

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF SPONSORSHIP IN CORPORATE COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY OF TURKISH AIRLINES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The concept of sponsorship has evolved over the years from simply being a philanthropic activity to one of the key corporate communication and marketing communications strategies. This can merely be seen by looking at the expenditure of multinational corporations' allocated budget figures for sponsorships. In particular, the biggest investment has and still goes to sport sponsorship deals as they have wide range of audience reach and mostly multi-national reach. One of the most important events is the Olympics, where millions of pounds are invested for sponsorship deals. Up until today, various studies have been conducted on to pinpoint the effect of sponsorship from different perspectives. Despite this, there is a dearth of study in terms of qualitative perspective, especially from the perspective of corporate communication managers' 'decision-making' mechanism and procedure. To accomplish and contribute to the literature, this study uses Turkish Airline's 'Globally Yours' campaign as a case study.

**Key Words:** Sponsorship, Corporate Communication, Turkish Airlines

### **Kurumsal İletişimde Sponsorluğun Önemi: Türk Hava Yolları Vaka İncelemesi**

#### **ÖZET**

Geçtiğimiz son yıllarda sponsorluk için şirketler tarafından ayrılan bütçeler ciddi bir derecede artmış ve geçmişteki bağış amaçlı yapılan bir aktivite olmaktan çoktan çıkıp, kurumsal iletişim ve pazarlama iletişimi stratejileri içerisinde yerini temel edinmiştir. Özellikle en büyük yatırım spor sponsorluğu alanında yapılmaktadır. Bunun en büyük kanıtlarından biri dünya devlerin şirketlerin Olimpiyatlar için ayırmış oldukları bütçelerdir. Bugüne kadar sponsorluk alanında birçok araştırma yapılmış ve

sponsorluğun etkileri birçok farklı alanda tesipt edilmiştir. Fakat, sponsorluk alanında yapılan çalışmaların büyük bir kısmı nicel olup, hemen hemen hiçbir çalışma nitel bir olaerak ele alınmamış, kurumsal iletişim uzmanlarının ‘karar alama’ mekanizma ve sürecini incelememiştir. Bu çalışma, Türk Hava Yolları’nın “Globally Yours” kampanya sürecini örnek çalışma olarak ele alıp sponsorluk literatürüne katkı sağlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sponsorluk, Kurumsal İletişim, Türk Hava Yolları

### **Introduction**

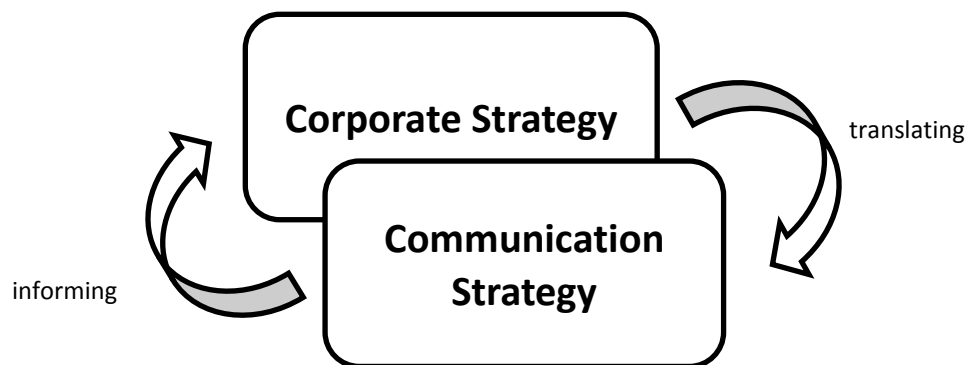
The concept of sponsorship has evolved over the years from simply being a philanthropic activity to one of the key corporate communication and marketing communications strategy. This can merely be seen by looking at the expenditure of multinational corporations’ allocated budget figures for sponsorships. In particular, the biggest investment has and still goes to sport sponsorship deals as they have wide range of audience reach and mostly multi-national reach. One of the most important events, Olympic, where multi million-pounds are invested for the sponsorship deals is one of the strongest evidence for this. Walliser (2003) has conducted a meta analysis and documented that between the period of 1985 to 2003, 230 academic studies conducted on sponsorship and this number has been surely risen since than. Majority of the studies has been conducted to document the ‘effectiveness’ of sponsorships. To list some of them, on consumer behaviour (Gwinner & Bennet, 2008), brand awareness (Bennett, 1999; Hermann et al., 2011), brand attachment (Chanavat & Martinent, 2009), brand image (XXX) and brand equity (XXX). Despite these studies, there is a scarcity of study on sponsorship from managerial perspective, where the corporate communication managers make the key decisions on how to decide and promote their sponsorship event in order to influence their target audiences or more precisely stakeholders. Hence, this research incorporates within the scope of corporate communication where the aim is to outline the role and the decision-making process of corporate communication managers in global branding strategies of Turkish Airlines (THY) via sponsorship, in particular sports sponsorship during the “Globally Yours” campaign, when THY employed two of the most famous and biggest football teams of F.C. Barcelona and Manchester United. To do this, qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with key Turkish Airlines’ corporate communication managers as well as externally employed communication specialist. This study by investigating from managerial perspective contributes to the literatures of corporate communication and brand management.

