

## An exploratory study for advertisements on the content of sustainability

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**Abstract.** In this study, it was aimed at investigating the sustainability-themed advertisements of companies in depth. Thus, the contents of 52 printed or electronic advertisements in which there were items about sustainability, constituted the scope of the research. In the study, in-depth and critical document review technique which is one of the qualitative research methods was used. Moreover, quantitative analysis was conducted for the frequencies of data coded via quantitative research. In terms of data analysis, Nvivo 8 and SPSS 16.0 programs were used. In the end of the research, environmental, social and economic solution proposals were identified via nodes and tree-diagrams, and these solution proposals were compared with the type of the organization. In this regard, it was determined that profit organizations make more sustainability proposals than non-profit organizations. Furthermore, it was found that there was significant relation between type of the organization and sustainability dimensions of its advertisements.

**Keywords.** Sustainability, Sustainability advertisement, Environmental sustainability, Social sustainability, Economic sustainability.

**JEL.** M10, M14, Q56.

### 1. Introduction

Climate change, a global issue for all over the world, could be balanced or prevented from the deterioration with sustainable development practices, proposed by the researchers (McGartland, & Oates, 1985; Jackson, 2005; Stern *et al.*, 2016). Sustainable development is a long term environmental, social and cultural climate creation and protection. After those conditions are fulfilled, there might stimulate the economic growth, indirectly. In fact, sustainable development encompasses the broader development including governmental, private and industrial organizations as well as all of the society (Giddings, Hopwood & O'brien, 2002). In the context of sustainable development, companies reorganize their operations on the basis of the sustainability requirements and society gets aware of the environmental as well as social issues. Hence, it is critical for companies to offer relevant services to their customers who are aware of sustainability issues and meet their desire and expectations (Jackson, 2005; Gabzdylova, Raffensperger & Castka, 2009). Nowadays, companies having not any sustainable implementation often engage in advertising and promotion on the content of sustainability. So this study aims to explore the primary focus and fundamental principles of the sustainability advertisements.

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There are some researches relating to green advertising of companies in the literature (Banerjee, Gulas & Iyer, 1995; Zinkhan & Carlson, 1995; Benli, Karaosmanoğlu & Taş, 2017). Furthermore, Haytko & Matulich (2008) develop a scale for customers' attitude toward green advertising. However, a great deal of the researches evaluated advertisements on the environmental framework only. Taking the consideration of all sustainability dimensions, we evaluated the advertisements on the basis of environmental, social as well as economic sustainability, unlike the previous researches. In order to achieve these goals, advertisements' texts including sustainable issues were examined and conducted qualitative as well as quantitative analyses on the basis of the scope of the advertisements in present research.

### 2. Theoretical framework

Companies are affected by all types of economic, social and even cultural formations taken place around its environment (Kuşat, 2012). In terms of business world, sustainability means to understand the risks and opportunities that today's trends bring for the companies in new order, and thus, reorganize the operations, goods and services according to these risks and opportunities (Menlik, 2013). The society expects from companies to create social and environmental values as well as economic values (Tüm, 2014). In this respect, there are economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability (Dönmez-Polat, 2017). Economic dimension of sustainability means the company's to maintain its life financially. In this regard, some activities of companies such as decreasing the costs, new product development, reengineering and developing innovative solutions can be evaluated within the scope of economic sustainability (Labuschagne, Brent & Van Erck, 2005; Balderjahn, 2013; Turan, 2017b). Social dimension of sustainability means the company's to make positive contribution into the society. This dimension comprises both the individuals working in the company and the society outside of the company. Activities such as company's protecting the social rights of employees, training, providing employment opportunities for the society outside of the company, organizing social responsibility projects contributing into the society can be evaluated within the context of social sustainability (Dillard, Dujon & King, 2008; Valdes-Vasquez & Klotz, 2010). Environmental dimension of sustainability means the company's to design its activities without damaging the environment, and taking measures on protecting the environment. Activities such as the company's setting up refining and recycling systems, designing business processes in environmentalist perspective, bringing environmentalist behaviours for employees can be evaluated in terms of environmental sustainability (Goodland, 1995; Tilman & Clark, 2014; Turan, 2017a). In this framework, a sustainable company creates long-term financial value, knows that how its activities affect the environment, and tries to minimize these effects, cares about its employees, customers and society, and tries to provide positive social change (Rowe & Bansal, 2013).

