

Research Article | Araştırma Makalesi

Planned Obsolescence and Sustainability in the Context of Corporate Communication Strategies: A Qualitative Study on Consumers

Kurumsal İletişim Stratejileri Bağlamında Planlı Eskitme Ve Sürdürülebilirlik: Tüketiciler Üzerine Nitel Bir Çalışma



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Abstract

Planned obsolescence is defined as determining a product's lifespan before its launch and planning the product life cycle within a specific strategy. Communication activities within planned obsolescence strategies aim to ensure consumption continuity by increasing sales, but they conflict with the concept of sustainability, which aims to meet today's needs without compromising future generations' needs. This study aims to measure how consumers perceive communication efforts related to these concepts. The study's universe consists of consumers in Turkey who are conscious of sustainable consumption. The research, conducted with 11 sustainably conscious consumers, collected data on their sustainable behaviors, knowledge of communication activities within the frameworks of sustainability and planned obsolescence, and their evaluations of these concepts. The results showed that consumers with a sustainable lifestyle were unaware of companies' sustainability communication efforts and found them insufficient. Additionally, they were influenced by communication activities within planned obsolescence strategies and felt these efforts were inconsistent with sustainability. This study is important for evaluating sustainability communication efforts and company approaches in this field from the perspective of consumers who value sustainable living in Turkey.

Keywords: Corporate Communication, Planned Obsolescence Strategies, Sustainability Communication.

Öz

Planlı eskitme kavramı, bir ürünün kullanım süresinin, ürün piyasaya sürülmeden önce belirlenmesi ve ürün yaşam eğrisinin belirli bir strateji çerçevesinde planlanarak oluşturulması olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Planlı eskitme stratejileri çerçevesinde gerçekleştirilen iletişim faaliyetleri, üreticilerin daha fazla satış yaparak tüketim sürekliliğini sağlamayı amaçlarken, bugünün ihtiyaçlarını gelecek nesillerin ihtiyaçlarını karşılama kabiliyetinden ödün vermeden karşılamayı amaçlayan sürdürülebilirlik kavramı ile çelişmektedir. Bu çalışma, bu iki kavram bağlamında gerçekleştirilen iletişim çalışmalarının tüketiciler tarafından nasıl algılandığını ölçmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın evrenini, Türkiye'de sürdürülebilir tüketim bilincine sahip tüketiciler oluşturmaktadır. Sürdürülebilir tüketim bilincine sahip 11 tüketici üzerinde gerçekleştirilen araştırmada, katılımcıların sürdürülebilir davranışları, sürdürülebilirlik ve planlı eskitme stratejileri çerçevesinde gerçekleştirilen iletişim çalışmalarına dair bilgi düzeyleri ve bu iki kavramı değerlendirmeleri sonucunda veriler elde edilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, sürdürülebilir bir yaşam tarzına sahip tüketiciler, kurumların gerçekleştirdikleri sürdürülebilirlik iletişim çalışmalarından haberdar olmadıklarını ve bu çalışmaları yeterli bulmadıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Ayrıca, planlı eskitme stratejileri kapsamında gerçekleştirilen iletişim çalışmalarından etkilendiklerini ve bu çalışmaların sürdürülebilirlik ile bir tutarsızlık yarattığını ifade etmişlerdir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de sürdürülebilir yaşama önem veren tüketicilerin, kurumların gerçekleştirdiği sürdürülebilirlik iletişim çalışmalarını değerlendirme ve bu alandaki kurum yaklaşımlarını gözler önüne serme açısından önem taşımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kurumsal İletişim, Planlı Eskitme Stratejileri, Sürdürülebilirlik İletişimi.



Introduction

In the 19th century, the “throwaway culture,” “disposable culture,” or “throwaway ethic” was born to sustain economic growth and to find a solution to the overproduction problem (Slade, 2007). Manufacturers encountered a problem while producing long-lasting and reliable products. This issue resulted in the purchase cycles of durable, long-lasting products slowing down, leading to a slow sales growth rate. Thus, planned obsolescence (PO) has become a frequently applied method to ensure continuity in the economy and to increase the profitability of companies.

