

REFLECTIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY ON CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS: SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL AUTOMOTIVE BRANDS' CORPORATE ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with corporate advertising as a public relations tool and questions how automotive brands, claiming to be sustainable, use corporate ads (advertisements) as to create sustainable corporate images. Seven ads belonging to global automotive brands are taken in order to analyze. The reflections of sustainability with its triple bottomline -economical, social and environmental dimensions- as they are visible in their corporate print advertisements are scrutinized. The study employs semiotics as a critical theoretical research perspective to understand the micro-level of tactical messages given in the corporate advertisements. The methodology of the study is based on the work of Saussure (1916/1983) and Jacobson and Halle (1956). The originality of this paper is that it contributes to the academic literature by dealing with semiotics as a critical method to be utilized in the PR field where corporate advertising is taken as a PR tool to create an image that reflects a company's sustainability approach.

Keywords: Corporate advertising, sustainability, automotive brands, semiotic analysis, public relations.

Sürdürülebilirliğin Kurumsal İletişimdeki Yansımaları: Küresel Otomotiv Markalarının Kurumsal Reklamlarının Göstergibilimsel Çözümlemesi

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, kurumsal reklamı bir halkla ilişkiler yöntemi olarak ele almakta ve sürdürülebilir markalar olduğu iddiasında bulunan otomobil markalarının sürdürülebilir marka imajı yaratmak amacıyla kurumsal reklamları nasıl kullandığını irdelemektedir. Küresel otomobil markalarına ait olan yedi adet basılı reklamın incelendiği çalışmada, sürdürülebilirlik kavramının kurumsal reklamlardaki yansıması ekonomik, sosyal ve çevresel boyutlarıyla ele alınmaktadır. Kurumsal reklamlarda yer alan taktiksel mesajların mikro düzeyde anlaşılması amacıyla semiyotik analizden yararlanılmaktadır. Araştırmanın metodolojisi, Saussure (1916/1983) ve Jacobson ve Halle'nin (1956) çalışmalarını temel almaktadır. Bir kurumun sürdürülebilirlik yaklaşımını yansıtan bir imaj yaratmak amacıyla taşıyan kurumsal reklamın, bir halkla ilişkiler aracı olarak ele alınması durumunda semiyotik analizin halkla ilişkiler alanında kullanımına yer vermesi nedeniyle bu çalışma, akademik literatüre katkıda bulunacak özgün bir nitelik taşımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kurumsal reklam, sürdürülebilirlik, otomobil markaları, semiyotik analiz, halkla ilişkiler.

Introduction

The value of public relations is its ability to make a positive difference in the future of an organization. It can create and sustain mutually beneficial relationships and, also, it has a power to create images (Heath, 2000, p. 88). PR practitioners can manipulate the image because they know the importance people place on signs and symbols in the culture (Mickey 1997, p. 271). A widely used method of managing public perceptions is corporate image advertisements (Porter 1992, p. 279) (in this paper the term ‘corporate advertisement’ is used instead). This study employs semiotics as a critical theoretical research perspective to understand the micro-level of tactical messages given in the corporate advertisements. These tactical messages are extensions of macro-level organizational processes -such as identity construction- and they reflect the sustainability ideologies of the corporations, as well. As a matter of fact, Cooren (2001) asserts that micro-level statements are mutually connected with discourses on macro-level organizing (in Grant et.al 2004, p.23).

In recent years there are growing pressures for sustainability to be addressed by the global organizations. Basically, sustainability is the capacity to endure (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainability>). For humans, it is the long-term maintenance of responsibility and the existing literature agrees on its three dimensions: economic, social and environmental (Málovics et al., 2008). Since the early 1990s it has been understood as an organization’s ability to survive in the face of rising environmental and social stakeholder pressures (Hocherts, 2001).

This paper aims to uncover the reflections of sustainability with its triple bottomline -economical, social and environmental dimensions- as they are visible in the corporate print advertisements. As the automotive sector focuses highly on sustainability issues, a primary concern of this study is to understand how meaning of ‘sustainability’ is produced in their corporate advertisements. In the primary research, the sample regarding the automotive brands’- claiming to support the idea of sustainability as an organization- corporate advertisements are selected from the United Nation’s Environment Programme, Division of Technology, Industry and Economics; Sustainable Consumption and Production Branch’s web page on creative gallery on sustainability communications (<http://www.unep.fr/scp/communications/ad/list.asp>). After choosing the automotive and cars as the business sectors, out of 43 advertisements in all media (print, internet, TV, radio..etc) it is seen that there are 7 print corporate advertisements. Therefore, all the 7 ads belonging to Audi, Honda Motor, Toyota (2 ads), Volkswagen (2 ads) and Volvo brands are taken under analysis.

The methodology of the study is based on the work of Saussure (1916/1983) and Jacobson and Halle (1956). Furthermore, Berger's (1982) checklist (p.40) is taken as a frame for the analysis; visuals and texts in the corporate ads are analysed. Semiotic theory and method furthermore provide a means for describing and interpreting how meaning is produced and constrained within the corporate advertisements. However there are a few semiotic studies conducted that examine the created meanings as a result of PR process (Botan and Soto, 1998; Mickey, 1997; Porter, 1992). Thus, this study aims to contribute to the academic literature by dealing with semiotics as a critical method to be utilized in public relations field where corporate advertising is taken a public relations tool to create an image that reflects a company's sustainability approach.

