The Impact of Organizational Symbolism on Firm Performance and Organizational Commitment at Family Companies: A Scale Development Research

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ABSTRACT

In this study that was conducted to measure the effects of organizational symbolism on organizational commitment and firm performance, a scale development study was carried out to evaluate the concept of symbolism. For all these analyses, a questionnaire was applied to a total of 727 family-owned business employees. In the scale development study, the organizational symbolism was divided into three dimensions. Among these dimensions, it is observed that structural and administrative symbolism and outward symbolism affect organizational commitment and firm performance. Narrative and discursive symbolism do not affect organizational commitment and firm performance.

KEYWORDS

Organizational Symbolism, Organizational Commitment, Firm Performance, Family Companies, Scale Development

1. INTRODUCTION

The symbols, which are expressed as the reflection of an organizational culture, enable organizational members to interpret in-depth information about the organization, and the member of the organization has information about the effectiveness of the organization in internal and external environments, and its ideology, character and value system (Dandridge et al., 1980). The fact that family-owned businesses are significant organizational forms of the world economy and make significant contribution to business life, and their unique structures composed of their members reveal the urgency and importance of this study, which includes the perceptions on how they interpret symbols and transfer them to the members of the organization (Shanker and Astrachan, 1996; Chrisman et al., 2003; Diéguez-Soto et al., 2016). When Hambrick and Lovelace (2018) reviewed the literature, they stated that the common goal of all authors is to develop existing methods and analyses or to change the organizational symbolism literature, and they attempt to strengthen their prospective prediction skills using the relevant concepts such as efficiency and effectiveness and various strategic management techniques.

Organizational symbolism means the aspects of the organization that the members of the organization use to explain or make unconscious feelings, images and values in the organization comprehensible. In short, symbolism is the character, ideology or values system of an institution. While this makes the character of the organization comprehensible, symbols can strengthen or weaken the institution, and consequently force the organization to make changes. This character is revealed with some various phenomena. For example, these phenomena can be stories and myths that the organization has deliberately made up, created unconsciously or selected from critical real-life incidents. They have accumulated to give meaning and structure to critical life events (the establishment of the organization, critical events, charismatic characters, etc.). Otherwise, they can emerge as an orientation program, a meeting, a coffee break or an organization’s logo (the externalized concrete, visual mark that an organization has selected or designed to transmit its unique inner character to the external environment and itself). The jokes and anecdotes that occur in the daily emotional and political life of the organization may also reveal the character of the organization. Each of these examples is symbolic, as it is in the words of psychologists and anthropologists. Each of these symbolic elements is shaped by individuals in the organization and culture and is made up of broad meaning layers that are intertwined (Dandridge et al., 1980).

To date, the researchers have focused on the subjects related to organizational culture and organizational climate rather than studies on organizational symbolism and developed many scales and conducted empirical studies on
these subjects. Unfortunately, the organizational symbolism was overshadowed by these two subjects and could not make as many advancements as the subjects mentioned above in the literature. The analysis, interpretation, and creation of an integrative effect within the organization of symbols that are accepted as the reflection of the organizational culture in specific definitions and include more elements than the organizational culture as of content in certain definitions are of great importance for the organization (Morgan, 1985; Rafaeli and Worline, 1999; Keskin et al., 2016). In short, the excellent management of symbols in organizations is essential for their survival and maintaining their life.

The fact that the order related to global economy is built around family-owned businesses (Sarbah and Xiao, 2015), the richness of family-owned businesses increases in general since they have a mixed structure that consists of the family and other members (Whiteside and Brown, 1991), and consequently family-owned businesses have unique and specific features (Tagiuri and Davis, 1996) make investigating the world of symbols that family-owned businesses incorporate more attractive. While primarily the family’s ideas, long-term point-of-view, common targets, quick decision-making and particular forms of competitive advantage are regarded as sources created, on the other hand, elements such as family conflict, refusal to accept ideas from outside and resistance to change are regarded as a threat (Barrett, 2014). While all these show that the advantageous and disadvantageous symbols in the family-owned business should be investigated, whether these symbols create organizational commitment and affect the firm performance are also revealed primarily with this study.

The research question of this study is whether organizational symbolism affects organizational commitment and firm performance. Consequently, the two aims of the study are revealed. The first one is to develop an organizational symbolism scale since there is no organizational symbolism scale available in the literature. The second one is to establish a conceptional model to investigate the effect of the organizational symbolism scale developed on organizational commitment and firm performance.