Within the scope of PO practices, companies determine the product lifecycle before launching a product into the market (Cooper, 2005; Longmans, 1960; Slade, 2007). According to Longman (2006) “Its use as a strategy to influence either the shape of the product or the mental attitude of the consumer represents the quintessence of the throwaway spirit.” (p.37). Although PO practices were first observed in the automotive industry in a historical process, they are also frequently applied in the ready-to-wear, plant breeding, technology, and telecommunications sectors (Baša & Szabó Farkas, 2022; Junge & van der Velden, 2018; Rivera & Lallmahomed, 2016). It is also observed that the development of products in the current class, especially in the technology or ready-to-wear industry, is used more frequently (Cox et al., 2013)

Thus, institutions began to employ various communication strategies for the PO method they implemented to increase the frequency of product purchases by consumers (Utaka, 2000). This situation has led to numerous studies on technological developments and trend evolutions for new products. PO has been used not only to increase sales but also as a strategy to maintain market competition and engage with competitors (Guiltinan, 2009). Hence, within the scope of PO, consumers are directed towards the consumption of new products and similarly, they tend to replace their existing products within a certain period to attain a particular prestige and status, even if the products do not break or malfunction (Cox et al., 2013; Echegaray, 2016).

There is an inherent contradiction between the concept of sustainability, defined as using today’s resources without compromising the needs of future generations, and PO strategies (Brundtland, 1987). With the growth of the World population, there is an increase in waste generation due to the increase in consumption (Bakhiyi et al., 2018), water consumption, and depletion of natural resources, which all affect climate change as well (Koop & van Leeuwen, 2017; Singh & Singh, 2017). Thus, various studies are being conducted on reducing consumption levels and promoting sustainable consumption. The UN has also targeted SDG Development Goal 12 which is responsible consumption and production that aims to reduce waste through repairing, reusing, and recycling (Adrian et al., n.d.). So with communication strategies, companies should address these issues to create awareness among their consumers. More sustainable communication strategies require integrating customer-oriented aspects with a focus on product and production issues, developing innovative solutions that guide customers towards new production and consumption systems. This approach aims to enhance resource efficiency and reduce pollution, ensuring product quality is not compromised by production concerns (Peattie, 2016).

There are many studies in the literature addressing PO and sustainable consumption. Some of these studies show that consumers demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding sustainability challenges in the industry (Hamatake & Keaney, n.d.; Yurtsever,

2023). However, a study on smartphones revealed that smartphone durability and sustainability were not primary concerns when deciding to replace their devices. While all participants viewed more sustainable smartphone options positively and expressed a desire to adopt more sustainable consumption habits, they acknowledged the existence of various barriers and practical limitations that hinder their ability to act accordingly (Sjöstrand et al., 2022). A similar study also shows that small household appliances have less shorter lifespans, whereas larger technical devices like TVs and laptops last longer (Hennies & Stamminger, 2016)

Therefore, this study aims to measure consumers' awareness of PO strategies and sustainability communications organizations implement. To achieve this, an in-depth analysis will be conducted with consumers in the technology and ready-to-wear sectors to assess their awareness of these issues, thereby evaluating the sustainability and PO communications carried out in Turkey.

The Concept and Communication of Planned Obsolescence

PO term defined during the World Economic Crisis by Bernard London in 1932 with his work titled "Ending the Great Depression with Planned Obsolescence". The crisis, which was actually driven by overproduction, occurred when manufacturers, after expanding their production capabilities, were unable to clear the large surplus they had accumulated due to a lack of sufficient demand (London, 1932).

According to the Longmans, (1960) the PO term is defined as unethical strategies that limits the life cycle of products. According to Cooper, (2010) PO is "the outcome of a deliberate decision by suppliers that a product should no longer be functional or desirable after a predetermined period, remains entrenched in industrialized economies despite criticism over many years" (p.4). This term can also be described as deliberately reducing the lifespan of products to encourage greater consumption (Slade, 2007).

