

A Historical Approach to Marketing from Anatolia: Akhi Organizations

B. Zafer Erdoğan

Anadolu University, Eskişehir, Turkey.

Ömer Torlak

Eskişehir Osmangazi University, Eskişehir, Turkey.

Cengiz Yılmaz

Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey.

Mahmut Sami İşlek

Anadolu University, Eskişehir, Turkey.

Introduction

Societies have different cultural, religious, historical, and geographical backgrounds. These differences can be apparent when societies meet and are compared. Such differences across societies in terms of social and cultural reservoirs may create distinct mindsets, which may further reveal themselves in various forms of creation and production, including scientific outputs. For instance, considering the historical development of marketing science, the fact that marketing management school developed its theoretical structure parallel to the progresses of Anglo-Saxon societies (Gummeson, 1993; Grönroos, 1994) and that the relationship marketing approach is manifested to reflect Alp-Germen market relationships (Grönroos, 2000; Gummeson, 2002) demonstrate the intertwined nature of society, culture and science. Both theories can be seen as reflections of cultural and societal codes on scientific explanations.

The progress of marketing literature followed the same route as in the Anglo-Saxon route in modern Turkey. This situation brings some obstacles between academia and practitioners. This purely Anglo-Saxon theoretical orientation somehow fails to satisfy the needs of practitioners in most Non-Western societies. To overcome this shortfall, attempts have been done to develop theoretical approaches more suitable in terms of explicating the idiosyncrasies of the Turkish society (Erdogan 2009; Torlak, 2010; Torlak, Erdogan and Yilmaz, 2013), most of which are rooted in the historically rich Anatolian culture. On the origin of these approaches, institutions such as “virtuous behavior” and “Akhi organizations” are located. Another contribution to this area is Torlak and Özmen’s (2009) research in which they examined the ethical rules of Akhi Organization in Anatolia and compared these rules with modern ethical codes. The purpose of the present study is to present a distinct historical marketing approach which was utilized in Anatolia for centuries. We investigate the historical background of Anatolian marketing approach which dates back to Akhi organizations in Anatolia. For this reason, some Fütüvvetnames (written minutes of Akhi meetings) which are the basic sources of Akhism knowledge are examined, and implications of the initial findings for a better understanding of this specific exchange culture are discussed. Akhism is a craftsmen solidarity organization arose in Anatolia in the beginning of 13th century, but the term Akhism also refers to the social, political and economic principles of Akhi Organizations that constructed the social relations at that time.

Anatolian Approach

The foundations of Anatolian approach can be found from Akhi organizations which are part of ancient Turkish culture and has a motto like “Customer is the benefactor”. Akhi understanding prioritizes high level societal and ethereal objectives, cares individual’s maturation and development instead of self-interest, and presents a different exchange model and consideration which is beyond commercial objectives and activities and shaped by political, martial and social concerns (Torlak, Erdogan and Yilmaz, 2013, p. 189).

Anatolian approach rooted in Akhism can be seen as a composition of relationship marketing within networks with the perspective of societal and ethereal considerations. As an alternative

theoretical approach to understand non-Western markets, Anatolian approach provides a holistic point of view embracing interests of society, producers, customers and the environment.

To present and compare basic different features of three distinct approaches Torlak, Erdogan and Yilmaz (2013) developed below Table 1, which is originated from Dwyer *et al's* (1987) study. By preparing this table, authors demonstrate nuances of three approaches and try to show distinctive features of Anatolian approach.