Semiotics as a Critical Theoretical Approach in Public Relations

Umberto Eco (1976: 7) states that 'semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign' (in Chandler, 2007, p.2). Semiotics provides a set of tools that can be used to look in detail at a single text. According to Roland Barthes (1972), a sign is a combination of some idea or object that is represented (the signified) and an image or word that represents it (the signifier) (in Blaney and Wolfe, 2004, p. 267). The scholars that tend to have a close look at advertising, public relations and marketing messages, want to find out the underlying ideology that is expressed in those messages. Semiotics is a critical theoretical approach that may be utilized in close textual analysis of campaign messages in public relations (Moffitt, 2004).

The critical theory paradigm in public relations views the organization as a culture or social formation with its singular viewpoints, narratives and organizational rules that embody the ideologies of the company and reflect, also, society at large (Moffitt 2011: 23). For an organization that wants to adopt sustainability in its operations at all levels, it is crucial to build up a solid corporate identity consistent with this ideal. Language and other symbols in advertising, public relations, issue management and marketing can be used in order to construct organizational identities (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004, p.156).

Moffitt (2011, p. 26) asserts that semiotics is a valuable theory and method for the reason that it ensures concrete and measurable data off the surfaces of the texts. Public relations researchers considering the value of semiotics as a qualitative research method would utilize this method not only to criticise but also to make a post-modern reading of the texts with their multiple facades. These readings would add a value to the evaluation of the PR processes.

Sustainability in the Automotive Industry

In the 1970s and 1980s the world recognized that the growing economy and population needs more resources than available. Many initiatives started to discuss this issue. In this context, the United Nations founded the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1983 with the aim to create a ‘global agenda for change’ (Brundtland, 1987). The result was the so called ‘Brundtland Report’ that shaped the term as well as the idea of ‘sustainability’ decisive (actually this term is much older and was already used in forestry) (WCED, 1987; Prexl and Signitzer, 2008). Sustainability is defined in the report as “the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs“ (WCED, 1987, chap. 2). That future oriented idea of responsibility for next generations is based on three interconnected key dimensions: economic, environmental and social dimensions (WCED, 1987; Prexl and Signitzer, 2008). Sustainable development is understood as a socio-economic development, in which the process of integration of political, economic and social actions, with the balance of nature and sustainability of basic natural processes in order to ensure that basic needs of communities and citizens of both the present generation and future generations (Gasiński, Piskalski, 2009, p.12). Another definition of sustainability and sustainable development include defining its goals or bringing the measurement of actions into consideration (Kates et.al., 2005, p.12-13). One of the most important concepts of sustainability is its triple bottom line, a process by which firms manage their financial, social and environmental risks, obligations and opportunities that includes three areas of actions that bring sustainability to the company: social, environmental and economic. The triple bottom line is also referred as 3P: Profits, People and Planet (Financial Times Lexicon). As Brooks (2003, p.1) claims, sustainability does not only deal with future development scenarios, but also with the valuation of natural resources in both financial and non-financial terms.

Sustainability becomes a key success factor for the automotive sector especially because cars are one of the biggest source of CO₂ emission and until now there exists ‘no’ technology to reduce these nor the number of car usage is decreasing. Thus the pressure on the automotive sector is growing to reduce its impact on the environment. This fact has affected the companies: ‘Automotive executives tend to see the sustainability agenda mainly from an environmental perspective especially in terms of carbon emissions – as this is where the industry has the biggest impact. Social and governance issues appear to be less of a concern’ (Maitin and Lacy, 2011, p.6). This includes both innovations and shaping awareness, attitudes and needs (Maitin and Lacy, 2011).

As Azapagic and Perdan (2000) assert, industrial systems cause and determine flows of material and energy in society and thus, are an important part of the human economy. They help economical development and wealth creation; however they are sources of environmental degradation and social concerns, as well. There are a few industries as large, diverse and influential as the automotive industry where it has a power to influence other business sectors (Orsato, 2007, p.989). Thus, it can be stated that automotive brands as important social actors must play a significant role in creating sustainable future. With the rising market demand for green energy, a vast amount of investment in research and development is unavoidable in the automotive industry. Alternative energy could revive the industry, however, many technology hurdles need to be conquered before industrializing new technologies. Besides, the new dominant energy resources such as, solar, electric, ethanol or diesel for the auto industry in the future is still not clear (Xia and Tang, 2011, p.501).

Xia and Tang (2011:509) also states that the automotive industry must satisfy all stakeholders in the society: customers, local community, suppliers, employees, different interest groups, trade associations, local and federal government, universities, creditors, investors, natural resources and environment. In order to achieve sustainability in the sector, the companies must plan their actions in the long-term and act proactively.

To be truly sustainable, a company needs to consider issues such as its role in the community (Rogers, 2011, p.12). However, integrating corporate social, environmental and financial impacts into operational and capital investment decisions is a big challenge for companies. While social and financial initiatives may benefit one another in the long term, they are often conflicting in their need for resources and agendas in the short run. Also, clear, measurable, short-term metrics apply to financial initiatives, whereas measurements of social performance are often uncertain and long term. Sometimes there are win-win situations, such as when waste and emissions are reduced, that save both company costs and environmental damage. But often it is a challenging issue to evaluate social, environmental and financial impacts (Epstein et al., 2010, p.43).