2. THEORY DEVELOPMENT AND HYPOTHESES

Organizational Symbolism, Organizational Commitment, and Firm Performance

The conceptual model and hypotheses were created after developing the organizational symbolism scale and revealing its dimensions. It is possible to achieve analyses on the subject in the Data and Method section of the study. It is argued that structural and administrative symbolism, narrative and discursive symbolism, and outward symbolism, which are the dimensions of organizational symbolism, will affect organizational commitment and firm performance positively because it is believed that the symbols inside and outside the organization that are interpreted by managers and organization members should increase organizational commitment and the performance of the organization. At this point, it is desired to examine the reflections of managerial decisions and behaviours in the organization, the structure of the organization, the stories told and discourses, the image of the organization, competitive power, ethical codes on the organization members, and the effects of this situation on organizational commitment and firm performance.

This research primarily focused on some studies previously conducted between organizational commitment and firm performance and organizational culture and its elements considering that no empirical study on symbols had ever been conducted, and the following results were obtained. Accordingly, Ahmad (2012) measured the effects of the sub-dimensions of the organizational culture on firm performance with a survey applied to the employees of the Commission on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in the South. As a result, it is possible to say that there is a significant and positive relationship between the sub-dimensions of organizational culture and performance management. Mitic et al. (2016) investigated the organizational commitment of 400 mid-level managers in 129 companies producing paper in Serbia in the context of organizational culture. The primary organizational culture elements addressed at this point were determined as future orientation, power distance, human orientation and performance orientation, and it was attempted to measure the state of the organizational commitment of organization members in the context of these elements. As a result, depending on the statistical analyses performed, it is possible to talk about a significant relationship between the elements of organizational culture and organizational commitment.

In the light of these ideas, thoughts, and studies, the main hypotheses of the study are as follows:

H1: Organizational symbolism directly and positively affects organizational commitment.
H2: Organizational symbolism directly and positively affects firm performance.
Nevertheless, it is necessary to support the sub-hypotheses depending on the main hypotheses to verify the main hypotheses. Accordingly, the sub-hypotheses were created as follows by the following information in the literature.

Regarding structural and administrative symbols, according to Çakınberk and Demirel (2010), the state of managers about their leadership styles increases the commitment of organizational members. It was found out that especially transformational leadership among leadership styles has a strong effect on organizational commitment. Again, according to Telli et al. (2012), the leadership styles of managers affect the commitment of organizational members to the organization. The positive styles and behaviors of managers have a reducing effect on the exhaustion of organization members experienced in organizations and the state of quitting their work. According to Holagh et al. (2014), there is a strong correlation between the structure of the organization and organizational commitment. For example, if the members of the organization are supported regarding producing creative ideas, this positively affects organizational commitment. According to Shafaee et al. (2012), positive business features related to the structure of the organization have a positive effect on job satisfaction, and this positively affects organizational commitment. The sub-hypothesis created in the light of this information are as follows:

H1a: Administrative and structural symbols that are among the sub-dimensions of organizational symbolism directly and positively affects organizational commitment.

Narrative and discursive symbols are at the top of the most essential elements of organizational culture and organizational symbolism. It is possible to say that especially the elements such as stories, myths, language, and heroes create narrative and discursive symbols. For example, according to Çelik (2004), organizational stories are among the main factors that determine organizational culture. This is among the main elements that affect organizational commitment in the light of previous information. It is stated that these symbols that are among the critical elements of organizational culture reinforce organizational commitment by strengthening it (Azizollah et al., 2016, 199-200), Gülöva and Demirsoy (2012) also underline that there is a definite relationship between organizational culture and specific dimensions of organizational commitment and emphasize how critical these dimensions are. The sub-hypothesis created in the light of this information is as follows:

H1b: Narrative and discursive symbols that are among the sub-dimensions of organization symbolism directly and positively affect organizational commitment.

It is possible to say that outward symbols are in the most important position regarding the point-of-views of organizational members on the organization and internalizing the organization because the symbols of the organization of vital importance for it such as its outward image, competitive power, ethical behaviors, reputation, and position emerge as outward symbols. For example, according to Valentine and Barnett (2003), the strong ethical codes and ethical values of the organization lead to a high level of communication in the organization and consequently affect organizational commitment. According to Öcel (2013), the power and reputation of the organization affect organizational commitment. According to Meydan (2010), organizational power and justice perceptions influence both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. As a result, individuals are satisfied because of their commitment, but what ensures commitment is their organizational power and justice perceptions. The sub-hypothesis created in the light of this information is as follows:

H1c: Outward symbols, among the sub-dimensions of organization symbolism, directly and positively affect organizational commitment.