There are some advantages of using PO strategies. For manufacturers, using PO strategies increases continuing demand for their products and also increases their sales as a result of increasing profits (Longmans, 1960). PO also has advantages for the economy, such as increasing sales in mature markets by supporting mass consumption, which will support economic growth. Companies also face several disadvantages, including legal challenges related to waste management and PO laws imposed by local governments, as well as increased consumer dissatisfaction resulting from rapid consumption.

In the 1870s, Americans began using disposable collars, and by the 1880s, sanitary pads and tampons were introduced (Rivera & Lallmahomed, 2016, p.121). At those years, one of the industries that implemented PO is the automotive sector. In the 1910s and 1920s, this strategy was first applied by brands like Ford and Chevrolet (Longmans, 1960, p.52). In the 1920s, General Motors continuously produced technologically advanced cars in order to compete with Ford, while also focusing on the design of automobiles to keep up with fashion trends. In doing so, the company utilized both technological and psychological obsolescence (Slade, 2007). General Motors's strategy led to dissatisfaction as consumer preferences shifted towards smaller cars, such as the Volkswagen Beetle. This demonstrates that PO can sometimes backfire and there are different types of it (Cooper, 2013).

Longmans, (1960) divided the PO term into several sub-units according to functionality, quality, and desirability (Guiltinan, 2009). According to functionality and quality, also

called functional obsolescence, the product becomes outdated because of technological improvement or product break down or wear out in time. Consumers want to buy new products due to technological developments or unusable products (Levinthal & Purohit, 1989; Rai & Terpenney, 2008). According to desirability, also called psychological obsolescence, the product loses its attractiveness and satisfaction level (Cooper, 2005).

It is also found in such a distinction as systematic obsolescence. This kind of obsolescence is similar to technological obsolescence. Consumers generally stop using the product because no maintenance is available for it (Guiltingan, 2009). CD and DVD players that have been marketed can be a good example of this area. The last type of PO relates to product failure and breakdown, where products are intentionally designed to fail after a predetermined number of uses. This design compels consumers to replace the product (Rivera & Lallmahomed, 2016, p.120).

Longmans, (1960) stated that consumers' buying behavior occurs more for psychological reasons than functional reasons. As the income of the consumer increases, the consumer prefers to replace the product rather than maintain or repair it because of the waste of time (McCollough, 2007). A study conducted on phone users found that they do not prioritize the lifespan of their phones when making purchasing decisions (Çerçi & Tosun, 2021) and generally tend to replace their electronic devices every five years and their phones every two years (Cox et al., 2013). Another factor supporting PO is the issue of product repairability. A study found that one-third of broken devices discarded by participants could have been repaired. However, due to the high cost of repairs, consumers more often choose to replace the product with a new one (Cooper, 2005). It has also been shown that purchasing these products often serves as a marker of social status (Cooper, 2005; Cox et al., 2013; Echegaray, 2016). This is not limited to phones; much of the communication efforts by telecommunications companies are also focused on PO, for which they have been criticized (Wieser, 2016).

Academic researches on PO indicates that most academic studies primarily focus on product durability, followed by product design (Zallio & Berry, 2017), sustainability, and sustainable development (Satyro et al., 2018; Vail, 2022). A third cluster of academic research topics includes e-waste, recycling, political economy, product lifespan, marketing, and waste disposal (Gecit, 2020, p.231). However, there is relatively little research on how PO is communicated to consumers. The existing studies generally focus on the campaigns themselves (Keeble, n.d.; Troeger & Hübner, 2017) or on consumer responses to these campaigns (Çerçi & Tosun, 2021; Cox et al., 2013; Echegaray, 2016) which tend to reflect negative attitudes towards PO practices (Akçay, 2022; Aydın Kanlıtepe & Özgül, 2021). As Cooper, (2005) suggests, the forms of technological and psychological obsolescence typically originate from either marketing or communication, making this an ideal starting point for exploring the topic (p.427).