In developing business plans, the wide variety of issues covered by the sustainability umbrella needs to be embedded in the strategic approach. The concept of sustainability should be promoted not from a defensive position but proactively, to exploit the benefits both internally within companies and in the market place at large (Hawkins, 2006,p.8).

All of the five automotive manufacturers (Audi, Honda, Toyota, Volkswagen, Volvo), that are subjects of this paper, prepare a sustainability report annually and share it with their stakeholders. Those reports underline the fact that together with their economic responsibilities,

those companies are aware of their social and particularly environmental responsibilities. In order to reach to a sustainable world overall, those companies claim that they utilize sustainability as a strong part of their corporate culture and by the help of broad research and development technologies; they try to produce eco-friendly products. Besides those sustainability reports that are important means for communicating, they are using other communication and public relations tools as well.

Utilizing corporate advertising to create a sustainable image

As Balmer (2006) asserts that for the firms it is crucial to follow the motto ‘what we say we are’ in the competitive environment as to highlight parts of its identity that it hopes will foster a better image than its rivals (Dowling, 2004, p.21).

Sustainability promotion is an important marketing tool through which purchasers may begin the process of due diligence for product selection (Schieble, 2008, p.135).

In this perspective, corporate advertising, that is also referred as corporate image advertising and institutional advertising, aims not to sell the company’s products and services directly but to enhance public perception of the company or to advocate a company policy (Wilcox, et al, 2003:491). Corporate advertising is often used as a public relations tool by corporations in order to enhance its corporate image. Argenti (2003,p.82) indicates that corporate advertising should present a clear identity and image for the organization based on the assessment of its overall communication strategy and is often divided into three types: image-building (image advertising), investor and financial relations programs (financial advertising) and advocacy (issue advocacy) (Wilcox, et al., 2003, p.491). Corporate advertising that is the subject of this paper differs from advertising by being a long-term communication tool, aiming at creating and maintaining favourable corporate image towards an organization’s stakeholders. It is considered as a public relations tool because of those characteristics (Wilcox, et al, 2003; Belasen, 2008; Argenti, 2003).

Commitment to social and environmental concerns must be communicated consistently, both in words and actions (Epstein et al., 2010, p. 47). Therefore, one of the main aims of organizations that adopt sustainability into their business processes is communicating with their stakeholders and informing them about their micro-level and macro-level actions concerning sustainability issues. Advertising and public relations are the two basic communication tools that can be used to create a sustainable image. Corporate identity management, product advertisements, actions and special events, issues management and corporate advertising can be used under these tools. Companies should orchestrate those tools and send a unique, consistent message concerning their sustainability.

Pomering et al. (Pomering and Johnson, 2009, p.110) state that a clear and necessary role for corporate advertising is to inform audiences not only of the company's CSR (corporate social responsibility) credentials, but to inform them about the particular social problem the firm is engaging with through its CSR initiative. Roberts and Dowling suggest that (Rossiter and Bellman, 2005, p.375 in Pomering and Johnson, 2009, p.109) building of a favourable image relies on different forms of 'manufactured publicity', namely corporate advertising, sponsorship and advertising.

Recognising corporate advertisements and corporate social responsibility reports not as neutral knowledge but as sites of knowledge production requires decoding the messages in order to reveal the company's standing with the sustainability issues. Rather than quantitative methods, qualitative methods such as rhetoric, semiotics or discourse analysis might be utilized as to scrutinise the micro-level tactical messages as a reflection of the entire organizational strategy.

Semiotic Analysis of Sustainability Focused Automotive Ads

Semiotics, is 'a science which studies the role of signs as a part of social life' according to Swiss linguist Saussure, one of the co-founders of this theoretical tradition together with Peirce, the American philosopher (Chandler 2007, p.3). Saussure (1983, p.15) referred to language as 'the most important' of all the systems of signs, similarly with another theorist, Jakobson (Chandler, 2007, p.5).

Signs may take the form of words, images, sounds odours, flavours, acts, objects or camera angles. These forms can only be considered signs when people invest them with meaning and interpret them. While this study takes print ads into consideration, major signs, which can be found in them, are words, images, colours, brand logos, slogans and camera angles. Related to research literature concerning media semiotics, Saussurean terminology is much more prevalent, consequently this study borrows terminology from the Swiss linguist (Danesi, 2002, p. 31).

According to Jakobson, metaphor and metonymy are the two fundamental modes of communicating meaning, and - according to Lakoff and Johnson - the basis for much of our understanding in everyday life (Jakobson and Halle 1956; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 5) argue that 'the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another'. Whilst metaphor is based on apparent unrelatedness, metonymy is a function, which involves using one signified to stand for another signified which is directly related to it or closely associated with it in some way. It consists in using for the name of a thing or a relationship an attribute, a suggested sense, or something closely related,

such as effect for cause (Chandler, 2007). Jakobson and Halle (1956, p. 95) argue that whereas a metaphorical term is connected with that for which it is substituted on the basis of similarity, metonymy is based on contiguity or closeness.

Paradigmatic and syntagmatic analysis are, also, applied to textual and visual signs in the automotive ads, in order to reveal the reflections of sustainability issues. Saussure (1983, p. 115) claimed that signs take their value within the linguistic system from what they are *not*. Why a particular signifier rather than a workable alternative was used in a specific context: on what they often refer to as 'absences'. Paradigmatic analysis is a structuralist technique, which seeks to identify the various paradigms that underlie the 'surface structure' of a text. This aspect of structural analysis involves a consideration of the positive or negative connotations of each signifier (revealed through the use of one signifier rather than another), and the existence of 'underlying' thematic paradigms (e.g. binary oppositions such as public/private) (Chandler, 2007, p. 87).