Regarding the effect of structural and administrative symbols on firm performance, Demir and Okan (2009) pointed to the relationship between the operational and strategic decision structure and the performance of the organization, and as a result of their study, they found out that the organizational structure has a significant and positive effect on firm performance. According to Ceylan (2001), firm performance increases as flexibility, one of the significant concepts related to the organization’s structure, increases. Furthermore, the rate of return, profitability ratio, economic profitability of investments increase as the quality of employees increases. The human-centered cultural structure and flexibility in the application of the processes increase profitability ratios. Cummings and Schwab (1973) stated that the most critical factor that affects the performance of organizational members is the leadership skills of managers (Yilmaz and Karahan, 2010). Avolio and Bass (1995) are of the same opinion that the behaviors
and styles of managers have a positive effect on the performance of organizational members and consequently a positive effect on organizational performance. The sub-hypothesis created in the light of this information is as follows:

H₂: Administrative and structural symbols that are among the sub-dimensions of organizational symbolism directly and positively affect firm performance.

Regarding narrative and discursive symbols, a direct relationship can be established between the fact whether these symbols are strong or weak and firm performance. It is stated that especially organizations that have such strong elements show better performance than others because the expected output of these elements that create cooperation and solidarity between the members of the organization, and commitment to the organization is high performance (Güçlü, 2003). According to Ojo (2008), these elements that are the building blocks of organizational culture are quite critical for the performance of the organization, and they should not be disregarded. The central beliefs and assumptions that underlie the organizational culture model of Denison (1984) are quite important for the organization. These main beliefs and assumptions are built on symbols, rituals and heroes, and these make up the basis of the culture component. These elements ensure that the organization is more consistent and better adapts to required conditions and affect organizational performance (Ahmad, 2012). The sub-hypothesis created in the light of this information is as follows:

H₃: Narrative and discursive symbols that are among the sub-dimensions of organizational symbolism directly and positively affect firm performance.

Regarding outward symbols, the value and image of the organization affect organizational performance according to Damey et al. (2016). Furthermore, the value of the organization has more effect when compared to the organization’s image in affecting the organization’s performance. According to Adams et al. (2005), the synergy between the strong position of the organization and managers and the values of the organization also affects the performance of the organization. According to Sabir et al. (2012), the ethical values of the organization are regarded as the most significant factor both for ethical leadership and employee performance. Again, according to Burns (1978), ethical values positively affect leaders and their followers regarding performance. Indeed, ethical values are among the most significant components of ethical leadership and employee performance (Sabir et al., 2012). Finally, Malik et al. (2016) also investigated the relationship between the opinion of the organization on ethical values and firm performance, and consequently, they observed that organizations that exhibit ethical behaviors inspire their employees, and this is positively reflected on the organization’s performance. The sub-hypothesis created in the light of this information is as follows:

H₄: Outward symbols, among the sub-dimensions of organizational symbolism, directly and positively affect firm performance.

3. DATA AND METHOD
Sample and Data Sources
The following sources were used and inspired from in the process of creating the organizational symbolism scale, which is the first stage of the study. According to these sources, the scale created consists of 2 main and four sub-dimensions and a pool of 51 questions in total. It is possible to list these sources used as follows chronologically:

The fact that Dandridge, Mitroff, and Joyce expressed the character, ideology or values system of the term organizational symbolism in their article (1980) was used as a reference in preparing the questions of the “Organizational Symbolism Scale.” As it is stated in the article, the stories and myths told, critical incidents and charismatic acts taking place in the organization, ceremonies, and rituals such as orientation, meeting and coffee breaks held, the effects of the organization’s logo inside and outside the organization, and the jokes and anecdotes told in the organization have become a source of inspiration in the preparation of the scale questions. The fact that symbols are perceived as the subjective proof of the climate in the study ensured the inclusion of the organizational climate element in the scale. Finally, the categorization of organizational symbolism as verbal (myths, legends, stories, slogans, beliefs, humor, rumours, nicknames), operational (parties, parades, meals, breaks, starting the day, etc. rituals, special actions) and physical (status symbols, company products, logos, prizes, badges, brooches, flags) was also reflected on the study regarding the scale.

