

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GREEN PUBLIC RELATIONS POLICIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM FOR ENSURING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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The Relationship between Green Public Relations Policies and Environmental Activism for Ensuring Environmental Sustainability

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Abstract

This study explores the importance of green public relations activities and environmental activism within the framework of the concept of sustainability. Limitation of resources, excessive consumption and environmental destruction are the subject of activist actions of various environmentalists or non-governmental organizations. It is necessary to minimize the reactions arising from these actions with public relations activities and to protect the corporate reputation. Institutions participating in the green movement, which wants a sustainable ecological environment, make claims that they are environmentalists with their public relations campaigns. From time to time, these green discourses also appear as an effort for green laundering. Accordingly, green institutions have had to produce sustainable economic, institutional and environmental policies. In this context, strategic green public relations practices are of great importance in the effective management of sustainability policies of institutions.

Keywords

Green public relation policies, environmental activism, environmental sustainability

Introduction

Sustainability covers human and nature relations and is long-term. Sustainability, by its nature, both sheds light on the future and aims at justice. Therefore, sustainability weaves a special relationship network in the formation of a reliable system between nature and people (Oláh et al., 2020). Sustainability covers both how people are responsible to future generations and to each other and how they should behave towards nature and constitutes a normative concept (Schaltegger and Burritt, 2005). However, focusing on mass production and profit share due to the industrial revolution has accelerated the unconscious consumption of natural resources. This situation allowed the formation of an unsustainable system and blocked the way of a sustainable future (Kates, et al., 2001). Contrary to the basic needs of people, excessive consumption harms the nature. However, due to the value attributed to nature, sustainability comes to the fore even more today (Baumgärtner and Quaas, 2010:2-3).

Due to industrialization, the excessive consumption of raw materials, the global water crisis, the decrease in biodiversity, global environmental change and climate change have become more evident, both the practices of activists who are sensitive to environmental issues and the thought that sustainability issues should be addressed in every field throughout society (Nara, et al., 2021). Accordingly, institutions and organizations have begun to care about the actions of activists or groups and societies to establish a sustainable life. Therefore, sustainable policies are followed in many areas today (Wijethilake, 2017). Environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social sustainability are a few of them.

Environmental sustainability is defined as the ability to care and protect the values in the natural environment (Morelli, 2011). The natural environment, which is important in maintaining the living conditions for humans and other living things, offers a sustainable life to the future of people, a suitable climate for life, clean air and water. People should use renewable resources such as solar, water and wind energy for the functioning of a sustainable society. Because a beautiful and livable natural environment quality for all living things is the basic quality that many people want to continue (Sutton, 2004).

Unconscious consumption of the natural environment poses the risk of not sustaining such qualities (Ögmundarson, et al., 2020). The excessive consumption of many non-renewable resources such as oil, gas, minerals and coal and the increasing damage to the natural environment reduce the quality of the natural environment and create the risk of extinction (Goodland, 1995). Organizations also play a serious role in the formation of such risks. These organizations can cause irreparable harm to the natural environment for their own benefit (Lloret, 2016). Naturally, sensitive societies, activists

and groups react to such problems (Ganglbauer, 2013). Therefore, in the face of these reactions, the public relations manager takes into account such problems caused by the institutions they represent, and resorts to methods that can minimize the damage (Roper, 2012). However, it is difficult to determine where and when the effects of risks will occur, and it is not always possible to reverse these effects. Thus, public relations managers adopt strategies that aim to compensate for the damage where the risk first arises (Rivero and Theodore, 2014). Therefore, public relations managers accept a green public relations policy so that institutions are not adversely affected (Rensburg, et al., 2008). An orderly sustainable green public relations policy avoids risks and actions. In addition, the public relations manager should prevent the institution from taking steps that may pose a risk to the environment and should implement methods to compensate for the damage (Cho, et al., 2021). These qualities constitute important elements of a sustainable green public relations policy.

Sustainability problems can arise wherever there is a risk of loss of resources of the environment, which is of serious importance to humans (Woodruff and Mankoff, 2008). Therefore, the existence of such risks, wherever and whenever they occur, necessitates both taking action and taking urgent measures (Mankoff, 2007). Environmental sustainability includes activities aimed at reducing the use of natural resources, adopting the approach of recycling everything, using renewable resources instead of non-renewable resources (Barbier, et al., 1990). In addition, it encompasses the redesign of products and production processes to eliminate the production of environmentally harmful products, and the regulation and protection of environments for their livability and beauty. Accordingly, one of the most important issues that enables livability to be carried into the future is social sustainability.

Social sustainability aims to preserve certain social relations, important values, structures and traditions. Social sustainability requires sustainable development to reach the goals (Källström and Ljung, 2005). Social structure is exposed to fundamental changes depending on technological developments. Therefore, social sustainability is interpreted as the continuation of social assets (Eizenberg and Jabareen, 2017).