Metaphor and metonymy, or selection and combination, are the two basic axes of language and communication. Metaphor is a paradigmatic dimension (vertical, based on selection, substitution and similarity) and metonymy a syntagmatic dimension (horizontal, based on combination, contexture and contiguity) (Jacobson and Halle, 1956, p.90-96). In the analysis of signifying systems in the corporate ads, Berger's (1985) checklist is followed: First of all, the important signs (illustrations, pictures, text, colours, etc.) are isolated and their signifiers and signifieds are questioned. Within the signs, metaphors and metonyms are examined. Ideological and sociological matters are considered. Paradigmatic structure of the text is analysed and central oppositions are questioned. Syntagmatic structure is analysed, sequential arrangement of the elements are questioned. Contributions of the above-mentioned semioticians are considered, as well. As a result, the meaning related with sustainability ideal of each automotive brand is presented.

Audi: Car-Free Day Ad

Audi is a German originated automotive brand. 'Car-free day' ad is created by DDB-Paris agency in the year 2005. In the very minimalist ad dominant vision is 'emptiness'. A spotlight coming down to the floor enlightens the empty ground. On the right base of the paper, the name and aim of the campaign as 'car-free day' is mentioned, just next to it the name and the logo of the Audi brand is visible. Table 1 summarizes the main signs, its signifiers and how they are signified.

The dominant colour grey in the visual, gives us a sense of being closed in a room. There is a spotlight coming down in the centre of the room; this light may be a metaphor of an

interrogation, however there is nobody or nothing to be interrogated. As this visual stands for the Audi ad, when analysed paradigmatically, the emptiness in the room is a result of the absence of an Audi car. The spotlight might be interrogating an invisible Audi car, which is partially responsible for environmental pollution. The ad is a result of the company's self-criticism, as a matter of fact, Audi supports an event which is called 'car-free day', that is also the theme of the ad. It is not possible to make a syntagmatic analysis for this short text, which is just the name of the event. This event is a sociological matter to be considered in the analysis.

Table 1. Summary of Main Signs, Audi

SIGN	Colour	Light	Text
SIGNIFIER	Degrading tones of grey	Spotlight at the center	Car-free day
SIGNIFIED	Air-pollution, coldness, pessimism	Optimism, interrogation	Audi's support for the car-free day event, thus indirectly sustainable environment

September 22 is International Car Free Day, which is celebrated the world over by more than 100 million people in about 1,500 cities. The global event is a day for motorists to forsake their gas-guzzlers, lessen their contributions to global warming and perhaps get some exercise instead. It is aimed at getting commuters out of the habit of automatically using their cars and coaxing them into considering more environmentally sound alternatives <http://www.carfreeday.org.in/>. 34 nations are hosting an "In Town Without My Car" day, including most of Europe, Japan, Brazil, Canada and Venezuela. Many cities will close off entire roads to cars. In Europe, the day forms part of European Mobility Week (EMW) and has the theme "clever commuting". The EMW website states: "European citizens will have the opportunity to enjoy a full week of events dedicated to sustainable mobility. The objective is to facilitate widespread debate on the necessity for changes in behaviour in relation to mobility and in particular the use of the private car". Clever commuting aims "to promote sustainable trips to workplaces and schools by encouraging alternative modes of transport to reduce traffic congestion, transport-related greenhouse gases and improve the health and quality of life." <http://www.mobilityweek.eu/>.

In this ad, although the message is not given directly, by not using the private cars, even for one single day, each individual can make a personal contribution to prevent global warming, for which Audi itself is partially responsible of. Audi as a car manufacturer tries to reflect a

corporate identity that is sensitive for its environmental responsibilities. Instead of just selling new cars and making profit, they would like to claim that the company cares for a sustainable environment and society, as well.

Honda- ICVS* Ad

Honda Motor Company is a Japanese multinational corporation manufacturing automobiles and motors. The advertisement's agency is Wieden + Kennedy UK Ltd, it is created in United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. The ad is composed of a circular, white illustration on a blue background and a text in one paragraph. The illustration is a special kind of art made by papers, called 'Kirigami'[†]. There are cars and big and small people figures holding each other's hands on it. The Honda logo is visible as well. There is a text composed of 12 short and simple sentences in English, explaining the main idea of the ad. Except the logos in the illustration, no name or no visual identity of the brand is emphasized. Table 2 summarizes the main signs, its signifiers and how they are signified:

Table 2. Summary of Main Signs, Honda

SIGN	Illustration	Background/Colour	Text
SIGNIFIER	Circle shaped Kirigami	White illustration and text on blue background	12 sentences forming the text* (below the table 2)
SIGNIFIED	People living inside the world in solidarity surrounded with Honda cars	Blue background is the sky and the white colour is purity, representing the world as a place worth living	Collaboration, sharing, solidarity, happiness, hope

**Could you imagine being a 222-car family? Sounds crazy. But in Singapore it happens. There they have a big pool of cars. Honda cars. And everyone shares them. You use one when you need it. Drop it off when you don't. We call it the Intelligent Community Vehicle System. It's like one big happy car sharing family. Perhaps one day we'll make it happen here. Do you believe in the power of dreams?*