According to Morgan (1985), symbols are at the top of the most important tools used in ensuring intra-organizational communication. According to the researcher, organizational life is all about a symbolic process, and
symbolism studies must focus on three main subjects. The first one is to understand the needs with symbolic importance related to the order, control, and organization. The second one requires the investigation of the close relationship between the conscious and non-conscious aspects of symbolism. The third one requires understanding the closeness of the relationship between power and ideology to understand symbolism. This information in work was used as a reference in the scaling study.

According to Fromm (1992), the symbol is defined as “the elements that remain in the place of something else, that replace and represent it.” People can explain their feelings as if they are concrete perceptions, and they can talk about many things with the language of symbols representatively. According to Pratt and Rafaeli (1997), organizational symbolism includes physical structures, language, metaphors, dramaturgy, ceremonies and rituals, stories and myths. In simpler terms, anything that has to mean is a symbol. All this information was used as a reference in the scaling study.

Rafaeli and Worline (1999) focus on four functions of symbols. These functions consider symbols as the physical tips and meaning bearers in organizations. The first one of these reflects the main and shared values or assumptions of symbols. Symbols represent the underlying values, assumptions, philosophies and the expectations of the organizational life. In the second one, symbols affect behaviors by revealing inward values and norms. Here, according to their position in the organization, employees exhibit certain behavioral patterns depending on their roles, and these roles and patterns are directly affected by symbols. In the third function, symbols facilitate communication between employees in the organization. Symbols are shown as reference frameworks that enable talking about abstract concepts. In the fourth function, symbols ensure intra-organizational integration. All these functions have become the source of inspiration for the scaling study.

According to Fuller (2008), examples of symbols also include organizational incidents that may potentially have a symbolic meaning such as titles, decisions, structure, personnel policies and physical environment in addition to comprising classical language, myths and stories about the culture. All this information was taken into consideration when creating the scale.

According to Keskin et al. (2016), organizational symbols can be exemplified as a corporate logo, parking spaces, formal meetings, corporate plans, office layout, architecture, sculptures, interior design, decoration, stories, myths, legends, slogans and jokes. Symbols are the objects, stories, discourses, tastes and smell that give an idea to organizational members about the sense of identity, meaning and structure. These elements were taken into consideration in the scaling study.

The organizational commitment scale used in the model together with organizational symbolism in the conceptual model was developed by Mowday et al. (1979), and it consists of 15 questions. The firm performance scale, which is another scale to be used in the conceptual model, consisted of 12 questions and took its final shape with the contributions of Venkatraman and Ramanujan (1986), Baker and Sinkula (1999), Vorhies et al. (1999), Antoncic and Hisrich (2001), King and Zeithaml (2001), Zahra et al. (2002), Chang et al. (2003), Rozenzweig et al. (2003), Vorhies and Morgan (2005).

According to the information obtained from the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce, the size of the population revealed was calculated as 4,000,000 insured employees in Istanbul region, and the number to be surveyed was determined accordingly. First, the 7-point Likert-type scale study was applied to the employees of 314 family-owned businesses at the confidence interval of 90% based on this universe in the relevant study on the development of the organizational symbolism scale. In the second study, the model of the thesis study was tested, and the 7-point Likert-type scale model was applied to 413 family-owned business employees at a confidence interval of 95% again based on the same universe.

Variables

Independent Variables
Organizational Symbolism. As it is specified above, the organizational symbolism scale was created by being inspired by the studies in the literature on the subject. Accordingly, organizational symbolism is divided into two main dimensions, being inward and outward symbols. Inward symbols consist of three sub-dimensions, being structural and administrative, aesthetic, narrative and discursive symbols.
Inward symbols include symbols related to the internal operation of the organization. The first ones among these symbols, administrative and structural symbols consist of elements such as the behaviours and decisions of managers in the organization, the structure of the organization, the level of commitment to work and the level of motivation, an environment of trust, break hours, the level of cooperation and solidarity, margin of error, corporate and career planning, ceremonies, meetings, parties, informal chats, ethical codes, circulation and transfer of information. The second one, aesthetic symbols consist of elements such as the organization’s unique decoration and architectural structure, clothes and appearance of organizational members, the logo and identity of the organization, equipment used, technology and parking places. The third one, narrative and discursive symbols consist of important people and stories in the past of the organization, legendary executives, slogans, jargon, jokes and anecdotes. Outward symbols generally consist of the adaptation of the organization to environmental conditions, the ability to turn the environment of crisis into an opportunity, the ability to observe the environment and make a decision, relations with customers, the position in the environment of competition, the level of importance attributed to social responsibility projects, the reputation and image in the sector and ethical codes, technology and the logo of the organization.