Driving force of sustainability for companies (Menlik, 2013):

- Legal Necessities: Companies have to fulfill the legal necessities of the state in which they operate (Sulkowski, 2015). However, these legal necessities are not only limited with the country where the company makes production. The necessities brought via Reach Directive for chemicals export from Turkey to the EU can be evaluated as an example of this situation.
- Public Confidence: Companies have to obtain non-written confidence especially from the communities living in the environment where the company carries out its operations in order to maintain their activities. If this confidence cannot be obtained, it is inevitable that the company gets reaction from the society (Feldman, 2000). Likewise, damage of public confidence is one the important factors leading to loss of money and customer. Confidence can make

contribution into brand value and prestige as well as it protects the company especially in time of crisis.

- Customer Demand: Companies analyzing the suggestions and information given by stakeholders, gain success in developing new products and services, and sustainable business processes. The change in consumers' expectations on protecting the environment has risen the importance of sustainable production, and this situation has made sustainable consumption widespread (Wüstenhagen & Bilharz, 2006).
- Investor Demand: Access of accountable companies to the finance gets easier. For example, companies in global sustainability index attract more investments (Falkenbach, Lindholm, & Schleich, 2010).

### 3. Method

In this research, in-depth and critical document review technique which is one of the qualitative research methods was used. In this regard, sustainability-themed advertisements were coded via Nvivo 8 program. The words evoking about the sustainability were counted via relevant codes, and certain nodes, tree-diagrams and matrixes were generated.

#### 3.1. Research questions and aim of the research

In this research, investigating the sustainability-themed advertisements of organizations in depth was aimed. By nature of qualitative research, researchers start to the research with an extensive research problematic. During research process, the research problematic takes its final form (Neuman, 2013). In this respect, researchers started to the research with the first problematic stated below and then put into final form proceedingly in this study:

- Why do organizations make efforts/spend money for sustainability?
- To what do the organizations aim to reach via sustainability advertisements?
- Which aspects of sustainability do the contents of sustainability advertisements contain, and which of them is concentrated more?
- Does the weight given sustainability aspects from organization to organization differentiate?
- Is there any relation between types of organizations and sustainability dimensions focused in the published advertisements?

#### 3.2. Sample

54 advertisements including sustainability items were chosen among 232 printed or online advertisements published on internet or television which have only text content, but do not comprise dynamic and interactive features. Then, 2 advertisements which are not suitable for content analysis were discarded from 54 advertisements published by some organizations (see the organizations which sustainability-contented advertisement published in Appendix). In this regard, 52 printed or online advertisements involving sustainability items constitute the sample of the research.

#### 3.3. Results

Each of 52 advertisements in the sample was categorized in terms of environmental, social and economic sustainability dimensions they contain. According to the categorization, it was seen that 22 advertisements focus on environmental, 15 advertisements focus on social, and 15 advertisements focus on economic sustainability. However, this focus point is presented as a solution proposal in related dimension in some advertisements, whereas in some other advertisements is involved as only a mentioned topic. Especially the advertisements including solution proposals were categorized according to the proposals they involve. Thus, it was identified that there are environmental sustainability solution proposal in 23 advertisements, social sustainability solution

proposal in 16 advertisements, and economic sustainability solution proposal in 21 advertisements. The reason that the number of solution proposals in the advertisements is more than total advertisement number, is that there are solution proposals for more than one sustainability dimensions in some advertisements. In this regard, there are 32 environmental, 23 social and 30 economic sustainable solution commitments in all texts of 52 advertisements.

3.1.1. Nodes of sustainable solutions proposal

a. Sustainable environmental solutions

In the literature, environmental dimension of sustainability was described with different words. In all advertisement texts, environmental awareness was stated with 6 different words. These are “environment friendly” (10), “footprint” (5), “sustainable” (7), “green” (3), “clear” (2) and “ecological” (2).