In this ad there is a narration: in the case of Singapore, the residents are sharing 222 Honda cars in a creative car-sharing system. The company gives a name to this system as well, so they adopt the idea by naming it. This narration reflects a collaborative culture of Asia, people living in solidarity and a system to take as an example, even for the individualist Westerners. The text

* ICVS: Intelligent Community Vehicle System

† Kirigami is similar to origami in that it is a form of paper art. The major difference is that in origami, you fold paper whereas in kirigami, you fold and *cut* paper <http://www.origami-resource-center.com/kirigami.html>

is given in a dialogic way; it is directly talking with the audience and giving its message. When the sentences are analysed syntagmatically ‘But *in Singapore* it happens’ sentence creates a meaning emphasizing the country, ‘*in Singapore* not in somewhere else’. This is also an accent to the collaborative culture of the East. All the idea of the ad is built on solidarity of people. The illustration belonging to a paper cut in a special way to create a picture of people holding hands in between Honda cars. Holding hands are metonymic and represent collaboration and harmony. The colour white signifies a pure, clean world in which it is worth living. Honda desires to reflect its Asian roots, naturally inheriting collaborative culture, and wishes to link this to a general vision of the company. Sustainability ideal would naturally be a part of this organisational identity built on values such as sharing and consuming less, as well.

Toyota – Cornfield ad

Toyota Motor Corporation’s ‘Cornfield’ titled ad is produced by Oasis advertising agency, in 2001, in New York City, in the USA. This advertisement is a two-page spread featuring a scarecrow and corn plants in the foreground, a vast cornfield in the mid-ground and a manufacturing plant of some kind in the distance near the sunrise. It is a bucolic scene hearkening to a good and pastoral ideal farmers life as clean and productive, and unimpeded by any other productions. Table 3 summarizes the main signs, its signifiers and how they are signified:

Table 3. Summary of Main Signs, Toyota

SIGN	Subject	Field	Building	Colour/light	Text
SIGNIFIER	The photo of a scarecrow	Photo of green corn plants	Photo of grey, big buildings far away	Blue, yellow, orange, green, grey; light of a sunrise	-Today, tomorrow, Toyota -Detailed text *(below the table 3)
SIGNIFIED	Guardian of the environment from the wastes of industry	Environment	Car industry that recycles the wastes	Future, hope, expectation	Concrete facts concerning environmental responsibilities and future promises of Toyota

**Today, reduce manufacturing waste going to landfills. Tomorrow, reduce land going to waste. Toyota, each year Toyota builds more than one million vehicles in North America. This means*

that we use a lot of resources-steel, aluminium and plastics, for instance. But at Toyota, large scale manufacturing doesn't mean large scale waste. In 1992 we introduced our Global Earth Charter to promote environmental responsibility throughout our operations. And in North America it is already reaping significant benefits. In addition to the 376 million pounds of steel that we recycle every year, approximately 18 million pounds of other scrap materials are now kept out of landfills thanks to aggressive recycling programmes in each of our nine manufacturing facilities. Of course, no one ever said that looking after the Earth's resources is easy. But as we continue to strive for greener ways to do business, there is one thing we're definitely not wasting. And that's time.

When looking at this advertisement the eye of the viewer is immediately drawn to the scarecrow. This scarecrow is a guardian of the unspoiled natural landscape, protecting it from the wastes of industry. Therefore, it is a metaphor. Green corn plants are metonymic as they stand for productive, fertile and protected nature. Remembering that this ad is created towards the North American audience, paradigmatic selection of the 'corn field' makes a sense (if the audience were Turkish, it would probably be a field of wheat). Photo of grey, big buildings seen far away are representing the car industry. As the whole visual composition is analysed syntagmatically, the scarecrow is just in the front, while it attracts the whole attention of the viewer on itself. The manufacturing plant, which is actually polluting the environment, is at the back of the scene, very far away from the eyesight. Green corn fields under the blue sky are spread all around and cover the whole background as a positive image. Noticeably cars and people are absent in the vision. Paradigmatically this absence may be read as the company traces itself back and highlights the importance given to the clean environment.

'Today Tomorrow Toyota' are the words standing for Toyota's general communication theme. This theme represents that Toyota is the company of the future with its clear visions towards environmental sustainability.

Toyota positions itself as a leading car manufacturer by giving the number of cars produced. The text focuses on Toyota's environmental responsibility vision. Seizing the usage of the natural resources led the company to create sound politics for recycling and diminishing the waste. Paradigmatically, the exact dates of the operations (year 1992) and clear numbers (376 million pounds, 18 million pounds, nine manufacturing facilities) provide solid facts concerning their efforts towards recycling and increase the persuasiveness of the message.

According to this ad, Toyota recycles, has a healthy sense and construct plants to fulfil their corporate environmental responsibilities. In the following ad, Toyota uses reflections of the same philosophy as the content of its tactical messages.