Dependent Variables
Organizational Commitment. Organizational commitment means the bond created between the organizational member and the organization, and this concept is defined as the loyalty to the organization, being identified with the organization, and the willingness to participate in the organization (Griffin et al., 2010; Kessler, 2013; Wołowska, 2014). In short, the success of an organization depends on factors that connect organizational members to the organization. The managers of the organization should analyze these factors thoroughly and try to keep them at the same level at all times (Wołowska, 2014).

Kanter (1968) defines organizational commitment as a process in which organizational members strive for achieving the targets that the organization has set. Etzioni (1975) investigates organizational commitment in three dimensions stating that the power or authorities of the organization on organizational members result from the approaching of the organizational member to the organization. These are defined as alienative, moral and calculative commitment. In alienative commitment, organizational members have a negative attitude towards the organization. It is dominant in the relationships between intra-organizational oppositional members. In moral commitment, organizational members exhibit a positive attitude towards the organization. As for calculative commitment, there is an interest-based relationship between organizational members. Here, it is not possible to talk about a positive or negative attitude of organizational members towards the organization. O’Reilly and Chatman (1986) define organizational commitment as a psychological bond that connects the organizational member and the organization with each other. According to Mowday et al. (1979), organizational commitment is defined as a strong desire of organizational members to believe and accept the aims and values of the organization, the willingness to make an intensive effort for the aims of the organization, and to remain in the organization and maintain one’s membership to the organization. According to Meyer et al. (1993), organizational commitment is a psychological condition that characterizes the relationship between organizational members and the organization and affects their decisions on whether to continue their membership or not.

Allen and Meyer state that organizational commitment is based on three main elements (Meyer et al., 2002). These are effective, continuance and normative commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Shore et al., 1995). According to affective commitment, organizational members exhibit a determined attitude to achieve the aims of the organization and remain in the organization. This ensures the identification of organizational members with the organization (McGee and Ford, 1987; Shore et al., 1995). The commitment to maintain is the state of being aware of the costs that are quitting the organization will bring, and therefore, organizational members strive to maintain their membership (Gül, 2002). Normative commitment includes the moral obligations of organizational members regarding continuing to work in a particular organization. Organizational members that feel committed to their organization because of the sense of gratitude and the wish to give back what one takes or the need to socialize think that they should stay in their organization (McMahon, 2007). The approach of Penley and Gould (1988) is based on the commitment approach of Etzioni. However, they focused on the concepts of moral and calculative commitment rather than the concept of alienative commitment. Concepts such as work addiction, willingness to work outside the working hours and working at home comply with the concept of moral commitment; behaviors such as introducing oneself, asking for more responsibility from the seniors and trying to prove oneself are defined as calculative commitment. According to Becker (1960), the concept of commitment is a clear indication of the operation in the behavior of a consistent human being. At this point, the members of the organization shape their interests with a series of consistent activities by performing the party-bet operation. The party-bet state occurs as a result of the
participation of organizational members in social organizations. It is necessary to analyze the values system in which party-bets are made to understand the intra-organizational commitment fully. According to Salancik (1977), organizational commitment includes the state in which organizational members are bound with their actions. According to the researcher, commitment exists in every area of life, and people live without being informed of its restricting effects and its fine control on their behaviors, and they act according to it. Commitment is what makes us what we do, and human beings continue to do it even when the results are not visible.

**Firm Performance.** The word performance is expressed as the number of goods and services produced within a specific period, and it is also mentioned synonymously in the literature with concepts such as “effectiveness,” “productivity” and “output.” It is also described as a result of interaction between one’s skills and motivation. Performance is the good, service or thought revealed to fulfill a duty and achieve a goal in such a way that fulfills the previously defined targets during the task (Helvaci, 2002).

Upon examining the literature on performance measurement in firms, it is observed that it consists of two stages. The first one is between the 1880s and 1980s, and financial measures such as profit, the return on investment and efficiency were focused on at this stage. The second stage started at the end of the 1980s depending on the changes in world markets (Ghalayini and Noble, 1996). In other words, it is observed that performance measurement has a finance-based traditional approach until the 1980s. Nevertheless, the globalization movements that occurred in the world as of these years led organizations to think and make decisions more strategically, and consequently, new not traditional models consisting of low-cost, high-quality, flexible and robust distribution channels were developed (Ossovski et al., 2016).