Social conditions support ecological sustainability, and determining how social values, rules, assets and resources will be distributed in society between present and future generations forms the basis of social sustainability (Chiu, 2003; Davidson, 2010). Therefore, social values, social structure and norms should be changed in a way that is conducive to the sustainability of the environment in order to ensure ecological sustainability, which is at the center of sustainable development (Hutchins and Sutherland, 2008). Accordingly, institutions can adapt to this change through public relations. Public relations management prepares plans that will ensure the continuation of social sustainability depending on the reactions that pose or may create risks and

make positive contributions to social sustainability (Chiu, 2003). In addition, public relations adopts the protection of health and safety existing in the social dimension, respect for laws and regulations, increasing social welfare, absence of harmful effects, respecting ethical principles and the rights of stakeholders-employees (Roper, 2012). It also takes responsibility by considering the reactions of activists who want such qualities to be taken into account (Boar, et al., 2020).

The economy is shared in economic sustainability. The formation of a sustainable consumption style, the emergence of economic opportunities, the emergence of a fair and sustainable economy depend on economic sustainability (Spangenberg, 2005). A sustainable economy requires a community-based and accessible economy (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). Proper use of resources and consumption only to meet the needs ensure the continuation of economic sustainability (Anand and Sen, 2000). Accordingly, the public relations department enables the institutions to adopt a sustainable structure by ensuring that the resources of the institutions are used correctly, and it prevents the reactions that may arise in this direction by preventing unnecessary expenditures (Steyn and Niemann, 2014).

As a result, public relations take important responsibilities in economic, social and environmental sustainability, contribute positively to the reputation of institutions and allow those institutions to make applications to the ecological system from an environmental, social and economic sustainable perspective (Jeong and Park, 2017). In addition, the importance of economic, social and environmental sustainability and their management within the framework of sustainability have necessitated public relations, especially for institutions and companies (Roper, 2005). Because institutions sometimes damage the ecological balance by making wrong decisions as a result of their activities and are exposed to the reaction of activist groups who are sensitive about this issue. Therefore, companies assimilate public relations to avoid such reactions and to ensure the correct implementation of activities (Shrivastava, 1995). Managing sustainability requires expertise and the management process is one of the areas of expertise of public relations. In addition, the fact that public relations provides an accurate and reliable communication option makes the profession stand out in terms of sustainability. Achieving long-term sustainability goals of institutions depends on a correct public relations policy.

Activism as a Communication Method for Environmental Sustainability

Activist public relations are communication activities that aim at social change and sustainability in all areas. In this context, the concept of activist public relations is defined as all the actions that legitimize the expression of thoughts of non-governmental organizations and social communities (Demetrius,

2008). The activist is the person or community that brings these actions to life. Activist communication activities come to life in traditional or digital environments (Ürkmez, 2020). The aim of activist action is to create pressure on the target group based on sustainability in the chosen medium. In addition to strikes, boycotts, and rallies, civil disobedience is among the methods of organizing an activism campaign, as can online signature campaigns, petitions, phone calls, and letter/petition campaigns to make the pressure felt (Sert, 2016). Therefore, there are ways and methods that can be integrated with each other in activist communication.

Activist actions are organizational initiatives that trigger sustainable transformation in socio-economic, political and environmental fields in an effort to offer solutions to global or societal problems (Thompson et al., 2016). In addition to these topics, gender, religion and race topics also take place in activist action (Gürel and Nazlı, 2019). The area frequently encountered with activist movements is environmentalist actions. Even if environmental issues are local/regional, many NGOs are interested in this issue, as it resonates on a global scale. Environmental activist actions; Sustainable environmental policy practices of private/public institutions or states encourage individuals, institutions or states to minimize the damage caused by the production of products or services, in addition to raising awareness on consumption habits. In addition to these stimulating actions, it aims to create environmental sensitivity in individuals and to raise an environmentalist generation (Tani and Taşkıran, 2018). In short, environmental activist actions aim to achieve a wide range of results from sustainable policy production to raising conscious individuals.

Cultural codes and morality are decisive in the emergence of environmental action movements, and the sanctity attributed to nature, defending the right to life of living things and ensuring the sustainability of these qualities are effective in the emergence of environmental activism (Farrell, 2011). According to Yanık and Batu (2019: 185), this activist environmental initiative includes four elements. These elements are as follows: interaction, challenge, social solidarity and protest. Therefore, considering the factors and elements that are effective in the emergence of environmental activism, its scope and target audience is quite extensive.

Public Relations with the Perspective of Activism and Sustainable Corporate Social Responsibility

Although public relations are used to control problems, risks and crises, commercial institutions use public relations to increase image and reputation and to ensure corporate sustainability. Corporate social responsibility activities have a positive effect on increasing image and reputation (Bachmann and Ingehoff, 2016). It is clear that corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices

include a key strategy in creating a positive image (Wu et al., 2018). As a result of social responsibility practices of institutions, an increase occurs in their reputation (Işık and Erdem, 2007; Marsh, 2018). L'Etang (1994), who argues that corporate social responsibility practices are made in terms of visibility in the media, questions these activities from an ethical point of view. The results are as follows: CSR applications are made with commercial concerns. The concern of not receiving the desired feedback from the target audience in the campaign is increasing and there is a lack of two-way communication in the content of the campaign. Finally, the image and reputation concerns of CSR are among the issues to be questioned ethically.