### **The Components of Corporate Communication**

Corporate Communication is defined as a “management function that offers a

framework for the effective coordination of all internal and external communication with the overall purpose of establishing and marketing favourable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organisation is dependent” (Cornelissen, 2011, p5). In other words, it has been simply explained as a means, which “integrate internal and external perceptions” (Blombäck and Brunninge, 2009, p407). This indicates synchronization between corporate strategy and communication strategy.

**Figure 1:** The Link Between Corporate and Communication Strategy.



Source: Cornelissen, 2011, p85.

The roots of corporate communication has multifunctional specialized disciplines including corporate design, corporate advertising, international communications to employees, issues and crises management, media relations, change communication and public affairs which became tactical tools rather than only ‘public relations’ function (Argenti, 1996). Nevertheless, this complex structure of corporate communication demands an “integrated approach” to managing and coordination of communications.

Generally speaking, the design of corporate communications strategy is based on corporate identity which is the profile that an organization wants to reflect through corporate ‘images and reputations’ (Cornelissen, 2011). Indeed, conceiving a favourable image from all perspectives of different stakeholders requires the synchronisation of all communication tools from brochures, advertising campaigns to websites, themes, visuals, logos and so on.

Aspects of corporate communication involve corporate identity, corporate branding and corporate reputation. These terms have been defined within the literature of corporate communication as:

Corporate Identity is “the profile and values communicated by an organization. The character of a company seeks to establish for itself in the mind of its stakeholders, reinforced by consistent use of logos, colours, jingle, etc” (Cornelissen 2011, p254).

Corporate Brand is “a structure whereby businesses and product brands of an

organization carry the same corporate name. Brand is the set of physical attributes of a product or service together with the beliefs and expectations surrounding it – a unique combination which the name of the product or service should evoke in the mind of the audience” (Ibid, p261).

Corporate Reputation is “collective representation of past images of an organization established over time in the mind of individuals” (Ibid, p255).

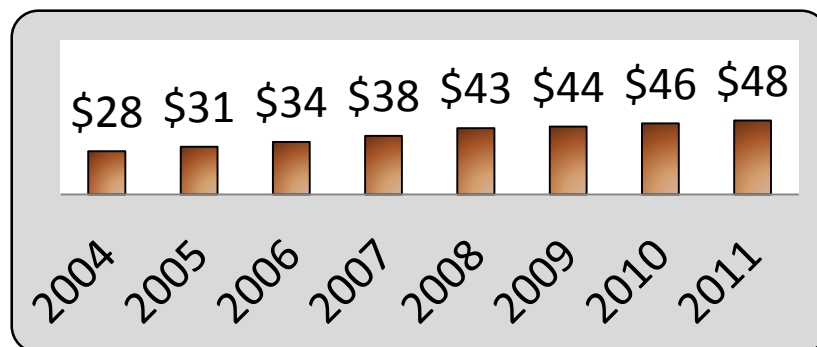
In conjunction to these terms, the new concept has been introduced by the corporate design specialists Brikigt and Stadler (1986) to the literature of corporate communication as ‘corporate personality’. The corporate personality model of Brikigt and Stadler (1986) on the concepts of corporate identity, brand and reputation, introduced the following attributes:

- 1- Symbolism: corporate logo of an organization
- 2- Communication: all planned forms of communication
- 3- Behaviour: all behaviours of employees that leaves an impression on stakeholders.

#### **Sponsorship and the Role of Sponsorship in Corporate Communications**

Although O’ Sullivan and Murphy stated that sponsorship is the trendiest communication tool in 1998, it is possible to state the importance given to the sport sponsorship this is still the case, in particular sport-sponsorship. The investment has shown an constant growth within marketing communications mix in recent years. Figure 2 below confirms the significant investment in sponsorship since 2004 on global scope.

**Figure 2:** Amount of sponsorship investments in billion \$, IEG Sponsorship Report 2011.



In 2001, IEG Network had evaluated sponsorship as the world’s fastest growing form of marketing with 24.66\$ in billion of spent. Chajet (1997) believes this growth rate is due to sponsorship differentiate from other communication tools which is enabling to shape powerful corporate brand image of an organization while raising the profile of the corporate brand and gaining entry to overseas markets. Furthermore, Chajet (1997) claimed that sponsorship offers

unlimited benefits to create a desired image of the corporate brand in emerging markets. Moreover, Barez et al., (2007) brings attention to a distinct type of sponsorship effectiveness where a receiver disposition of familiarity in terms of a linkage with the brand in the memory. In their research, global cases of effective sports sponsorship, three basic steps had been evaluated that should be considered when sports sponsorship is of concern;

- 1- Sponsorship managers should select an activity congruent with the desired positioning of the brand based on both image and function similarly.
- 2- Explanation of interpret the sponsorship by developing public relations and advertising campaigns articulating the specific image associations the sponsor hopes to convey.
- 3- Display a level care for the sponsored activity in order to stimulate goodwill and minimize potential negative associations resulting from excessive exploitation of marketing rights and opportunities.