Table I: The Comparison of Anglo-Saxon, Alp-Germen and Anatolian Approaches

Situational Characteristics			
Contractual Elements	Discrete Transactions	Relational exchange	Akhi Understanding of Exchange
Timing of Exchange (Commencement, Duration, and Termination of Exchange)	Distinct beginning, short duration, and sharp ending by performance	Commencement traces to previous agreements, exchange is longer in duration reflecting an ongoing process	Commencement traces back to the establishment of value systems during to foundation of the AKHI institution, and exchange is expected to prolong indefinitely as long the AKHI institution continues to exist.
Number of Parties (Entities taking part in some aspect of the exchange process)	Two parties	Often more than two parties involved in the process and governance of exchange	Almost always more than two parties involved in the process of exchange which is governed by AKHI norms
Obligations (Three aspects: sources of content, sources of obligation, and specificity)	Content comes from offers and simple claims, obligations come from beliefs and customs (external environment) and are mostly standardized	Content and obligations are promises made in the relation plus customs and laws; obligations are customized, detailed, administered within the relation	Largely standardized content and obligations based on religious values, social welfare concerns, and societal balance; shaped by traditions and moral norms.
Expectations for Relations (Especially concerned with conflicts of interest, the prospects of unity, and potential trouble)	Conflicts of interest (goals) and little unity are expected, but no future trouble is anticipated because cash payment upon instantaneous performance precludes future interdependence.	Anticipated conflicts of interest and future trouble are counterbalanced by trust and efforts at unity	Due to adherence to higher-order religious, societal, and military concerns, harmony and balance constitute most important expectations and conflicts of interest are rare and generally solved in a functional manner
Process Characteristics			
Primary Personal Relations (Social interaction and communication)	Minimal personal relationships; ritual-like communications predominate	Important personal noneconomic satisfactions derived; both formal and informal communications are used	Exchange processes are seen as instruments facilitating personal faith and progress as well as mastery in business; therefore, intrinsic satisfaction and solidarity predominates economic considerations
Contractual Solidarity (Regulation of exchange behavior to ensure performance)	Governed by social norms, rules, etiquette, and prospects for self-gain	Increased emphasis on legal and self-regulation; psychological satisfactions cause internal adjustments	Governed in accordance to the higher-order societal and religious aims of the AKHI institution.
Transferability (the ability to transfer rights, obligations, and satisfactions to other parties)	Complete transferability; it matters not who fulfills contractual obligation	Limited transferability; exchange is heavily dependent on the identity of the parties	Partial transferability; rights and responsibilities are not personal and are tied upon the identity of the AKHI organization
Cooperation (especially joint efforts at performance and planning)	No joint efforts	Joint efforts related to both performance and planning over time; adjustment over time is endemic	Unconditional cooperation in line with the higher-order societal and religious foundations of the AKHI institution

Planning (The process and mechanisms for coping with change and conflicts)	Primary focus on the substance of exchange; no future is anticipated	Significant focus on the process of exchange; detailed planning for the future exchange within new environments and to satisfy changing goals; tacit and explicit assumption abound	Primary focus is on tacit and explicit norms that represent higher-order aims. Planning usually purports principles of harmony and balance
Measurement and Specificity (Calculation and reckoning of exchange)	Little attention to measurement and specifications; performance is obvious	Significant attention to measuring, specifying, and quantifying all aspects of performance, including psychic and future benefits	Measurement and specifying based not on economic concerns but on harmony and balance
Power (The ability to impose one's will on others)	Power may be exercised when promises are made until promises are executed	Increased interdependence increases the importance of judicious application of power in the exchange	Existence and use of power are based on religious principles and institutional goals
Division of Benefits and Burdens (The extent of sharing of benefits and burdens)	Sharp division of benefits and burdens into parcels; exclusive allocation to parties	Likely to include some sharing of benefits and burdens and adjustments to both shared and parceled benefits and burdens over time	Flexible configuration of burdens primarily for societal benefits as well as for the continuation of institutional AKHI principles; individual benefits are suppressed to the largest extent

By determining situational and process characteristics of discrete transactions, relational exchange and Akhi understanding of exchange, authors highlighted the differences of Anglo-Saxon, Alp-Germen and Anatolian approaches on timing of exchange, number of parties, obligations, expectations for relations, primary social relations, contractual solidarity, transferability, cooperation, planning, measurement, power and division of benefits. To clarify Akhi understanding of exchange, it should be said that exchange processes are seen as instruments facilitating personal faith and progress as well as mastery in business; therefore, intrinsic satisfaction and solidarity predominates economic considerations. In Akhi understanding, there are largely standardized content and obligations based on religious values, social welfare concerns, and societal balance; shaped by traditions and moral norms. Anatolian marketing approach puts being moral and virtuous behavior to the center of market relationships within networks and considers competitors, society and their gains while creating value for the parties, and originates this orientation from Akhi knowledge of Anatolia.

Akhism and Fütüvvetname

Akhism was manifested in 13th century Anatolia and becomes a significant building block for Turkish social structure. It is pre-guild experience of Anatolian history (Özbirecikli, 2010). Akhi organization has branches in every accommodation unit and they are social and economic structures where craftsmen and traders develop their secular and ethereal improvements. There were official documents indicating the socio-economic conditions of Akhism and every member of Akhi organization must obey the rules mentioned on these documents. Regulations including the rules to be obeyed by small enterprises according to the Akhism Rules were called as Fütüvvetname (Gürata, 1975, p. 252).

Basic sources of Akhism which are also leading the content of Fütüvvetnames are; Islam (Verses of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad's sayings), ancient cultural characteristics of Turks, and cultural heritage from Anatolia (Ceylan, 2013, p. 13) which has been the center of many civilizations such as Hittites, Phrygian, Lydia, Urartian, (2000 BC - 600 BC), Persian Empire (543 BC- 333), Byzantium (395 - 1071) and Turks (1071 - ..).