The feeling of responsibility towards nature in social responsibility campaigns, the belief of company employees and the adoption of a sustainable environmental policy by the institutions end the ethical discussions (Yavuz, 2009). NGOs and environmental activists serve to improve society (Waymer and Heath, 2021). Therefore, NGOs and environmental activists are organizational structures that benefit society, care about sustainability in every field and have positive effects (Keleş and Özkan, 2018). According to Mongillo and Booth (2001), these organizational structures also contribute to participatory democracy by voicing environmental problems in the public arena because they believe in protecting nature/environment and fighting for environmental values.

The Relationship between Environmental Activist Actions and Green Public Relations in the Scope of Sustainability

Environmental actions of environmental movement activists, defined as pressure groups, were first defined as participatory ecological movements, then this concept evolved over time and took the name "environmentalism". Then it was known as the greens (Private, 2015). With the participation of companies in the Greens movement, corporate environmentalism emerged and the boundaries of the idea of individual environmentalism were lifted. Thus, the beginning of a green social construction was supported by media organs and a change began to occur in political movements (Faber and O'Connor, 1993). This change provides the opportunity to reinterpret the institutional structure of green.

With the popularization of the environmental movement, companies began to organize advertising or public relations campaigns to look green (Stauber and Rampton, 1995). In these campaigns, the emphasis on "green" in the corporate redefinition causes the institution to face a softer reaction and supports it in creating an image of a sustainable environmental visionary who is sensitive to environmental problems. Therefore, these institutions continue to maintain and manage their green claim by giving the message of being green to consumers with the image of green corporate (Lynch and Stretsky, 2003; Yetkin and Güzel, 2020). In short, these companies keep the environmentalist public

under surveillance by managing this interest in environmental problems and their willingness to participate in the green movement.

The demand for a sustainable environmentalism has led companies to debate about the green movement, viable policymaking, corporate growth, and economic reallocation (Dobson, 1991; Dobson, 1992). Public support for environmental movements is seen as an impediment to the ability of commercial institutions to operate as usual. Therefore, companies produce two policies to overcome this obstacle. In the first case, concessions are made to disperse the anxious atmosphere in the public, and in the second case, it is the production of a sustainable green-themed public relations campaign. Thus, the incentive to protect the environment formed in the public is reinforced (Grunig, 1977; Lynch and Stretsky, 2003). Therefore, according to Yavuz (2009), the characteristics of environmental institutions can be listed as follows:

- Always has the goal of being green
- It aims to increase its environmental efficiency.
- There is a search for resources to increase environmental efficiency.
- They do not hesitate to submit an environmental efficiency report.

According to Larson et al (1982); In order to develop an environmental public relations campaign, it is necessary to have various educational materials and the concept of green and environmentalism should be included in the media. According to Grunig (1977), there is a very important link between education and environmental public relations. Environmentally conscious individuals are educated and activist individuals.

Corporate advertising practices are also used to increase environmental awareness and ensure sustainability (Iyer and Banerjee, 1993). For this purpose, environmentalist institutions produce green discourses in their campaigns in order to convince the public that they are green (Yıldız and Kırmızıbiber, 2019; Wu et al., 2021). Therefore, corporations maintain this green image and sustainability through public relations campaigns, with green discourses, as environmentally friendly producers who find green practices in the minds of consumers (Taraççı and Göktaş, 2019). As a result; Institutions that claim to be green and sustainability should be green with their vision, mission, corporate philosophy, stakeholders and all employees. Otherwise, their work will be considered unethical and green brainwashing.

Conclusion

Sustainability is the relationship that aims to ensure the formation of a long-term reliable system established between man and nature. Sustainability, which aims at a just life, covers the responsibilities of people on nature and future

generations. Excessive consumption of raw materials, pollution, drought and climate change make sustainability even more important. Organizations that are held responsible for over-consumption of non-renewable resources and irreversible damage to the natural environment attract the reaction of vulnerable societies and activist groups. Public relations practitioners should ensure that these reactions are minimized, that the institution does not harm the environment and that the damage is compensated.

The actions of environmental movement activists, which started as a “participatory ecological movement” and later named “environmentalism”, created the concept of “greens”. The participation of institutions as well as individuals in the Greens movement has caused these movements to gain a political dimension in a green social construction. Thus, institutions began to organize advertising or public relations campaigns to show that they participated in the green movement. Therefore, institutions carry out a public relations policy in order to show the public their sensitivity to environmental problems.

Public relations practices contribute to the reputation of institutions within the scope of sustainability, and allow institutions to work within the framework of environmental, social and economic sustainability. The role of public relations is to reduce the damage of institutions to the ecological balance and to ensure that their activities are implemented correctly. Managing sustainability requires expertise and achieving sustainability goals of institutions is possible with the strategic management practices of public relations specialists.

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