Toyota – Aim Zero Emissions

Toyota's "aim: zero emissions" campaign endorses Toyota's promise to achieve sustainable mobility by developing advanced technologies in order to protect the environment. Toyota has effectively set the pace towards zero emissions vehicles with its hybrid engine technology – the cleanest engine technology on the market. The campaign agency is Dentsu in Brussels and the ad is created and printed in 2006, for European and Russian car consumers. In the ad there is a surrealistic pastoral scene, colours are vivid and bright, the language is clear. At the top, left-hand side of the paper, the name of the campaign is visible 'aim: zero emission'. Below the picture there is a text composed of 5 sentences, moderately long. The text explains the concrete facts supporting the company's ideal about clean energy. At the end of the page, the website of the campaign and the name of the brand are indicated. Table 4 summarizes the main signs, its signifiers and how they are signified:

Table 4. Summary of Main Signs, Toyota Aim Zero

SIGN	Subject	Background scene	Text
SIGNIFIER	The illustration of a hand-tree	Illustration of a pastoral scene	-Aim: zero emissions -Detailed text* (below the table 4)
SIGNIFIED	Balance between human and nature	Environment	Concrete facts concerning environmental responsibilities and future promises of Toyota

**We believe in preserving the delicate balance between man and nature. It is not just about your car's exhaust emissions. It even goes beyond Toyota's leading hybrid and clean diesel engine technologies. We apply innovative environmental solutions to every aspect of the vehicle's life cycle: from design, manufacture and use, right through to recycling. It's the only way we can expect to reach our ultimate aim: zero emission.*

www.zeroemissions.eu

At the centre of the ad there is a dominant illustration of a surrealistic tree that has a body made out of a human arm and hand. These arm and hand are metonym and stands for human. Fingers of the hand are representing the roots of the tree, hence they can be considered as a metaphor. The finger-roots leaning towards the earth nourish the tree, besides they represent the harmonious relationship between humankind and the nature. When analysed paradigmatically, the image is a green and vivid tree, instead of a dry and dead winter tree. This signifies the result of the positive contributions that Toyota has made towards the environment.

The text also supports the idea: providing the balance between man and nature as a result of the technologies that Toyota develops. Similarly with the Honda ad, the dominance of the first plural subject pronoun in the text reveals Toyota's corporate vision towards environmental issues. This vision is supported by the real facts (*hybrid and clean diesel engine technologies*) given in the text.

Volkswagen – Sandwich Man[‡]

Volkswagen is a German car manufacturer. The so called 'sandwich man/ homme sandwich' advertisement's agency is Agence.V. It is created in Paris, France. Actually, this ad is one of the three ads having the same concept. The other ads were published in English, in other countries. In the ad, stone statue of a historical man is "wearing" a big poster. The text on the poster is written in French 'Filtre a particules Volkswagen Pres de 100% de fumes noires en moins'. The translation of this text is as follows: 'Diesel Particle Filter System. Nearly 100% less black smoke'. The photo was taken on a winter day. In general, the tones of grey are dominant in the photo. The only colour in the ad belongs to the Volkswagen emblem, which is blue. Table 5 summarizes the main signs, its signifiers and how they are signified:

Table 5. Summary of Main Signs, Volkswagen

SIGN	Subject	Colour	Text
SIGNIFIER	Statue sandwich man	Grey and white	Filtre a particules Volkswagen Près de 100% de fumes noires en moins.
SIGNIFIED	Ironically a man who has been hired for making advertisement, but can not wander around to advertise	cold	VW respects for environment with a new filter system

This creative ad with a short text, has an ironical tone. At the time of the historical figures represented by the stone statues, there were no cars and no pollution caused by them. Besides, today's audience are taking the message of Volkswagen via this unrelated mediator. The mediator sandwich man is a stable figure in the ad, in contrary to its actual nature. There are no metaphors or metonyms in the ad. An uncertain word 'nearly', decreases the credibility of the message and does not give a clear message to the audience.

[‡] sandwich man *noun*: a person with advertising boards hung from the shoulders
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sandwich+man>

The ad in overall indicates that Volkswagen tries to attract attention to ‘pollution caused by vehicles’ without an effective emission filter system. Although the application of the ad is creative, it hardly makes a sense for the audience related with the company’s contribution to sustainable environment and society.

Volkswagen – Save Fuel Ad

‘Save Fuel’ ad belongs to Volkswagen and it is created by DDB London, in the year 2005. The ad is composed of a slogan ‘SAVE FUEL’, however the letters forming the text do not have a normal typography, instead each letter is a figure exposing one of the 7 steps related with Volkswagen FSI engine technology. Since the resolution of the figures in the ad is not high enough, parts of the process are not clearly understood. At the bottom of the page, on the left side there is a text written in small fonts: ‘FSI engines. Advanced technology, simple benefit’, presenting the main idea of the ad, and at the right side Volkswagen’s emblem is visible together with the text ‘Aus liebe zum automobile’ (Because of the love of car). Table 6 summarizes the main signs, its signifiers and how they are signified:

Table 6. Summary of Main Signs, Volkswagen Save Fuel

SIGN	Letters	Picture	Text
SIGNIFIER	S,A,V,E,F,U,E,L	‘SAVE FUEL’ text composed of letters explaining the process of FSI engines in VW cars	1-FSI engines. Advanced technology, simple benefit. 2-VW, Aus liebe zum automobil
SIGNIFIED	Each letter represents one of the seven steps of FSI engines.	The main message of VW: Saving fuel is provided by new technological engines created by the company; as a result of this tech. VW helps protecting the environment	1-Outcome of choosing VW cars that use a high technology, people gain benefit- either social or economical. 2- emotional

The ad carries the main idea out via 8 figured letters forming ‘Save fuel’ slogan. S letter is the first step towards saving fuel by the help of high technology FSI engines, which Volkswagen uses in its products. Each of the remaining letters signifies one step of the engine’s technology. Inside the figures only FSI letters, numbers between 1 and 7 and the exhaust of a car are distinguished. Arrow shapes are used to indicate the direction of the process. The meaning extracted from the syntagmatic analysis of the slogan ‘save fuel’ –instead of fuel save- is that, Volkswagen is commanding the people to save fuel by using their cars When analysed

paradigmatically, the absence of the subject pronoun-we- in this text weakens the claim of the company concerning its role in saving fuel.