Fütüvvetname is composition that utilized on moral education of Akhis and basic subject of Fütüvvetname is moral education including theoretical foundations of Islamic mysticism (tasavvuf). There are some Fütüvvetnames in history which have no authors specified. Since general moral orders and values suggested in Fütüvvetnames, and compositions that guide to Akhis, some modest and humble authors did not consider themselves as superiors to lead and guide Akhi people. That is why, they did not write their names on Fütüvvetnames.

Fütüvvetname is the word stem from Fütüvvet which is associated with altruism, kindness, helping, philanthropy, tolerance, being against self-indulgent.

According to Ülgener (2006) in economic understanding that compose Akhism, moderation and austerity are the basic elements of the system. With his words; “perfect human being (insan-ı kamil) of this age is the person who is far from future anxiety and greed rampancy resulting from continuous contacts with material world. He is also calm, in peace within and confident about livelihood”.

Demir (2000) indicates that Akhism is the Renaissance of Turks. According to Erken (1998) even today, Akhism and its order of organization shape a prime societal action with five core principle; “social responsibility, excellence in service, honesty, righteousness, and common life awareness”. Furthermore excellence in service was the *raison d’être* of Akhism (Torlak and Özmen, 2009). On that sense Erken (1998) states that Akhism provides an organization model which is advanced even for the new Millennia. Methods and rules to develop standardized and of high quality production in Akhism characterize historical versions of today’s Total Quality Management and auto-control system (Durak and Yücel, 2010).

According to Ülgener (2006) Akhi organization represent a mindset which is contrary to liberal capitalist system in all aspects. Accordingly, instead of doing business which is sufficient to have the livelihood of self and dependants, exploitative and greed business bent on material accumulation always heavily criticized back then. Moral of social life even for craftsmen and traders who should have connections to economic activities is from immaterialized world view. This basic idea can be remarked with one sentence; staying out of material and material world. People who are stingy, arrogant, vindictive, liar, promise-breaker, thief, cruel, fornicator, traitor, and those who tell someone’s fault to his face rather than cover up and those who overcharge are not accepted to the organization. If any member of the organization does any action mentioned above, he would be excluded immediately. No one does business with him and he would not be respected in the society (Arslanoğlu, 1997).

In order to make this system successful, society should have some features such as; being communitarian rather than individualist, limited ambition to get market share, being accommodating, and aversion of risk. Main purpose of life should be reaching security by being a part of the community (Cem, 2008, p. 102).

Everybody is not welcomed to the organization. The people who are not accepted to Akhism (cited fr. Burgazi Fütüvvetname) are; those who do not fulfil the promise on time and not honor a commitment, butchers who hurt the slaughtered animal, hunters who set a snare and catch birds with cheat, and traders who hide required material, create scarcity, and then sell it expensive (stockpiling) (Anadol, 2001). Members of Ahi organization act in accordance with rules because of their spiritual progress which takes place during the highly-disciplined promotion procedure along the levels of organization hierarchy (Torlak and Özmen, 2009).

Rules of Akhism

Rules of Akhism can be classified as social and economic rules (Gülvağaboğlu, 1991, p. 248). Social rules consist obeying the orders of God and avoid interdictions, being hospitable and helpful, embracing people without taking into consideration religion and cult, not talking against people behind, resisting cruelty and injustice, trying to guide people to the straight path, and not having hatred and enmity towards anyone. Furthermore, economic rules are about being generous, not cheating and lying in trade, helping the fair weak over the unfair strong, being accurate, giving priority to public interests, considering manual labor as sacred, and not burgling (Özbirecikli, 2010).

In Akhi organizations, there were some signs (mark, brand) of the producer on the good produced by copper or iron. This mark was a kind of certificate of high quality, because the product was the identity for the producer. It is forbidden in Akhism to denigrate or copy the colleague. Instead of trying to grab more market share, austerity and altruism is prevalent on markets (Durak and Yücel, 2010).

If a store had the first sale of the day (siftah) and his neighbor not, he lead the customer to his neighbor to make his first sale of the day also. In Akhism, capital accumulation is forbidden. Akhi leader can have only 18 dinars on his pocket. He should share the surplus with weak, poor or travelers. That is why in every Akhi organization; there was a Zawiyah (a small Islamic monastery) on every accommodation unit (Ceylan, 2013).

Akhism is against to anything that is immoral such as; consumption without production, consuming more than need, unfair competition, dominant’s exploitation of weak, unjust gain, and deception. Selling bruised or fraudulent goods, taking more money from the customer, imitating someone’s good, weighing inadequately or using broken scales, and producing goods in low quality

and fake are some of the actions that are forbidden in Akhi organizations (Ivgin, 1993). It can be said that Akhi organization is shaped by solidarity, moderation and austerity principles. In Akhism, people should consume up to their need and share the surplus with others (Çağatay, 1990).