As it was stated before, the most observed sustainable environmental solution in 52 advertisements is about renewable energy and recycling. The distribution of these two sustainable environmental proposals in the content were presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Environmental solutions frequency in the advertisement

	Number of Advertisement	Count all the text
Environmental Solutions	23	32
Planting Tree	1	1
Environmental Materials	1	1
Turning off the Lights	1	1
Clean Environment	1	1
Renewable Energy	6	9
Sustainable Energy	1	1
Electricity	2	2
Solar	1	1
Geothermal	1	1
Alternative Energy for Thermal Power Plant	1	1
Waste Recycling	13	19
Glass	1	1
Electronic Appliance	1	1
Paper	3	3
Metal	1	1
Plastic	2	4
Oil	1	2

In 6 of advertisements presenting environmental solutions, renewable energy was attributed. These attributes were seen in the texts as both renewable energy or sustainable energy, and renewable energy types (solar, geothermal and etc.). In all advertisement texts, renewable energy was referred 2 times, and electricity, solar and geothermal energy as renewable energy types were referred 6 times. Moreover, waste recycling was referred in 13 different advertisements, and plastic and paper recycling became the most prominent.

On the other hand, it was seen that natural resources were referred in advertisement texts frequently, even if these do not contain any solution proposal. It can be said that natural resources were referred in 14 different advertisements, and 5 of them are about water resources.

b. Sustainable social solutions

Social dimension of sustainability involves both the employees working in the organization and the society outside of the organization (Koçoğlu, 2017). In this regard, it was identified that there are sustainable social solutions in 16 of 52 advertisements. Moreover, sustainable social solutions were referred 23 times in all advertisement texts (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** *Social solutions frequency in the advertisement*

	Number of the Advertisement	Count all the text
Social Solutions	16	23
Valuing to Employee	1	1
Training	5	7
The Best Employer	2	5
Handing Down the Next Generations	1	1
Being Tolerant	1	1
Career Support	1	1
Happy Employee	1	2
Creating Collective Consciousness	1	1
Healthy Life	1	1
Art	1	2
Social Responsibility Awareness	1	1

In advertisements presenting social solutions, there are social solution proposals about employees such as training, the best employer, happy employee, valuing to employee and career support. It is seen that the most discoursed solution proposal is training. Moreover, it attracts notice that there are so few reference to the society subject of sustainable social dimension. It was seen that only literacy and handicapped trainings/educations are related with society in terms of training title.

c. Sustainable economic solutions

Economic sustainability is about a organization’s to maintain its existence financially. There are sustainable economic solutions in 21 of 52 advertisements. Moreover, sustainable economic solutions were referred 30 times in all advertisement texts. In this regard, the details of sustainable economic solutions are seen in Table 3.

**Table 3.** *Economic solution frequency in the advertisements*

	Number of the Advertisement	Count all the text
Economic Solutions	21	30
Smart Technologies	1	1
Research	1	1
Growth	1	1
Value Creating Solution	1	1
Electricity Efficiency	2	4
Innovation	2	2
Corporate Structure	1	1
Perfect Service	1	2
Brand Value	9	15
Sustainable Resource	1	1
Sustainable Service	1	1

It is seen that sustainability-themed advertisements provide economic solutions such as electricity efficiency, innovation, brand value and etc. It was determined that the most frequently referred solution is brand value. Furthermore, it is possible to evaluate renewable energy in terms of economic solutions as well as environmental solutions, because today establishment and operation of renewable energy production facilities brings economic added-value for the organization.

The details of economic solutions are indicated in Table 3. Even if it is not indicated as a title in the table, saving composes a node in the advertisement texts as a solution proposal. In this respect, saving subject was referred in 6 different advertisements, and energy, water and fossil resources were mentioned 8 times in total contents.