New opportunities rose due to increased leisure-conscious societies and greater global media coverage of sponsorship events. Thus the potential of sponsorships increased to support the broader public relations strategy (Owusu-Frimpong, 2000). A model of new communications Barez (*et al*, 2007) employs the specific mix of on-site communications: media sponsorship, advertising, public relations and sales promotions implemented to leverage sponsorship platform and drives communication effectiveness.

In parallel to this, Erdogan and Kitchen (1998) posit that companies fail in their sponsorship attempts because they do not support the event with adequate advertising, PR and other promotional activities. Similarly, Tripodi (2001) suggests that integrating sponsorships with other elements of the communications mix create a synergic effect. So, to create a successful effectiveness, sponsorship must not be treated in isolation (Grimes and Meenaghan, 1998).

Sponsorship potentially provides the opportunity for brands to leverage brand experience that would not otherwise be possible by linking the event experience to the brand, (Cliffe and Motion, 2005). Therefore sponsorship is one element in a process of sending a set of stimuli to different target groups with the intention of evoking a desired set of responses (Olkkonen *et al.*, 2000). Bargnall (2002) outlined that people are increasing getting resistance and cynical towards marketing and advertising at all levels due to brand overload. However, sponsorship enables to take away the sense of ‘escapism’ by presenting corporates’ brand as ‘facilitator of good times’ without repulsing the targeted audience. At this point, sponsorship differentiates itself from advertising from perspective of the advertiser creates a message

using a mixture of visuals, vocals, and context, whereas sponsorship can be described as a 'mute', non-verbal medium in the sense that the message is delivered by association with a socially intrusive activity possessed of its own personality in the eyes of the receiving audience (Meenaghan, 1991), hence gives an excuse to talk to an audience happy to listen by attaching themselves with a trusted property, like sponsored football team (Earl 2002).

Overall, sponsorship can be seen as one of the most effective tools within the corporate communications with the ability to contribute towards the fulfilment of corporate communication in conjunction with branding management if can be managed effectively.

### **Employed Research Strategy, Method and Data Collection Technique**

A case study is an employed research strategy, as it allows the researcher to elucidate "a *decision* or set of decision; why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result" (Schramm 1971, emphasis added, cited in; Yin, 2003, p12). Yin (2003, p89) further claimed that the interview is the most crucial source of information for case study research, as in this case, "key informants are often critical to the success of a case study. Such persons not only provide the case study investigator with insights into a matter but also can suggest sources of corroboratory or contrary evidence – and also initiate the access to such sources". Furthermore, Bryman and Bell (2007) reported that exponents of the case study design often favours qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviewing, because these methods are viewed as particularly helpful in the generation of an intensive and detailed examination of the case. The rational reasoning of why to investigate THY's corporate communication can be outlined as:

- 1- Familiarity with the culture and the company,
- 2- Accessibility - in terms of language and location,
- 3- Notably signed global sponsorships,
- 4- Media Occupancy via gained awards in communications,
- 5- Distinctive approach of integrated communications.

Robson (2002) stated that semi-structured interview techniques as a data collection permits the research to focus on the studied subject as they are pre-set. Thus, this study research employs a qualitative method of semi structured in-depth interview to obtain a deeper and a more thorough understanding of a situation or phenomena. As THY's corporate communications are run by three departments which are; Advertisement, Public Relations and Protocol Directorship, semi-structured interviews were held with the following interviewees:

1. Protocol Directorship, Specialist Fatih KARAMAN (21.12.2011, Istanbul)

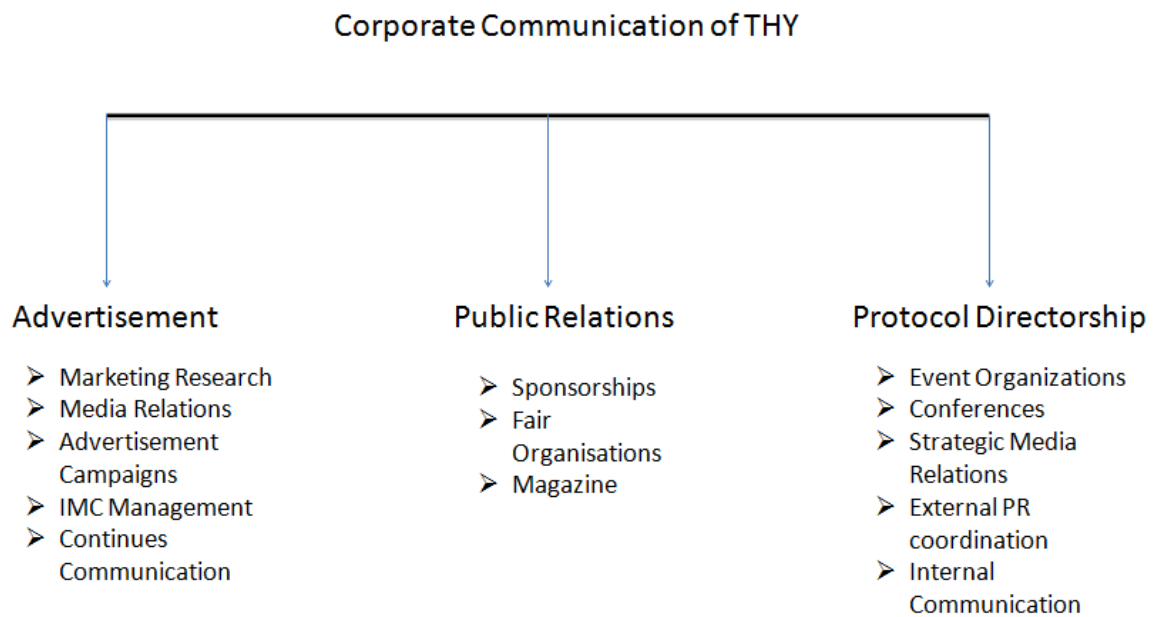
2. PR/Sponsorship, Specialist Ayşe SARI and Specialist Yunus CELIK (7.12.2011, Istanbul)
3. Advertisement Departments, Advertisement Manager Serdar E. SIRIN (21.12.2011, Istanbul)

### **Research Findings**

#### **Corporate Communication of Turkish Airlines**

Even though, THY kept improving its air craft operations and services with an accelerated speed, the years of 2005-2008 particularly were not good years for THY airline as one of its aircraft crashed in the Netherlands. However, the company managed to get back on its feet and improve immensely, which brought the company many rewards in the air industry. Although it's ever improving service quality was acknowledged by the airline sector leaders, this gained successes could not reflect on its corporate reputation. In 2008, the company decided to invest heavily in their brand name. To do this, the company first started to conduct marketing research in many destinations to find out its existing corporate image and reputation in the eyes of its target audiences. As a result of the market research they discovered that there is 'a lack of brand awareness'. Therefore, the company corporate communication and management team has significantly increased the marketing communications budget to unravel this problem. According to IATA (2010) figures, a number of international passenger traffic grew by 8.2% worldwide in 2010. One of the influencer of those numbers is resulting in day by day increase in trade-related economic relations between countries. As a host of Istanbul Ataturk Airport, which is the main hub of THY, is located in Istanbul, based on a very strategic geopolitical landmark whereby Europe and Asia are connected to each other.

Turkish airlines within its corporate communications strategy has developed and implemented "a 360-degree perspective in order to manage satisfaction amongst all of the stakeholders" (Karaman, 2011). Under corporate communications, there are three departments which are dealing with different prospects but for the same achievement. The Figure 3, which was developed based on the collected data from the interviews, illustrates the structure of THY corporate communications.

**Figure 3.** Corporate Communication Structure of THY, (2011)

Sari (2011) pointed out that “we cannot prepare our communication strategy before company set its corporate strategy, because all the events and messages within our communication strategy are supposed to support our main goals. Thus, there is a strong coalition of strategies at this point”. This claim echoes the statement of Cornelissen (2011), where the author underlines the need of synchronization of corporate and communication strategies.

Considering 15,000 employees from different backgrounds and different cultures, it requires extra attention to ensure the clarity of objectives. To address and prevent potential cultural diversity issues, corporate communications strategy particular attention has been devoted to corporate culture. So, THY has introduced three internal communication tools, where the company purpose was to enhance possession of culture towards the employees, and these are:

- Magazine Empathy
- Air TV
- Intranet social network

One of the main aspects of corporate communication is to match internal identity with external image due to company’s employees are regarded highly important to create a strong and collaborative internal identity as well as they are the representatives of corporate image in the stakeholders’ eyes, particularly customer. To quote from the company (THY, 2010);