In Akhism system, many goods are delivered from producers and there were not many intermediary institutions. Working places are the markets where a cluster of craftsmen gather. Hence, consumer can find the needed good easily and faster. Goods are presented with similar quality and price in these markets (Ceylan, 2013). A competition approach which lets consumers to choose in terms of his/her taste and perceived quality was constructed in Akhi organization (Durak and Yücel, 2010).

If consumer feels like that he was deceived, he/she has right to make complaint to the top Akhism institution. In Akhism, it is seen that there is an agenda for consumer and his/her level of satisfaction with the good. The consumer not only permitted to make complaint but also some organizational actions had taken to sustain this complaint process by Akhism institution. Consequently, money is not seen as goal but a tool. Concordantly Sadi (13th century poet) remarked that “Good is for peace and security of life, life is not for good gathering” (Ekinci, 1989).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Anatolian approach rooted in the Akhi Organization can be seen as composition of relationship marketing within networks with the perspective of societal and ethereal considerations. It is derived from a form of market economy that cares for society, producers, customers and the environment as a whole.

The question for now is; is it possible to apply this historical approach to marketing in today’s global modern society that is highly tech-savvy, individualized and materialized? If yes, that is the question for future academic inquiries. The first step could be a test for Anatolian approach in terms of marketing equilibrium which, is offered from Gummesson (2009), is composed of the forces of competition, collaboration, regulations/institutions and one overriding force, ethics. In marketing equilibrium, Gummesson (2009) suggests a marketing contribution to the market economy and highlight the need of ethical consideration by putting ethics to the center of his equilibrium formula which is also quite apparent in Anatolian approach. To expand the understanding of marketing approaches in markets, some fresh and different conceptualizations and historical/political background is needed. Anatolian approach can be part of an answer to these issues on some level.

REFERENCES

- Dwyer, F. R., Schurr, P. H. and Oh, S. (1987), “Developing buyer-seller relationships”, *Journal of Marketing*, 51 (April), pp. 11-27.
- Erdoğan, B. Z. (2009), “Pazarlama: Küresel Krizin Suçlusu mu, Kurtarıcısı mı? *Tüketici ve Tüketim Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 1, (1), pp. 41-51.
- Grönroos, C. (1994), “From Marketing Mix to Relationship Marketing: Towards a Paradigm Shift in Marketing”, *Management Decision*, 32/2, pp. 4-20.
- Grönroos, C. (2000), *Service Management and Marketing: A Customer Relationship Management Approach*, Wiley, New York, NY.
- Gülvağaboğlu, A. (1991), *Ahi Evran-ı Veli ve Ahilik*, Memleket, Ankara, Turkey.
- Gummesson, E. (2002), “Relationship Marketing in the New Economy”, *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 1/1, pp. 37-57.
- Gummesson, E. (2009), “The Global Crisis and the Marketing Scholar”, *Journal of Customer Behaviour*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 119-135.
- Gürata, M. (1975). *Unutulmuş Adetlerimiz ve Loncalar*, Tisa, Ankara, Turkey.
- Habermas, J. (1988) *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jerry A. Stark, MIT Press, Massachusetts:USA.
- Özbirecikli, M. (2010), “The Institutions Forming The Socioeconomic Structure Of Turkish Private Enterprises Between The 13th And The 19th Centuries: Akhi, The Lonca System And The Gedik System”, *Pecunia*, 11, pp. 135-152.
- Torlak, Ö. and Özmen, M. (2009), “A Comparison between East and West in Terms of Marketing Ethics Codes”, paper presented 14th Biennial Conference on Historical Analysis and Research in Marketing (CHARM), 28-31 May 2009, Leicester, UK, available at

<http://faculty.quinnipiac.edu/charm/CHARM%20proceedings/Proceedings%20Vol.%2014.htm>
(accessed 12 September 2014).

- Torlak, Ö., Erdoğan, B. Z. ve Yılmaz, C. (2013), “Bir Sosyal Pazarlama (İşletmecilik) Modeli Olarak Ahi Örgütleri, paper presented Social Business @ Anadolu International Conference, 30-31 May 2013, Eskişehir, Turkey, available at:<http://sbau.anadolu.edu.tr/sbau-2013/bildiriler/SBCONF-2013-M-09.pdf> (accessed 24 October 2014).
- Ülgener, S. F., (2006) *İktisadi Çözülmenin Ahlak ve Zihniyet Dünyası*, Derin, İstanbul, Turkey.