Sustainability Communication

Sustainability was first defined in the 1987 report "Our Common Future" as the use of today's resources without compromising the needs of future generations (Brundtland, 1987). When examining the definitions of sustainability, it can be observed that the definition encompasses social, economic, and environmental aspects, with most studies addressing sustainability within these three dimensions (Bansal, 2005; Bergman et al., 2018; Goodland, 1995; Mckenzie, 2004; Montiel & Delgado-Ceballos, 2014; Morelli, 2011). In the social context, sustainability addresses issues such as equity, adequate

nutrition, health, education, ecological footprint and the elimination of urbanization problems. In the environmental context, it involves climate change, problems related to natural habitats, loss of biodiversity, waste management issues, and the use of natural resources. Economically, it pertains to the improvement of living standards, economic development, and growth (Goodland, 1995).

In this context, institutions also undertake various corporate sustainability communication efforts. Although there is no precise date for the inception of corporate sustainability communication, it is suggested that the environmental crisis communications initiated by institutions in response to environmental scandals of the 1970s laid its foundation (Signitzer & Prexl, 2007, p.5). During the 1950s to the 1970s, the physical environment was largely considered irrelevant in marketing, except in industries such as oil, chemicals, and automobiles, where environmental concerns were framed as operational management issues. In the 1980s, with the publication of the Brundtland Report, it was recognised that environmental and sustainability issues had a significant impact on marketing (Peattie, 2016, p.240).

McDonagh, (1998) argue that a conventional communication or marketing approach should not be regarded as sustainable communication. According to McDonagh, (1998) “sustainable communication is an interactive social process aimed at resolving and eliminating ecological alienation between an organization and its public or stakeholders” (p. 599). Based on this definition, it can easily be claimed that sustainable communication, which centers on mutual understanding and a solution-oriented approach, is an important tool for organizations to convey their message to their target audiences. For organizations, maintaining corporate sustainability communications is crucial for achieving their goals. The concept of sustainable communication emphasizes a continuous process that supports the objectives of different stakeholders and, ultimately, the sustainability goals (Petts, 2000, p.247). It is an ongoing, clear, interactive, and coherent process with measurable results, utilized by organizations aiming to build lasting relationships with their stakeholders (Harrison et al., 2003). Sustainable communication is transparent, open, and dialogue-based. It informs society about issues such as process management systems, pollution control systems, risk assessments, life cycle assessments, environmental impact assessments, and product and technology development, all related to the assumptions of the industry in which the organization operates (Petts, 2000, p.242).

Within the scope of sustainability communication, organizations can undertake various communication activities related to their products. Examples include life-span labels, environmental claims, guarantees and warranties, quality marks, and labels concerning installation and care (Cooper & Christer, 2016). Additionally, the replacement period for products purchased to maintain status is shorter. One of the best practices in this area is to create a bond between existing products and consumers through various communication efforts (Cox et al., 2013). This ensures that products can be repaired when they break down. However, one of the biggest challenges in sustainability is the repair process when products fail. In this context, repair cafes staffed by individuals knowledgeable about repairs are one of the developments supporting sustainability. These centers, which cater to a range of products from electronic devices to bicycles, clothing, and household items, play a significant role in fostering a repair and reuse culture; (Masclat et al., 2023; Moalem & Mosgaard, 2021; Ozanne, 2024). Even phone companies are attempting to open their own repair centers to prevent purchase rates and support sustainability. Notably, Apple,

one of the companies most resistant to this movement, announced a repair program in 2021, and similarly, Microsoft has accepted the repair of its products (Sustainable Brands, 2024). According to Cooper (2005), increasing repair needs can be considered within the scope of social sustainability, potentially having a positive impact on employment.