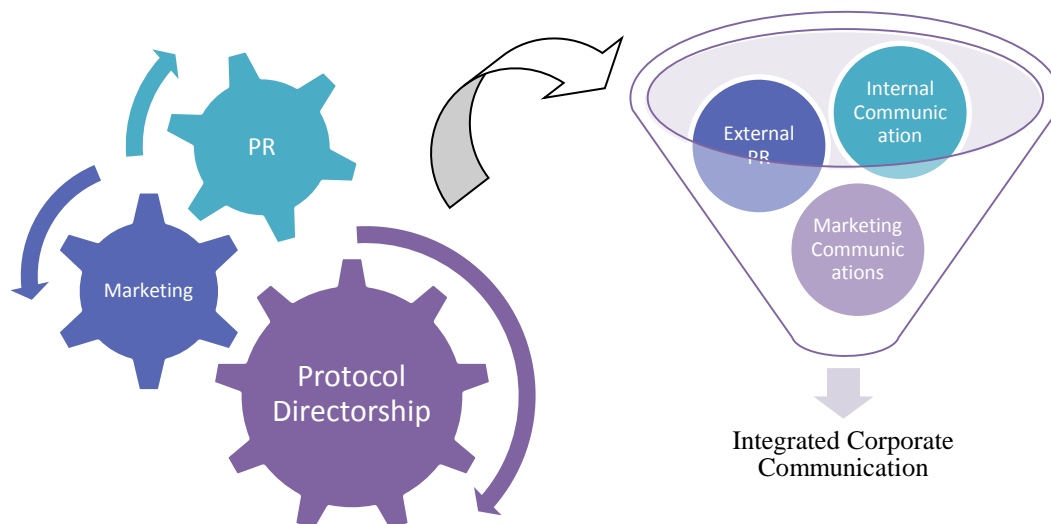
*“Strong sense of identification throughout the company will result in unconditional*



*customer satisfaction”.*

Considering the assertive global brands within the airline industry, it is essential to run an integrated marketing communications to achieve desired brand image/reputation. Not only THY holds three different departments for overall corporate communication, but it also employs (alongside its PR department) external Advertising and PR agents. This tactic enables the company to focus on different local and global level strategies to increase their campaigns’ effectiveness. Karaman (2011), who is one of the key managements team member that make decisions for the coordination of external PR agencies stated “PR agencies are our spies who are increasing our awareness about competitors and also enabling to be in touch with their localised countries”. The Figure 4 illustrates the mechanism between departments of corporate communication.

**Figure 4.** Integrated Corporate Communication, THY interview, 2011.



### **Corporate Identity, Corporate Branding and Corporate Reputation**

In 2010 Turkish Airlines increased the total number of its passengers by %16 to 29,1 million, which at the same time rose its share of global international passenger market by 1,25% (Annual Report, 2010). Not surprisingly the striking results of 2010 is the same year that THY signed the sponsorship contracts with two premium football clubs; F.C. Barcelona and Manchester United. Seeing the impact of brand investments made top managers to realize the importance of brand creation value. To quote, from chairman Topcu (2010) and Karaman (2011);

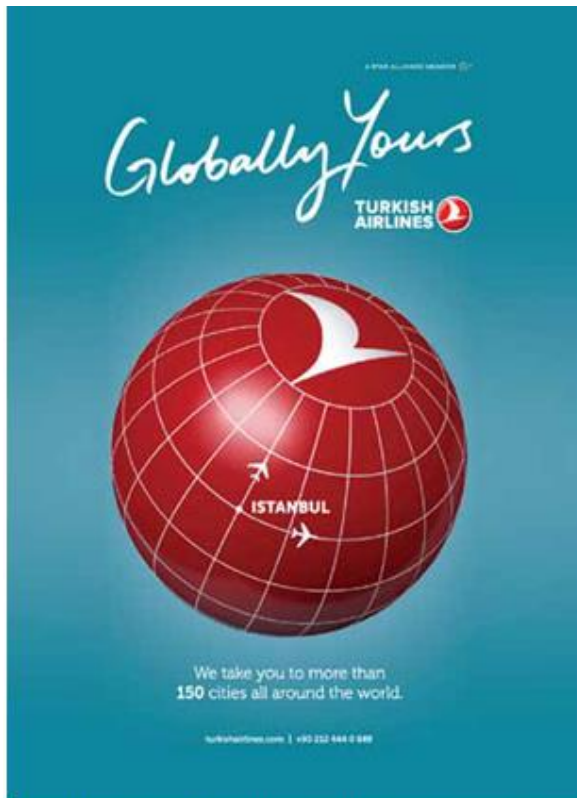
*“Becoming a strong global player requires to become a strong global brand.”* and

*“becoming a global brand requires global successes”.*

These statements illustrates the importance put forward under the corporate communication efforts of THY to build its brand image on a global scale.

### **Corporate Personality Analysis of THY**

To analyse the corporate personality of THY, we adopted the Corporate Personality Model by Brikigt and Stadler (1986). In this model, there are three main components; Symbolism, Communication and the Behaviour. To analyse the symbolism, relativity with the symbol (the red globe logo) and the motto (Globally Yours) can be quickly identified with the brand design. The motto has been introduced within every appearance of the red globe adverts, which has also become an important element of THY’s corporate identity. Flying



Visual Analysis of Red Globe: THY’s logo, Annual Report, 2010, p57

over the globe is the THY’s logo symbolizing the wild goose, nature’s only truly intercontinental traveller. The lines are connecting the destinations that the airline flies to join with the THY Logo on at the top. This design of the globe is intended to emphasize the globe spanning identity of the Turkish Airlines brand, (THY Annual Report, 2010).