Enterprises that want to achieve a competitive position under changing environmental conditions achieved many stages from strategically low-cost production to flexibility, and from short delivery period to safe delivery. Such enterprises also implemented new production technologies and philosophies such as computer integrated manufacturing, flexible production systems, just-in-time manufacturing, optimized production technology and total quality management (Ghalayini and Noble, 1996).

The aim of the performance system is to determine and realize the targets of the organization by its vision. Nevertheless, it is quite essential to evaluate the participation of organizational members with a just, systematic and measurable method and support their personal development when achieving these targets (Şen and Bolat, 2015).

**Method**

The analyses to be applied to the organizational symbolism scale consist of the factor analysis and reliability analyses, and they have performed in the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science) software. The analyses to be applied to the conceptual model developed as the effect of organizational symbolism on organizational commitment and firm performance consist of the factor analysis, validity and reliability analysis and structural equality model, and they are analyzed in the SPSS and SMART PLS (Partial Least Square) software.

**4. RESULTS**

**Summary Statistics**

Regarding the demographic information of the participants that contributed to the study on organizational symbolism, 77.1% consists of mid-level managers, 47.1% consist of managers aged between 30 and 39 years, 43.6% consist of university graduates, and 47.1% consist of female participants. The Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) value in the organizational symbolism scale was determined as 0.941. This is quite a high value. This shows us that the consistency of the variable values is at a perfect level. Furthermore, the Chi-Square test statistics of the scale were found as 11012.214; since p<0.05 was found significant, the data used in the study showed a normal distribution. As a result of the factor analysis of the scale, the organizational symbolism scale consists of 3 dimensions and 32 questions, being structural and administrative symbolism (9 questions), narrative and discursive symbolism (9 questions), and outward symbolism (14 questions). The aesthetic symbolism part that was previously included in the dimensions of the scale was removed from the scale by failing to provide the necessary values as a result of the factor analysis. Considering the reliability analysis of the scale, it is observed that structural and administrative symbolism (α: 0.909), narrative and discursive symbolism (α: 0.905) and outward symbolism (α: 0.946) have a Cronbach’s alpha (α) value over 0.700. These values show that the scale and its dimensions are highly reliable.
Regarding the demographic information of the participants that contributed to the study on the conceptual model, 49.6% consists of mid-level managers, 43.6% consist of managers aged between 30 and 39 years, 36.6% consist of university graduates, and 43.8% consist of female participants. Upon investigating the Fit Index values in the conceptual model, it is observed that the SRMR value is 0.058, and the NFI value is 0.750. The Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) value of the conceptual model was found as 0.959. This shows us that the consistency of the variable values is at a perfect level. Furthermore, the data used in the study show a normal distribution since the Chi-Square test of the scale were found as 22536.763 and p<0.05 was found significant. Upon investigating the factor analysis of the organizational symbolism scale regarding the conceptual model, it is observed that structural and administrative symbolism (9 questions), narrative and discursive symbolism (9 questions), and outward symbolism (14 questions) dimensions that occurred in previous analyses are maintained. Upon examining the factor analysis of the organizational commitment scale, it is observed that the scale has a single dimension, and the number of questions decreased from 15 questions to 13. The firm performance scale decreased to a single dimension. As a result the factor analysis and maintained the number of its questions, which is 12. Again, upon examining the reliability analysis of the organizational symbolism scale regarding the conceptual model, it is observed that the Cronbach’s alpha (α) values of structural and administrative symbolism (α: 0.916), narrative and discursive symbolism (α: 0.942) and outward symbolism (α: 0.954) are well above 0.700. The values of the organizational commitment (α: 0.923) and firm performance (α: 0.959) scales are close to the organizational symbolism scale. These values show us that the scale and its dimensions are highly reliable.

**SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) Results**

According to the conceptual model in Table 1, administrative and structural symbols directly affect organizational commitment (β: 0.383, p<.01) and firm performance (β: 0.163, p<.05) in the same direction. In other words, the behaviors and attitudes of managers towards organizational members, and the structure and rules they create ensure commitment among organizational members and positively affect the firm performance. In the light of all this information, it is observed that the organizational members that participated in the survey developed a sense of belongingness to the organization by being affected by the behaviors of the manager and the structure of the organization, and these elements positively affect the firm performance.