In sustainability communication, the credibility of messages related to social, environmental, and ethical issues communicated by organizations is sometimes questioned by various stakeholders. The perception that an organization's sustainability communication is aimed at gaining a market advantage is not well received by stakeholders (Dawkins, 2004, p.10). Similarly, communication efforts based on PO can create social inequality while encouraging consumers to purchase new products (Satyro et al., 2018, p.749). Promotional activities, especially advertising and offers like 'buy-one-get-one-free,' are often criticized for driving unsustainable consumption levels (Peattie, 2016, p.248). It is evident that PO compromises the concept of sustainability. Governments, firms, and consumers all share responsibility. In 2015, France became one of the first countries to ban planned obsolescence, imposing penalties of up to two years in prison and fines of €300,000 (Wieser, 2016, p.156). The government has the power to legislate, firms should adhere to their sustainability activities, and consumers should be conscious of sustainable consumption as well, (AKanlıtepe & Özgül, 2021, p.966). On March 30, 2022, the European Parliament published the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (UCPD) and the Consumer Rights Directive (CRD) to empower consumers for green consumption. It was stated that "Consumers would have to be informed which products are more durable and repairable. Environmental and social impact, durability, and repairability would be added to the list of product characteristics about which traders are forbidden to mislead consumers." This indicates a step forward in avoiding PO activities. Additional measures have been included, such as limiting product durability (European Union, 2024; Sapmaz Veral, 2023).

Consumers are unaware of the effects of PO, or they are feeling hopeless about this issue (Akçay, 2022). Thus, communication plays a crucial role in encouraging responsible use, maintenance, and recycling of products, which is essential for changing consumer perceptions and behavior (Peattie, 2016, p.248). Therefore, organizations should integrate sustainability into all aspects of the company. When sustainability is included in the company's mission and vision but not reflected operationally, PO business models may be observed (Rivera & Lallmahomed, 2016, p.124). Based on this premise, the next section will examine the PO and sustainability communication efforts carried out by organizations. The following research questions will be addressed within this scope.

Research Question 1: What do the interviewees/participants reveal about their sustainable behaviors as consumers in Turkey?

Research Question 2: To what extent are consumers in Turkey aware of corporate sustainability communication strategies, and how do they perceive and evaluate these strategies?

Research Question 3: How aware are consumers in Turkey of corporate communication strategies related to PO, and what are their perceptions of these strategies?

Research Question 4: How do consumers in Turkey assess companies' PO practices in terms of sustainability?

Method

To examine the impact of PO and sustainability communication strategies on consumers within the context of corporate communication, an in-depth interview method, a qualitative research technique, was employed. In-depth interviews not only provide detailed information on a subject but also allow for the collection and analysis of participant-specific expressions (Dömbekçi & Erişen, 2022).

The population of the study consists of individuals in Turkey who prioritize sustainable consumption. Due to the impracticality of reaching the entire population, criterion sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, was used to determine the sample. The aim of criterion sampling is to select individuals who meet a predetermined set of criteria (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021, p.271). Within this scope, individuals who are aware of sustainability and are referred to as “green consumers,” “environmentally friendly consumers,” or “responsible consumers” were chosen as the sample to establish the relationship between sustainability communication efforts and PO strategies. Sustainable consumption is defined as “the use of services and related products that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the lifecycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations” (UNEP, 2010). Within the study, selecting individuals with high awareness on the subject as the sample was based on the assumption that these consumers’ attitudes and behaviors would differ, and their awareness of communication strategies implemented by organizations in this direction would also be high.

The limitations of the study include focusing solely on consumers with a sustainability awareness and the subjective interpretations obtained through the use of in-depth interview methodology, a qualitative research method. In this study, the criterion for sample selection was based on individuals who responded above average (higher than 3 on a Likert scale) to the statements in the “green purchase behavior” survey developed by (Lee, 2009). Thus, a total of 14 individuals were surveyed, and 11 individuals who scored above the “green purchase behavior” average were included in the study and subjected to in-depth interviews.

For data collection, a semi-structured interview technique was employed. Interviews were conducted between 17.09.2024 and 01.10.2024. During the interviews, participants’ consent was obtained for recording, and these recordings were securely stored. Given that PO and sustainability are abstract concepts, the study divided these into two subcategories to facilitate easier examples from the consumers. Accordingly, the first group of 7 participants was asked to respond to the questions considering the “ready-to-wear” sector, while the remaining 4 participants were asked to consider the “technology” sector. This distinction is significant as it provides a comparative analysis of consumer perceptions of communication efforts in different sectors. Detailed information about the participants is provided below.