To analyse the communication phase of the model, THY shows a high level of social awareness, by undertaking numerous investments in the area of traditional as well as social media. THY have taken into the ever increasing important role of social media and network as a communication tool, hence the

company has started to benefit from social network of Facebook by improving its English-language Facebook page alongside its Twitter page. The company aims to be accessed from anywhere in the world in line with Turkish Airline’s global identity. Besides this, the company has been producing all form of traditional publications (such as flight magazine, in-house magazine) as well as mainstream communication tools (such as television, radio, newspaper) to deliver Turkish Airlines’ promotional campaigns and activities. Additionally, by the use of these mediums, it aims to inform their passengers as potential passengers with up to date

current changes and continue to reinforce its brand awareness and image campaign.

During the analysis of the behaviour phase of the model, THY implies a slogan “The world is our home and you are our guest” meaning “hospitality” which is commonly associated with Turkish culture. In addition, Karaman (2011) has also expressed their sensitivity while selecting the employee due to their way of kindness, because they believe relationship and the way of treatment is one of the most important aspects within the services quality. On the same side all interviewed experts shared the same idea that the way of behaviour, caring with kind sympathy pleases all dealt stakeholders and has been praised one of the most significant distinctive values of THY in comparison with its competitors.

### Use of Celebrity Endorsement as Brand Image Creation

As stated above quotation by one of the advertisement managers, Sirin (2011) further inclined that many sub-messages were created, which aimed to appeal mainly to A+ passengers, by using psychological approach of using the faces of celebrities and carefully crafted slogans. Some of the examples are as follows.

#### Kevin Costner- “Feel Like a Star”



#### Kobe Bryant – “Business Class for Stars”



#### F.C. Barcelona- “Fly Like A Champion”



What is important to also point out in here that different strategy in ‘meaning’ creation has been employed to deliver them effectively in different countries (Sirin 2011), such as:

- 1- In Japan: Modest messages
- 2- In England: Proved messages
- 3- In America: Assertive messages
- 4- In Arab Emirates: Privileged messages

Karaman (2010) refers this differentiation as a part of their international marketing communication strategy of ‘think globally act locally’. This has been further approved by Sirin (2011), when he stated “it is difficult to deliver the same intended meaning through your message(s) within different cultural context, nevertheless our marketing research showed that this can be achieved if an emphasising put on ‘positive’ message delivery”. Moreover, if you could manage to reach them with their own languages, you would gain their respect as a stranger who has made an effort to understand their culture and values (Sirin 2011).

### Sponsorships

As Turkish Airline’s has obtained a goal of “being a global brand”, this have had a direct impact on the company’s overall corporate strategy and in their worldwide global activities. In territories where brand loyalty and choice need to be strengthened, testimonials are solicited from the most prestigious individuals and teams. (THY Annual Report, 2010)

**Decision-making process and influencers during sponsorship integrations.** THY is running a very selective marketing research strategy before signing any contracts. The general perspective from all managers has set the sport sponsorship at a priority level, where a good management and strong negotiations of critters in contracts to place the THY as sole and first place, has rewarded them in Marketing & Media World’s best from a marketer point of view (M&M Global, 2011).



**Source:** Annual Report (2010, p62)

Sari (2011), one of the sponsorship specialists, stated that “we need to evaluate sports sponsorship within the context of particular countries”, hence she outlined that the segmentation should take place within the sport sponsorships due to fan identification and popularity of the sports in specific country origin. Sari (2011) has

further proven this information in terms of how THY used marketing research results, which jointly conducted by their external PR agencies, to make a decision on which sports and teams to choose for their sponsorship in different continents. Hence, she (2011) stated they used the below sports and/or clubs within sport sponsorship within their global advertising campaigns:

- In Asia: Manchester United Fans
- In Africa: F.C. Barcelona Supporters
- In the Balkans: Turkish Airlines Basketball Euro-league
- In America: NBA, Kobe Bryant.

Although THY started to attempt sponsorships in their communication marketing mix beforehand, the key step has been taken in 2010 by moving into the sports arena. Turkish Airlines signed “Official Sponsor” sponsorship contract with the Spanish Champion and reigning European Champion; FC Barcelona in that year. The contract had covered 2.5 years and cost approximately 7.7€ million to the THY. All the advertising materials and the logo of THY displayed on the internal screens of the Nou Camp Stadium in Barcelona, plus commercial films with the players of the Barcelona Club increased the level of satisfaction in comparison with advertisement investments stated by Celik (Barcelona and Manchester Sponsorships Coordinator, 2011). He further expressed that “sponsorship is functioning like capillary vessels which enables to feed communications through very special small channels” (2011) and further emphasise the importance of the tricks while selecting the sponsorship packages (Gold-Silver-Platinum). In this process, the negotiation skills are crucial and some of the negotiations that undertook were involved in the process of such as rejecting 50 football tickets and asking for the access to their database. Basically, Celik (2011) believes that it dominantly depends on a person’s own abilities to obtain most of the rights even if not included in the contract.