After the contents of advertisements were investigated in detail according to environmental, social and economic solutions, there was made evaluation of advertisements in terms of time, place and existence scopes. When looking at the time and place scopes, it is seen that in 15 different advertisements (totally 23 times) future is referred. Moreover, 9 advertisements were written to involve Turkey, and 14 advertisements written to include the world. Furthermore, some certain nodes were identified about all creatures in advertisements. Plants were

referred in 12 different advertisements (totally 41 times), animals were referred in 7 different advertisements (totally 10 times), people were referred in 16 different advertisements (totally 23 times). The most frequently mentioned word in plants node is tree, and in people node is handicapped and woman words.

3.1.2. Matrixes

In advertisement texts, environmental solutions were referred 23 times, social solutions were referred 16 times, and economic solutions were referred 21 times (totally 60 times). In order to see how these solution proposals are distributed according to the organization goal, matrixes were formed via Nvivo program. The solutions stated under the titles of environmental, social and economic sustainability dimensions mentioned in detail before, were compared according to the goal of the organization (profit and non-profit organization) offering the solution.

**Table 4.** Comparison of sustainability solutions and organization goal

	Profit Organizations	Non-profit Organizations
Sustainable Solutions	42	18
Environmental Solutions (23)	9	14
Social Solutions (16)	12	4
Economic Solutions (21)	21	0

As it can be seen in Table 4, it was identified that there are more environmental solution proposals in sustainability-themed advertisements of non-profit organizations than profit organizations. Moreover, it was observed that there are more social solution proposals in sustainability-themed advertisements of profit organizations than non-profit organizations. Furthermore, it is seen that all of economic solutions offered in sustainability-themed advertisements are provided by profit organizations

In all contents of 52 advertisements, there 60 environmental, social and economic sustainable solutions. This situation indicates that there are more than one solution proposal in some advertisements as it was mentioned before. Moreover, in some advertisements there is no solution proposal, and only there are references for sustainability or its dimensions. Since the separation of sustainability solution proposals and type of the organization indicated in Table 4 involves only solution proposals, an additional analysis was made towards all advertisements.

In this respect, every advertisement separated according to their main sustainability scope (environmental, social, economic), and categorized according to the type (profit, non-profit) of organization giving the advertisement. In this section, Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted to determine whether or not there is relation between the point focused by the organization giving the advertisement within the scope of sustainability, and organization type. This test is used to investigate whether or not there is relation between two or more variable groups. Furthermore, observation results should be indicated as categorized or grouped combined series to conduct the test (Kalaycı, 2010).

**Table 5.** Chi Square test statistics

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13,181 <sup>a</sup>	2	,001
Likelihood Ratio	18,249	2	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	9,956	1	,002
N of Valid Cases	52		

a. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5,77.

As it can be seen in Table 5, Chi Square test results indicate that there is significant relation between type of organization and sustainability dimensions of published advertisements ( $X^2= 13,181, p<.01$ ). In Table 6, the numbers and rates of sustainability dimensions which were focused on the sustainability-themed advertisements published by profit and non-profit organizations are given. According to the data, %46,9 of profit organizations' advertisements focus on

economic, %31,3 of advertisements focus on environmental, and %21,9 of advertisements focus on social sustainability dimensions. On the other hand, %60 of non-profit organizations' advertisements focus on environmental, and %40 of advertisements focus on social sustainability dimensions.

**Table 6.** Comparison (cross tabulation) of sustainability dimensions and type of organization

		Sustainability Dimensions					
		Environmental	Social	Economic	Total		
Profit Non-profit	Profit	Count	10	7	15	32	
		Expected Count	13,5	9,2	9,2	32,0	
		% within Profit Nonprofit	31,3%	21,9%	46,9%	100,0%	
	Non-profit	Non-profit	Count	12	8	0	20
			Expected Count	8,5	5,8	5,8	20,0
			% within Profit Nonprofit	60,0%	40,0%	0,0%	100,0%
Total		Count	22	15	15	52	
		Expected Count	22,0	15,0	15,0	52,0	
		% within Profit Nonprofit	42,3%	28,8%	28,8%	100,0%	

#### 4. Conclusion

In most of the sustainability-themed advertisements, it was identified that there are commitments about the future. In terms of the scope, Turkey and world scopes were used frequently. It can be said that existence scope is about all creatures, when considered that in more than half of the advertisements, at least one group of all creatures was referred. It was seen that people were referred the most, then plants and animals came.