Underneath the illustration it is written in small letters: Advanced technology, simple benefit. ‘Advanced technology’ indicates the FSI engines and the word ‘simple benefit’ stands for the fuel save. This ad suggests that the company is innovative and is doing an effort to save fuel through innovations to reduce its impact on the environment - as to be more sustainable.

Volvo- Green Ad

The advertisement titled ‘Green’ is made by Euro RSCG Worldwide HQ Agency in New York. The ad shows a Volvo car – any kind of Volvo car, not a specified model – that is “made of grass”. Background colour is white. Underneath the image, ‘Every Volvo is a green Volvo’ is the headline of a text in which factual information is given. On the right end of the page, logo of Volvo and the slogan ‘for life’ are observed. Table 7 summarizes the main signs, its signifiers and how they are signified:

Table 7. Summary of Main Signs, Volvo

SIGN	Illustration	Background/Colour	Text
SIGNIFIER	Car made of grass	Green car on white background	1-Every Volvo is a green Volvo 2-Detailed text* (below table 7) 3-Volvo for life
SIGNIFIED	Eco-friendly Volvo car	Eco-friendly Volvo car	Eco-friendly Volvo car

** At Volvo, respect for the environment is at the core of everything we do. That’s why 85% of every new Volvo can be recycled or returned to the environment. And why we developed the premar radiator system that actually converts ground level of ozone into pure, breathable oxygen. So, you can be sure that by driving a Volvo, you’re helping to pass along a world that’s at least as good as the one you came into.*

The viewer transfers the qualities signified by the grass to the Volvo car, thus substituting one signified for another, and creating a new metaphorical sign, which offers us the meaning that Volvo car is eco-friendly. The slogan ‘Every Volvo is a green Volvo’ and the description underneath suggests that Volvo cars are in 85% recyclable, do not pollute the air and leave the world unharmed. In the text, subject pronouns ‘we’ and ‘you’ are noticeable as this indicates a sincere and dialogic tone of communication. Environment is presented as a subject to ‘respect for’. Each signifier in the ad are designed to signify eco-friendly Volvo car, this unity emphasizes the power of the message.

Conclusion

This paper focused on sustainability in the automotive industry and how they reflected sustainability issues in their corporate ads as a part of their public relations efforts. The study tried to figure out how meaning of ‘sustainability’ is produced in five automotive brand’s corporate advertisements. The meanings extracted from semiotic analysis of the automotive brands are highlighting the concepts such as green, eco-friendly, environmentally responsible, pollution prevention and re-cycling. It is obvious that environmental and social responsibilities of the companies are emphasized rather than the economic ones.

Two Asian originated companies (Honda and Toyota) stress their cultural values in their ads. Collaborative culture, solidarity between people in the society, the balance and harmony between human and nature are the main points that are considered, even though the receivers of the messages were European and/or American. While the tones of the ads are highly emotional and metaphoric and metonymic expressions are preferred, the content of the messages depend on concrete facts and realistic examples. However, three European originated companies (Audi, Volkswagen and Volvo) do not emphasize culture in their ads; they reflect their image via metaphors, as well; however, Audi and Volvo prefer a more minimalistic style in their ads.

All the ads have a future orientation. They all tend to promise to their stakeholders to act responsibly that are generally covered under the term of environmental responsibility. Some of the automotive manufacturers utilize from sustainability as an idea to attract the consumers and to encourage them to purchase their products and differentiate themselves from their competitors. The companies Toyota, Volvo and Volkswagen created corporate ads in which they comprehend and reflect sustainability as a marketing tool rather than an internalized universal value belonging to their corporate culture. On the other hand, Audi and Honda revealed a sustainability vision that does not legate the issue to the companies’ profit but consider it as a profound ideal.

As a conclusion, examining corporate advertisements with a textual analysis method, such as semiotics, might help to scrutinize the overall organizational identity. It is a useful method to be utilized in public relations field, when dealing with the campaign messages, both in creation and in analysis steps. Corporate advertising, as a tool of public relations, together with other texts revealing sustainability issues (e.g. sustainability and CSR reports), is a powerful way to reflect corporate image; thus, as to undercover the meanings adopted by the companies, it is crucial to analyse all the micro-level tactical messages with a qualitative research method, particularly with semiotics.