According to interviews with sponsorship specialists (THY, 2011) the purposes of THY sponsorship can be outlined as:

- 1- Adding Brand Value
- 2- Increase brand awareness
- 3- Increase brand reputation
- 4- Create brand loyalty in long-run
- 5- Increasing the motivation of the personnel
- 6- Creating new network platforms for communication
- 7- Creating an emotional-bond between all stakeholders and the brand

Various factors has been taken into considerations in the decision-making process of sports sponsorship in terms of which sport team(s) and sport personalities will represent and will generate the best match for the THY's desired brand image. These factors are outlined as;

1. The level of match with Brand Strategy
2. Appealing international standards
3. Potential Media Attraction
4. Matching with regional strategies
5. Number of attendants
6. VIP opportunities
7. Digital Platform and Social Media allowance (Sari, 2011).

On the other hand, there are also number of factors have been implemented in the decisions of 'not to accept' any sponsorships, which are:

- 1- Alcohol, drug, smoke related sponsorships
- 2- Discrimination, pornographic or violence including events
- 3- Betting, poker related money games or potentially illegal anything
- 4- Dangerous sports such as boxing, car race, anything concerning safety issue – on the contrary of their vision.
- 5- Also any event or individual who is involved or attached with any political attachments (Celik, 2011).

**The rationale behind the employed sport-sponsorships to create a brand image.** Sport is a popular scope for sponsorship as it carry very strong images, has a mass international audience reach, and hence enables the sponsor to appeals vast amount of different segments of the society (Ferrand & Pages, 1996). The sponsorship criteria are set according on some principles. Sari (2011) sets their first two priorities as (1) level of THY awareness and (2) the affinity of population in those regions.

Some significant research results showed the amounts of Manchester United supporters are marginally high in Asia rather than Europe. This striking issue lead them to priorities Manchester United as number one against other teams in list. Another target country Africa marketing research showed African's affinity to F. C. Barcelona thus Barcelona gained more importance when compared with others. As a known fact, in America basketball has always been more important and generated a greater interest, such as their NBA basketball league, hence Kobe Bryant NBA best soccer has been selected to be the face of THY's America campaign. Likewise America, Basketball Euro league is also very popular in Balkan and European countries and therefore it has been decided to obtain a 'named sponsorship'. On

the other hand, tennis and golf sponsorships target more niche market where potential Business Class passengers while also contributing towards perceptions of the airline as a prestigious name.

THY was the 3<sup>rd</sup> International sponsor of the Barcelona Football Team, which was the first in history to win six trophies in a single season, (2008-2009). THY is an official sponsor of FC Barcelona Spanish Football team that has a huge and fiercely loyal following around the world. 18 January 2001 was the occasion for an event at Barcelona's Nou Camp Stadium that associated the THY's brand with FC Barcelona's distinctive style of football. Under the sponsorship agreement the F.C. Barcelona team will fly to and from all training camps and games outside Spain abroad THY's aircraft. Thus image expected to take place by showing the "safety and global" standards via carrying the champions.

THY announced a partnership with Manchester United, one of the World's biggest football clubs, by replacing Malaysian Air Asia as the "official carrier" of the Manchester Team. This contract covers 3.5 years and cost approximately 8.2 million € ([www.marketingturkiye.com](http://www.marketingturkiye.com), 2011). In its capacity as the team's official sponsor, likewise Barcelona football team, THY will be transporting the team to and from games and training camps outside the U.K. with the intention to generate a brand image "safety and global" via being an flagship air carrier of champions.

For example; Turkish Airlines decorated a Boeing 737-8F2 with the colours of Barcelona and Turkish Airlines Boeing 737-8F2 WL TC-JFV with the colours of Manchester United. Furthermore, THY uniformed its planes for 28 May 2011, when two of its teams which played the championship in London (see below advert).



**Source:** Adopted from THY Presentation, which had been prepared and provided by Karaman (2011).

Nevertheless attention of the media can't be ignored. According to Future Sport's report 2009-2010 season M. United & Barcelona related match news accessed by 2,892 billion people which is massively higher than Formula 1 potentials. What is more, unsurprisingly THY also took advantage of social media marketing and had painted by these photos images the Facebook albums of the football teams. Subsequently, this idea ends up

gaining coverage on various social blogging websites. Furthermore, creativity and humour applications in marketing communications of THY, in particular the use of Barcelona and Manchester uniform painted aeroplanes, use of football game in plane, and football related safety records with famous Manchester football players video shoot in flight screening has created highly influential effect in terms of brand awareness.