It was identified that sustainability-contented advertisements investigated in the research involve solution proposals in environmental, social and economic dimensions. It was seen in the advertisement texts that environmental solutions are the most, then economic solutions and social solutions came respectively. In terms of environmental solutions, especially “renewable energy” and “recycling” sub-dimensions became prominent. Moreover, in terms of social solutions, “training” and “non-handicapped life” themes were in the foreground. Furthermore, in terms of economic solutions, “brand value” and “saving” sub-dimensions were prominent.

Findings of the research indicated that advertisements published by profit organizations include more sustainable solutions than advertisements of non-profit organizations. Moreover, it was seen that profit organizations were prominent in terms of economic and social solutions, and non-profit organizations were prominent in terms of environmental solutions.

There were no commitments about economic solutions identified in the advertisements published by non-profit organizations. This situation directed the researchers to investigate whether or not there is relation between type of the organization and sustainability dimension that the organization focuses on. In this regard, the researchers conducted Chi Square analysis in order to test the relation between the type (goal) of organization publishing the advertisement and sustainability dimension that the organization focuses in the content of advertisement. Analysis results indicated that there is significant relation between organizational goal (type) and focused sustainability dimension. Therefore, profit organizations focused more on economic and social sustainability in their advertisements, while non-profit organizations focused on environmental sustainability the most. Profit organizations to focus on economic sustainability dimension and to reflect this dimension into their advertisements can be evaluated as normal. However, these organizations' to focus on social dimension of sustainability more than non-profit organizations via considering their employees and the society, associates with the opinion that profit organizations practice social dimension of sustainability in their advertisements particularly. It can be said that social dimension of sustainability was practiced as a public relations activity, based on lots of critics about whether social responsibility projects were made for

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advertisement or for responsibility (Frankental, 2001; Capriotti, & Moreno, 2007; Yalur, 2014). However, it is required to identify that in what degree these organizations carry out these solution proposals mentioned in the advertisements in order to deduce such a result.

In this research, advertisements which were published as printed or electronically without having interactive features, were investigated in-depth. Especially advertisement texts' not to be so long is the main limitation of this research, because extra meanings were loaded into certain words in the texts. One other limitation is document review's to be limited with the viewpoint of the research by nature of qualitative research. Further studies can be designed to investigate interactive advertisements in-depth.



Appendix

Table 7. Organizations publishing sustainability-contented advertisements

01-ATS Enerji	28-Doğan Gazetecilik
02-Ankara Büyükşehir Belediyesi	29-Hurriyet
03-SosyalSorumluluk.org	30-Gitti Gidiyor
04-Doğuş Otomotiv	31-Mars Logistics
05-Ümraniye Belediyesi	32-BASF – Kimya
06-Eti	33-GSK
07-Kilsan	34-Toyota
08-Fiziksel Engelliler Federasyonu	35-TEB
09-P&G Orkid	36-A-101
10-SosyalSorumluluk.org	37-Ziraat Bankası
11-WWF – WorldwideFundFor Nature	38-LC Waikiki
12-Remax	39-TEMA
13-Samsung	40-Pegasus
14-Sosyal Girişimci	41-TEMA
15-SosyalSorumluluk.org	42-Malkara Belediyesi
16-Tema	43-T.C Sağlık Bakanlığı
17-WWF – SAGA Lojistik	44-Plastik Sanayiciler Derneği
18- WWF	45-Sedaş
19-Türk Eğitim Vakfı	46-Genç Sanayiciler Birliği
20-Yapı Kredi	47-Hakkari Belediyesi
21-Akfen	48-Migros
22-Boydak Enerji	49-Sosyal Sorumluluk Derneği
23-AKÇANSA	50-Halkbank
24-Kalyon Enerji	51-Knorr
25-Karpowership – Karadeniz Holding	52-Lipton
26-TEMA – MasterCard	53-Çevre ve Kültür Değerlerini Koruma Vakfı
27-Vektörel Çizim	54-Otizm Vakfı

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