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Online Resources

<http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>

<http://www.unep.fr/scp/communications/ad/details.asp?id=51338&cat=>

<http://www.unep.fr/scp/communications/ad/details.asp?id=20966&cat=>

<http://www.carfreeday.org.in/>

<http://www.mobilityweek.eu/>

<http://www.origami-resource-center.com/kirigami.html>

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sandwich+man>

<http://www.unep.fr/scp/communications/ad/details.asp?g=1&id=46268&cp=&cat=>

<http://www.unep.fr/scp/communications/ad/details.asp?id=6684116&cat=>

<http://www.unep.fr/scp/communications/ad/details.asp?g=1&id=53329&cp=&cat=>

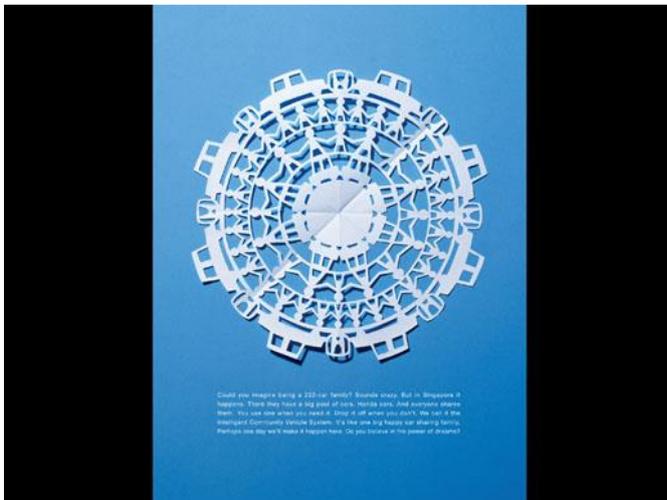
<http://www.unep.fr/scp/communications/ad/details.asp?g=1&id=49180&cp=&cat=>

<http://www.unep.fr/scp/communications/ad/details.asp?id=53279&cat=>

Appendix 1- Audi



Appendix 2- Honda



Appendix 3- Toyota (Cornfield)



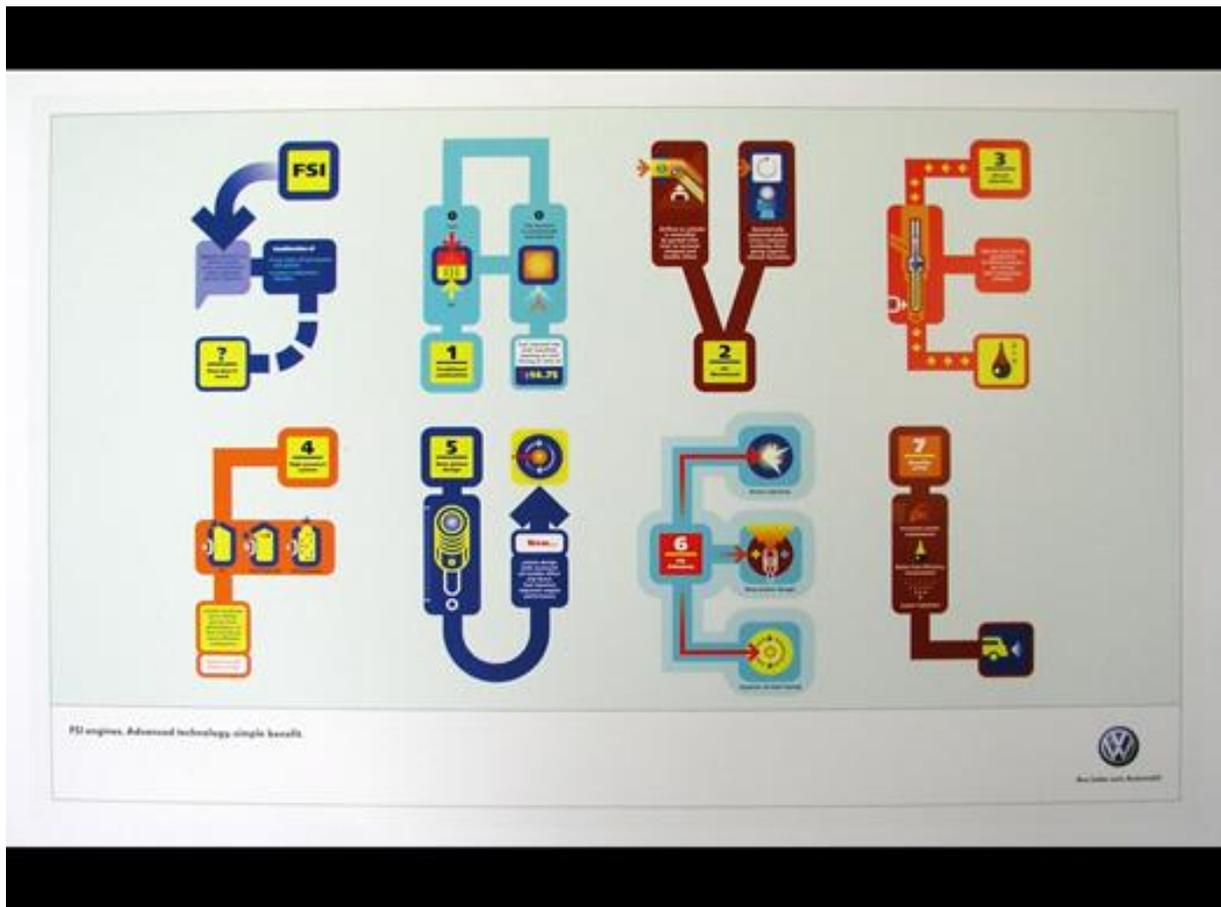
Appendix 4- Toyota (Aim zero emission)



Appendix 5- Volkswagen (Sandwichman)



Appendix 6- Volkswagen (Save Fuel)



Appendix 7- Volvo