Table 1. Participant Information

Participants	Occupation/ Sector	Gender	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	AVG
P1	Engineer	Female	3	3	2	2	4	2	3	2,71
P2	Engineer	Female	2	2	2	4	4	3	2	2,71

Participants	Occupation/ Sector	Gender	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	AVG
P3	Communication	Female	2	3	2	4	4	3	2	2,86
P4	Communication	Female	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2,28
P5	Engineer	Male	2	1	1	2	2	2	3	1,86
P6	Communication	Female	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	1,71
P7	Engineer	Female	3	2	1	4	2	1	2	2,14
P8	Communication	Female	2	3	2	4	4	2	2	2,71
P9	Dentist	Female	2	3	3	2	4	2	3	2,71
P10	Pharmacist	Female	2	2	1	2	2	3	3	2,14
P11	Communication	Male	4	3	1	3	3	2	4	2,86

- S1: "I usually buy organic products."
- S2: "I often buy products labeled as environmentally friendly."
- S3: "I often buy products that are against animal testing."
- S4: "I usually buy products that contain no or fewer chemicals."
- S5: "When I consider purchasing a product, I look for a certified eco-friendly or organic stamp."
- S6: "I often purchase products that support fair community trade."
- S7: "I often purchase products that use recycled/recyclable packaging." (Lee, 2009)

As part of the study, internal validity, internal reliability, external validity, and external reliability tests were conducted. To ensure the external validity of the study, purposive sampling was used (Başkale, 2016, p.24). For internal validity, participants were asked if the study findings accurately reflected their thoughts, employing the member checking method. Regarding reliability tests, external reliability was ensured by detailing the characteristics of the participants who were the data sources, and internal reliability was addressed through a descriptive approach to the data collected within the study (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021).

Ethics Committee Permission

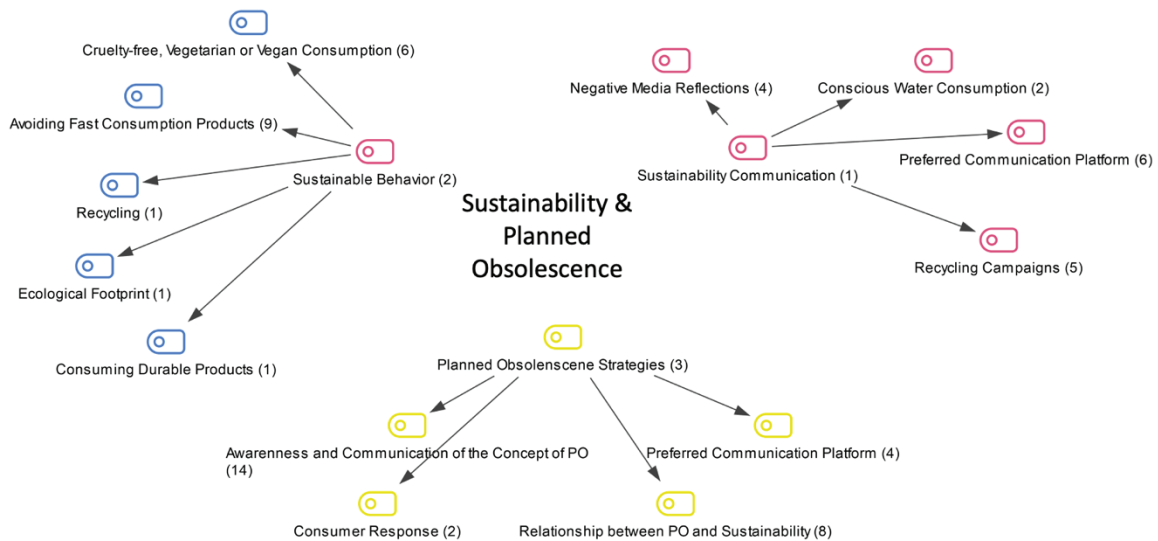
Within the framework of the decision taken during the meeting by Yeditepe University Humanities and Social Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee dated 16.09.2024 and numbered 54/2024; the study does not contain any ethical issues.