The effect of narrative and discursive symbols, which are another important concept of the study, is observed neither on organizational commitment (β: 0.015, p>.05) nor firm performance (β: 0.086, p>.05). In short, the stories told about the organization and leaders, slogans, jargon, clothes, and logos within the organization do not have any effect on organizational commitment and firm performance. While legendary stories about leaders were used as a tool of motivation for the organization in the past, it seems to have lost its power especially due to the major role of social media in today’s world. The easy access to information and the fact that there are different information and opinions about any subject nowadays have probably created certain question marks in the minds of organizational members on the issue of investigating and questioning the reality of these legendary stories. In short, these stories and discourses do not affect organizational commitment and firm performance.

It is observed that outward symbols, which are the last symbolism variable of the study, directly affect organizational commitment (β: 0.465, p<.01) and firm performance (β: 0.408, p<.01) in the same direction. Here, it is observed that the outward image of the organization, its effect on the sector, state of competition, and customer relations create commitment of organizational employees. Again, this is reflected positively and significantly on firm performance. Furthermore, it is observed that the sub-factors of organizational symbolism affect firm performance at a rate of 37.4%, and organizational commitment at a rate of 61%.

**Insert Figure 1 about here**

The hypotheses of the conceptual model were tested in the light of all this information, and information in Table 1 was obtained:

**Insert Table 1 about here**

5. DISCUSSION

The study has examined the effects of the dimensions of organizational symbolism (structural and administrative symbolism, narrative and discursive symbolism, outward symbolism) on organizational commitment and firm performance. It is observed that structural and administrative symbolism, which is the first dimension, profoundly affect organizational commitment and firm performance. The second dimension, narrative and discursive symbolism does not affect organizational commitment and firm performance. The last dimension, outward symbolism has a high effect on organizational commitment and firm performance. According to these results, H₁ and H₂ hypotheses
among the hypotheses suggested in the conceptual model are partially supported. Upon examining the sub-hypotheses, while $H_{1a}$, $H_{1c}$, $H_{2a}$ and $H_{2c}$ hypotheses were verified, $H_{1b}$ and $H_{2b}$ hypotheses were not supported. In the light of all this information, the importance of the concept of organizational symbolism and its elements regarding the internal and external environment of the organization can be observed. Regarding this situation, professional managers are suggested to interpret the symbols in the organization and transmit them to organizational members in the correct way. Continuously changing environmental factors will lead to the change in certain symbols, and certain symbols will even disappear, and new ones will replace them. This will cause the constant renewal and update of the organization’s managers and employees. It is necessary to empirically study the concept of organizational symbolism, which has not received enough academic interest by being overshadowed by the subjects of organizational culture and organizational climate to date, and to examine it by modeling it with different concepts. Furthermore, it is very important for organizations to investigate and interpret the subject outside family-owned businesses based on different target masses.

6. CONCLUSION

Theoretical contributions
The most important contribution of the study to the literature is the development of the organizational symbolism scale. Many empirical studies were conducted on organizational culture and organizational climate, which are concepts that are close to organizational symbolism in previous studies. The effects of organizational symbolism both on organizational commitment and firm performance were first investigated in this study. At this point, while a major part of the hypotheses presented is supported, it is observed that organizational symbolism affects organizational commitment at a rate of 61%, and firm performance at a rate of 37.4%. These numerical expressions show the importance of organizational symbolism for organizations.

Limitations and future research
While the study has significant effects and contributions, it does not seem possible to conduct the study without limitations. Nevertheless, these limitations also provide opportunities for the researchers for future research. Firstly, the fact that the study was conducted in family-owned businesses led to the emergence of the findings depending on these organizational members, and it is a significant limitation. Second, the fact that the study was carried out in Istanbul province of Turkey is another limitation. It is believed that it will be beneficial to perform the study in different countries and cities. Thirdly, the fact that the organizational symbolism scale has not been modeled with a variable other than organizational commitment and firm performance is another limitation offering an important opportunity for the researchers. Fourthly, a new study that will be conducted by increasing the number of the study participants may bring a different dimension to the literature. Considering all these limitations, it should be ensured that the literature on organizational symbolism should be contributed more.