Alongside football sponsorships, as Euro-league basketball is the second most popular basketball league after NBA, THY has decided to become and still is the official 'name sponsor' of Euro basketball league, which is called "Turkish Airlines Basketball Euro-league". With this sponsorship, Turkish Airlines has managed to reach 197 countries, where 40 of them are located in Europe. The contract is signed for 5+5 years (Celik, 2011). According to 2010/2011 data information, 1,550,000 people have been attended to the Euro-league. This also generated 556,000,000 TV watching numbers. At the same time, the web-site has produced an average clicking number of more than 1,000,000 per year. The Marketing research that has been conducted by IFM Sports Group, which was based on 16 countries and 99 TV Channels guaranteed a return on media value as 6,700,000€ and the 5 year agreement points Global Media Value of 63,500,000€. During 2010-2011 year of the sponsorship contract, Turkish Airlines' logo appeared 4588 times related with Euro-league (Sari, 2011).

### **Conclusion**

Despite ever increasing use of sport sponsorship in promotional goals under corporate communication, the effectiveness of sponsorship in terms of sponsor recognition, attitude towards and satisfaction, last but not least on brand image/reputation creation is still ambiguous and sometimes contradictory amongst scholar findings. Although sport sponsorship took at the centre stage of Turkish Airlines' brand awareness and building campaigns, THY reached the maximum effect not only with use of sponsorship, it rather occurred through uniquely transformed 'informing mechanisms' between corporate strategy and corporate communication, where in a 'single platform' all communication mix elements run collaboratively to achieve the outlined corporate communication objectives from different angles. The simple and easy to remember motto of THY, "We are Turkish Airlines, we are globally yours" with an engaging musical jingle has been reinforced within every promotional activities to create association with the brand, like in the case of McDonald's 'I'm loving it'. In addition, many visuals, videos and memorable messages have been used and to increase the impact of memorability and awareness various celebrities were acted in these commercial promotions. On the PR side, external and internal PR took part in the development processes of various PR activities, such as media relations, conference and event organizations,



international aircraft industry trade shows and so on.

One of the key driving force of success story of THY's employed corporate communication strategy via sport sponsorship is having been able to set realistic and achievable objectives, but more importantly three of the corporate communication departments (PR, Protocol Directorship and Advertisement) having worked within harmony and collaboratively to accomplish the set objectives. Sport celebrities have been used in various forms of advertising to create awareness and recognition and thereafter transfer image via celebrities by adopting emotional appeal approach to build THY's corporate brand image. As stated previously, it is difficult to establish brand image with one global corporate communication strategy in service industry due to variation and barriers within different cultures, such as values, norms and obviously language. By acknowledging this, THY has adopted 'think globally, act locally' approach in its international marketing communications strategy and hence employed locally famous celebrities and symbols to create brand awareness and image. To further strengthen the brand image of THY, as quality service provider and the Europe's leading carrier, THY has also inserted 'A Star Alliance Member', which provides global airline alliances that embraces most respected aircrafts in the world, as a sub-slogan in its every promotional activity to emphasise the message of global respected air carrier.

One of the important finding was how marketing research played a crucial role in corporate management decision-making processes. Various market research survey findings have enable management team to make a decision on corporate communication strategy. More importantly, based on market research findings THY made the decision of what kind(s) of commercial sponsorship would be most beneficial to achieve their corporate communication objectives as well as to build communication campaign messages, strategic media planning, and so on.

This overall illustrates successful integration of various marketing communication tools to deliver Turkish Airlines' corporate communication goals. However, the integration process of communication mix elements centralized around sponsorships promotions. As THY has been witness the benefits of using sponsorship as the centre of marketing communication campaigns, the management team has decided to invest a further in their promotional budgeting. Overall, the corporate communication management team has been the main running force behind the success of achieving their outlined corporate vision and goals.

To summarise, the successful adaptation of campaign's strategy provides a sustainable growth. The cooperation between three communication departments enabled a 360 degrees

communication model and combinations of advertising and sponsorship, specifically sport sponsorship generated a synergic effect of global advertising campaigns. The importance of selecting sponsorship has been emphasised and several factors were listed in the decision-making process of selection. THY valued exclusivity, public awareness and positive image of the sponsors whilst investing in sponsorship decisions. To conclude, the intention is neither intended to measure the awareness building nor the image transfer, rather to document the decision-making process of how THY corporate communication managers regarding with sponsorship selection process, what did they pay attention to in their creation of global promotional campaigns. Thus, future research can be conducted on either brand awareness or brand image transfer to produce statistical finding. The attempt of build brand image via celebrity endorsements (mainly sports people) and sport sponsorship in conjunction with global advertising campaigns, Turkish Airlines' corporate communication has adopted a strategy of 'think globally act locally' strategy approach in their international integrated marketing communications effort as they saw the necessity of modifying certain aspects of communications due to the implication of multiculturalism in perception of the delivered messages.

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