Findings & Data Analysis

Both content analysis, which sustains objective and systematic data analysis objective, and descriptive analysis, which gives details on the data methods, used to analyze the data within the scope of the research. Theme-code matching was performed for content analysis within the study. While themes were considered within the context of the research, the results of the study were used to derive themes and codes, utilizing the open coding method. The open coding method divided the research data into themes and categories (Neuman, 2020).

MAXQDA was used for data analysis within the study. Below is the model of the study.

Figure 1. Code Model



Theme 1: Sustainable Behavior

As all participants were given a pre-test, they are all aware of sustainability. However, to better analyze the participants and measure their awareness regarding communication campaigns, questions about daily life and consumption behaviors within the scope of sustainability were asked, resulting in the following codes. Additionally, two participants expressed that striving to exhibit sustainable behavior in Turkey causes them anxiety.

Participant 5: "In a city like Bursa, it is very difficult to hold this ideology. You have to explain it to everyone." Participant 10: "I started living more sustainably in small ways because we can't change our life habits immediately, nor our purchasing decisions. Paying too much attention to this also started to cause me anxiety."

Cruelty-free, Vegetarian or Vegan consumption

Most participants indicated that they are cautious about living sustainably by adopting a vegetarian lifestyle. Additionally, many participants stated that to support sustainable living, they do not purchase products from brands that conduct animal testing and do not use leather products. Participant 2 stated, "Sustainability is something I have recently adapted to. I pay attention to the clothes I buy. I am vegetarian and prefer products that are not tested on animals. I also try to be mindful of my clothing choices. Additionally, I do not use plastic bags."

Avoiding Fast Consumption Products

Many participants defined their sustainable behavior as not consuming unnecessary goods and avoiding fast consumption products. Participant 1 commented on consumption habits, stating, "For me, sustainability is about maintaining balance. If I buy clothes one week, I try not to consume meat that week or buy fast technology products. Instead of buying headphones from China, I prefer to purchase higher quality and long-lasting products." In this context, consumers try to avoid fast fashion or fast technology products.

Consumers do not consider brands like Apple and Samsung as fast-technology products.

Besides avoiding fast consumption products, participants also support local businesses and try to use second-hand items. However, comments from two different participants noted that brands with a local and sustainable identity are more costly. Therefore, it was mentioned that not everyone can afford to make such choices due to the inaccessibility of these brands.

Recycling

Participants stated that they value recycling in their daily lives and want to see the results of their efforts. Participant 6 expressed this by saying, "I value recycling. I do it myself at home, but, for example, I cannot throw my old clothes into municipal bins because I don't know what will happen to them," indicating their desire to see the outcomes of recycling.

Ecological Footprint

Reducing the ecological footprint along with fast consumption products was also considered a sustainable behavior. In addition to the term "ecological footprint," Participant 2 tried to describe circularity as "trying to keep up with the environment."

Consuming Durable Products

The findings from the research also indicated that sustainable consumption is perceived as consuming more durable products. Participant 3 identified sustainability with durability by saying, "I don't think about sustainability when buying something. Actually, I don't think about sustainability and purchasing as two concepts. For me, it's about how long something lasts when I buy it."

Theme 2: Sustainability Communication

Many sustainability communication efforts have been carried out by institutions in Turkey in the fields of technology and ready-to-wear (Halaçeli Metlioğlu & Yakın, 2021; Koyuncu et al., 2023; Yücel & Tiber, 2018). However, participants in the study believe that institutions are insufficient in their sustainability communication. They indicate that institutions not only fail in their sustainability communication efforts but also perform sustainability initiatives solely to avoid penalties. Additionally, participants feel that the sustainability efforts by institutions are inadequate. In this context, Participant 7 states, "In fast consumption products, I see more trend-related efforts than those related to sustainability," expressing that such efforts are not being made. Participant 10 emphasizes the importance of brand ideology in sustainability communication by saying, "It is important for the brand's ideology to be sustainable." Similarly, Participant 7 highlights the significance of brand positioning by stating, "Local brands are working on their content. Not every local brand is sustainable, but there are brands that focus on this topic and frequently carry out communication efforts to distinguish themselves and their products from other brands." Consequently, many participants struggled to identify the communication efforts made by institutions. Below are the codes prepared in this context.