Practical implications
Nowadays, when organizations are considered as living organisms, one of the most important criteria for survival and growth is the reactions of organizations to changing internal and external environmental factors. At this point, it is quite important for the organizational structure to be flexible to respond to these internal and external environmental factors. As it is also mentioned in the study of Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), organizations feel the need to differentiate by being affected by certain internal and external environmental changes, and they change accordingly. After that, managers should act in an integrative way for the organization to continue its path stably and the differentiation regarding this change to be integrated. In ensuring this integration, in addition to organizational culture and climate, analyzing, interpreting and creating an integrative effect within the organization by symbols interrelated with them are of crucial importance for the organization. It is necessary for especially integrators at administrative positions in the organization to analyze the hidden, implicit and complex world of symbols, make them comprehensible by organizational members and use them as a positive power for the organization. The organizational symbolism scale developed in the light of all this important information in this study was applied to the managers and members of family-owned businesses, and it was divided into three sub-variables, being structural and administrative symbols, narrative and discursive symbols and outward symbols. Afterward, the effects of the organizational symbolism scale on organizational commitment and firm performance were measured.

Administrative and structural symbols consist of elements such as the behaviors and decisions of managers in the organization and the structure and culture of the organization. According to the analysis results, these elements significantly affect organizational commitment. In other words, the behaviors of managers and the structure of the
organization increase the commitment of employees to the organization. Again, it is observed that administrative and structural symbols affect firm performance. At this point, it is observed that the managers and members of the organization are successful in analyzing and interpreting structural and administrative symbols. In short, it is possible to say that organizational members commit to their organization and increase their performance in organizational structures in which administrative and structural symbols are interpreted and turned into power for the organization.

Narrative and discursive symbols consist of essential people and stories in the past of the organization, legendary managers, slogans, jargon, clothes and appearance, and firm logos. As a result of the analyses, it is revealed that these symbols have any effect neither on organizational commitment nor firm performance. It is observed that nowadays, different legendary stories and discourses told about organizations, preferred clothes and logos do not ensure commitment to the organization and do not affect firm performance. It is known that the founders of organizations or managers that became legends affected organizational members positively and were used as an element of motivation especially in years when the technology and internet were not widespread. Nevertheless, it is observed that these elements have now lost their effect and now organizational members are motivated by different situations.

Outward symbols generally include many external environment elements from the relationships of the organization with customers to its position in the competitive environment, and from its reputation in the sector to its ethical codes. As a result of the analyses, it is observed that outward symbols significantly and positively affect organizational commitment and firm performance. In other words, the appearance, position and image of the organization towards the external environment motivate organizational members and increase firm performance.

In general, it is observed that the hidden, implicit and complex structures of organizational symbolism are positively analyzed by the managers and employees of family-owned businesses. At this point, it is possible to say that the managers and employees of the organization follow the developments related to the business world, and they develop and update themselves by these conditions. In today’s competitive conditions, it is inevitable for organizations to update themselves continually to survive and grow. At this point, one of the most critical factors that distinguish organizations is the world of symbols that represent organizations inside and outside. It is necessary for these symbols to be well interpreted by the managers of the organization and transferred most positively for them to have an integrative effect on organizational members. In today’s conditions, it is not sufficient for organizational members to create a positive organizational culture in the organization, and they must ensure that the organization positively benefits from the world of symbols that have a broader scope and extend to all the units of the organization. At this point, it is possible to say that organizations that regularly update themselves, grow in a planned way, and consequently use the internal and external symbols of the organization will survive and grow.

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**Table 1. Hypothesis Tests of the Conceptual Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>β Value</th>
<th>T Value</th>
<th>P Value</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1:</strong> Organizational symbolism directly and positively affects organizational commitment.</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>Partially supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1a:</strong> Administrative and structural symbols directly and positively affect organizational commitment.</td>
<td>0.383</td>
<td>6.831</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1b:</strong> Narrative and discursive symbols directly and positively affect organizational commitment.</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.289</td>
<td>0.773</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1c:</strong> Outward symbols directly and positively affect organizational commitment.</td>
<td>0.465</td>
<td>7.852</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H2:</strong> Organizational symbolism directly and positively affects firm performance.</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>Partially supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H2a:</strong> Administrative and structural symbols directly and positively affect firm performance.</td>
<td>0.163</td>
<td>2.349</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H2b:</strong> Narrative and discursive symbols directly and positively affect firm performance.</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>1.452</td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H2c:</strong> Outward symbols directly and positively affect firm performance.</td>
<td>0.408</td>
<td>5.081</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. SEM Results

Structural and Administrative Symbolism
- \( \beta: 0.383 \)
- \( \beta: 0.163 \)
- \( \beta: 0.086 \)
- \( \beta: 0.465 \)
- \( \beta: 0.408 \)

Narrative and Discursive Symbolism

Outward Symbolism

Organizational Commitment
- \( R^2: 0.610 \)

Firm Performance
- \( R^2: 0.374 \)