comparison with other groups. This generation, however, does not comprise only a particular face in Turkey. The environments they live in take their expectations aside from the lives (MediaCat Special Supplement, 2011, p. 35). In this study, it is also underlined that Gen Y will possibly determine the future of Turkey because of not only being young, but also being more visionary, and up-to-date. When they are supported in their specific areas, they can be more creative and fruitful in those areas. Thus, this potential can be realized (MediaCat Special Supplement, 2011, p. 36). This research presents the current value pattern of Turkish Generation Y. Considering these findings on Turkish Generation Y, it will be interesting to know about this generation's view on social responsibility programs and voluntarism. As we mentioned earlier, additionally, stakeholders' expectation is that every company should be responsible and contribute to the society. Companies that are aware of their stakeholders' expectations want to hire employees who have some personality traits like empathy or are influenced by social effects such as social responsibility education. Thus, it is important to know about the

future's workforce' awareness level of social responsibility programs and voluntarism.

## **Methodology**

The sample consisted of undergraduate students studying in a state and a foundation university. 189 students who are at their fourth year participated to the study. Both of the universities are located in Istanbul. Students at the state university did not study any course related with voluntarism or social responsibility. However, students at the foundation university took social responsibility course in their second year and worked on social responsibility projects in teams. Convenience sampling is used as a sampling method. Of the 189 respondents, 45% are female; 56% are from state university and they did not study social responsibility course during their academic life. Although 118 respondents declared that they had engaged in voluntarism throughout their lives, 32% of them donated money to charities. The mean age is 20.6.

Questionnaires were used to gather data from the respondents. Researchers distributed the questionnaires to the students at their university and collected back. Data collection lasted for three months. 200 questionnaires were distributed and all of them were turned back. However, 11 questionnaires were left out of the analysis because of missing answers. The response rate is %94.5. Measurement instrument consisted of several questions measuring social responsibility and voluntarism. 21 items measuring voluntarism were taken from Yurttagüler and Akyüz (2006). Respondents rated the items on six point Likert scale ranging from "totally agree" to "totally disagree". In addition to that, authors included other items aiming to understand attitude toward voluntarism and intention to be a volunteer.

## **Analysis and Results**

In the first part, respondents were asked to associate the definition of voluntarism from a list of concepts. Respondents associated "willingness to work" (30%), "social awareness" (27%), "social sensitivity" (23%) and "solidity" (11%) concepts with voluntarism.

Twenty-two percent of the respondents evaluated activities related to enhancing social welfare as the most important voluntarism activity. Working without recompenses (19%) is the second most rated voluntarism activity. Among 118 respondents who were experienced in voluntarism, majority (32%) mentioned their monetary donations to charities. Seventeen percent performed their voluntarism activities in environmentalist groups and 15% in education. Of the respondents that have never engaged in voluntarism activities 23% mentioned "lack of knowledge about how to do voluntarism" as a reason not to engage in activities. "Lack of time" and "lack of belief in the benefit" are other most stated reasons.

Regarding the reasons for engaging voluntarism, 40% of respondents stated "contribution to social welfare", "social and environmental development" as the most important reasons. In the survey, the respondents are asked to mention the personal benefits for voluntarism activities. Most stated reasons are; "stated peace of mind" (31%); "pleasure for helping" (17%); "religion reasons" (11%).

Forty-eight percent of the respondents think that companies should develop CSR campaigns in education area. Interestingly, 14% mentioned a need in campaigns for enhancing social justice. In the last part of the survey, respondents were asked to mention their willingness to pay more for companies conducting CSR activities. Thirty one percent accepted to pay 10% and twenty five percent accepted to pay 5 percent more for socially responsible brands.

For the 22 items measuring voluntarism behavior, factor analysis was conducted. Seven items were left out of the analysis because of cross loadings and low factor loadings (.500). The remaining 15 items were loaded on four factors explaining %54 of the total variance. The factors were named as "social acceptance" ( $\alpha=0.737$ ), "collective behavior" ( $\alpha=0.708$ ), "self-image" ( $\alpha=0.678$ ) and "organization image" ( $\alpha=0.650$ ). Results of the factor analysis are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Factor Analysis Results of Voluntarism**

FACTOR 1: Social Acceptance % var :19.256	Factor Loadings
Voluntarism is a tool to have a good time.	0.779
Voluntarism is a learning process.	0.773
Social relations I have established during voluntarism are very important for me.	0.594
I am going to work as a volunteer in the future, too.	0.582
I believe voluntarism is a social responsibility.	0.574
I believe in voluntarism	0.504
The project I volunteer is more important than the mission of the organization I support.	0.503
FACTOR 2 : Collective Behavior % var : 12.168	
Volunteer behaviors are more effective as a teamwork.	0.837
I prefer to share volunteerism responsibilities in a team work.	0.664
I like to involve in decision making processes in CSR projects.	0.540
FACTOR 3 : Self-image % var : 11.492	
Voluntarism is a political stance	0.730
Voluntarism should include interesting tasks	0.668
I would like to be known as a volunteer	0.647
FACTOR 4 : Organization image % var : 10.998	
The mission of the organization I volunteer is important	0.821
There are specific organizations I would like to volunteer	0.745

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Value: .740 df: 105

Bartlett Significance Value: .000 Chi-Square Value: 545.870

In order to understand whether there is a significant difference in terms of the factors of voluntarism and other variables, T test is conducted. First of all, T-Test is used to understand whether there is a significant difference between men and women with respect to voluntarism. Results are tabulated in Table 2.

**Table 2: Results of T-Test Analysis**

Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p
Men	81	4.70	.69616	3.084	.002
Women	98	4.36	.78008		

As a result of the T-Test, a significant difference is found between men and women in terms of only "social acceptance" factor of voluntarism. Compared to men women perceive voluntarism as a way get socially accepted (mean women=4.70; mean men =4.36).

Secondly, T-Test is run in order to see whether there is a significant difference between the participants who have worked as a volunteer (mean =4.40) and who have never worked (mean= 4.04) as a volunteer with respect to voluntarism factors. Results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Results of T-Test Analysis**

Volunteerism Status	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p
Volunteer	117	4.40	1.15453	1.935	.045
Never Volunteered	63	4.04	1.20052		

Results show that there is a significant difference between participants who have involved in voluntarism activities and who have never been involved with respect to only "organizational image" factor of voluntarism. Participants who have involved in voluntarism activities perceived organizational image more important than others. No significant difference is found between income levels, university status and willingness to pay more regarding voluntarism factors mentioned above.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This paper aims to discover CSR and voluntarism concepts from Turkish Generation Y members' perspectives that will help to identify the role of CSR and voluntarism in the future business world.

Smith and Oakley (1997) discuss the growing trend in the number of women registering in business schools and their subsequent employment in business settings in the world. As a result of the growing attention in business ethics, social responsibility concept and volunteerism, women's participation in the area deserves further examination. Lamsa *et al.*, (2008) mention that women business students were more in favor of the stakeholder model, and they have higher ethical scores than their male counterparts.

However similar to the current study, Smith and Oakley (1997) also did not find any significant difference between women's and men's



evaluations of ethical concepts. The findings regarding the difference between women and men respondents perception about social acceptance can be related to women's desire to get more roles in the business area. This study shows that women consider voluntarism as a medium to gain social acceptance. Ruegger and King (1992) mentioned that gender can play a major role in person's perception of ethical conduct. Clary et al., (1998) stated that volunteers engage in unpaid helping behavior as a means to increase social interactions, strengthen existing relationships and to gain others approval.

The results of the study show that students who have involved in voluntarism activities perceived organizational image more important than social acceptance, collective behavior and self-image. The mission of the organization they volunteer is important, and they prefer specific organizations to volunteer because the sample consists of business students who are familiar with business world. As we underlined the work done by Astin and Sax (1998), the student's academic and life skill development, and sense of community responsibility considerably improved because of attending in service for the period of their undergraduate years. Additionally, they will graduate from the university and search jobs. So, their voluntarism experiences will help them to increase their job experiences, select the right profession, and develop students' curriculum vitae and opportunities (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2008). Therefore, choosing a specific (successful, legitimate, distinguished) organization to volunteer may provide the students all these opportunities.

According to Serow (1991) study on the students' motives of voluntarism, most respondents mentioned ideals as duty and helpfulness to others. Besides social benefits, they found out that respondents engaged in volunteerism for personal benefits such as feeling better and socializing in the real world outside the campus. Similarly, the findings of the current study found that among reasons for involving volunteer activities most students mention social benefits such as "contribution to social welfare", "social and environmental development" and personal benefits such as peace of mind; pleasure for helping; religion reasons. Thirty-two percent of the respondents mentioned that they donated money to charities and regarded it as voluntarism. Since monetary donation is a rule in Islam religion, this result is not surprising. Moreover, Oesterle et al., (2004) state that religious orientation may indicate prosocial values that encourage volunteer work.

Although a significant relation is not found between students who have taken social responsibility course and others with regards to their voluntarism perceptions, past volunteer experience is believed to foster student's future capacity and opportunity to volunteer (Oesterle et al., 2004).

Moreover, 23 percent of the respondents mentioned that they have never engaged in voluntarism activity because of lack of familiarity about how to do voluntarism, lack of time, and lack of belief in the benefit. This shows that there is a high need for creating awareness in terms of voluntarism among the younger generation. Besides graduate studies, families and primary schools invest time and effort in the subject. Effective projects should be promoted for young generations in order to persuade them for volunteering.

Another interesting result of the study is that 48% of the respondents think that companies should develop CSR programs in education area. Turkcell, one of the very well-known companies in Turkey, held a CSR campaign called Snowdrops and they promoted it heavily through mass media. Thus, GenY members who were the typical target market of Turkcell were exposed to the campaign very often, and they recalled the campaign in the first place. Another reason might be the low literacy rate in Turkey. Literacy rate of Turkish people above age of 15 is still 94.95% according to TÜİK (2013) statistics.

From the business perspective, 31% of the respondents accepted to pay 10% more whereas 25% of the respondents accepted to pay 5% more for socially responsible brands. Willingness to pay more is an important concept for emphasizing consumers' consent on paying more for socially responsible brands. Although this percentage is low when compared to developed countries, Turkey having a low level of awareness shows promising consumer environment. The reason of low level willingness to pay more can be because individuals rarely have the opportunity to witness personally and experience that the donation being put to good use (Strahilevitz, 1999).

The primary limitation of the study is the sample size. If future studies gather data from a wide range of education institutions, they can contribute to existing literature. Another limitation is that the data were gathered at just a single point in time. Future research with a longitudinal nature will better evaluate the uniformity of attitudes towards social responsibility and voluntarism.

### **Practical Implications**

Although the results showed no significant difference between students who have taken social responsibility course and those who have never taken, it is believed that their familiarity with the projects will help them to be aware of the social problems. The projects also help students to take an active role in solution oriented teams. Companies who work with students in social responsibility projects can use this as a recruitment tool as well.

The findings from this study show that awareness in terms of voluntarism should be created in the early stages of education. Courses or programs emphasizing the importance of social responsibility and voluntarism should take part in the curriculum of primary and high schools as well. At the societal level, governments and non-profit organizations have a responsibility to enhance the positive attitudes towards CSR programs and volunteerism and also lower the skepticism among consumers towards CSR programs. The more people see that their support reaches to its place, the more they will be involved in voluntarism activities.

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