Preferred Communication Platform

Participants noted that the efforts made by institutions in the scope of sustainability are not frequent and mentioned that digital platforms, influencer communication, and billboards in stores are primarily chosen for sustainability communication. Participant 2 expresses the inadequacy of communication efforts by institutions in the technology

sector with the following statement: "I think sustainability efforts are made for a specific audience; they become apparent when someone interested looks for them, but they do not reach everyone." Explaining why TV is not used in sustainability communication, Participant 6 states, "Because the X generation is on TV, and they focus more on factors like affordable prices or good customer service, while the Y generation and other younger generations care more about sustainability and usually use social media," explaining why these platforms are chosen as communication channels.

Negative Media Reflections

Some participants noted that instead of the sustainability communication efforts by institutions in the technology or ready-to-wear sectors, they pay more attention to negative media coverage about sustainability. Participant 3 mentioned, "In the US, an oil company developed a communication strategy about personal recycling, but they focused so much on this topic that they tried to show that only individuals are responsible for sustainability, and in this context, the US government sued the company." Similarly, Participant 8 said, "I read news about harsh working conditions in third-world countries. But I do not see any efforts by ready-to-wear brands on this issue," indicating that institutions are not working on this topic and that negative news is more prevalent in the media.

Conscious Water Consumption

According to the findings of the research, participants do not find the efforts by institutions on water consumption to be sincere. Participant 11 expressed concerns by saying, "They communicate about reducing water consumption, but none of it seems convincing to me. I wonder if they separate factory waste," expressing their doubts on the subject.

Participant 9 expressed their lack of knowledge by saying, "I didn't know that so much water is used in clothing production."

Recycling Campaigns

Participants mentioned that although not frequent, institutions in the technology and ready-to-wear sectors develop communication strategies about recycling, but they do not find most of these efforts sincere.

Participant 9 expressed that the communication strategies did not affect them by saying, "Some brands have clothes made from recycled products. But they seem low-quality to me. I wouldn't pay more for these products."

Participant 10 expressed their disappointment by saying, "Brands communicate that they have sustainable products and use recycled fabric, but when I find out it's not true, it was just a communication strategy, it's a huge disappointment. Additionally, some brands conduct sustainability efforts, but I see that they pay low wages to their workers or use child labor, and then I wonder why they would care about the world's sustainability."

In this context, Participant 3 stated, "Apple says all its products are recyclable. This positively affects me, but it's not a significant factor that changes my purchasing decision," indicating that they are aware of sustainability communications, but such campaigns do not influence their purchasing decisions.

Theme 3: PO Strategies

In this study, participants' awareness of PO strategies, communication efforts related to

this concept, consumer responses, the platforms where these communication efforts are conducted, and their relationship with sustainability are presented below as sub-codes.

Awareness of the concept of PO, except for three participants, the others were not familiar with the concept of planned obsolescence. One participant mentioned that this concept could be limited solely to technology products. Those who were aware of the concept generally associated it with the Apple brand. Additionally, Participant 11 stated, "I am aware of the concept, but I don't think deliberate obsolescence is practiced today. The use of cheap raw materials to reduce costs decreases the lifespan of products," emphasizing that only functional PO is practiced today. Other participants expressed that PO strategies are primarily carried out on a psychological level through various communication channels.

When the definition of the PO strategy was provided, and participants were asked about the communication strategies of institutions on this topic, Participant 2 stated, "I think they use advertisements that affect our emotional side," while Participant 10 said, "Their communication efforts seem to create a push that influences our consumption, making us want to consume more. For example, in ready-to-wear products, there is no understanding of 'let's buy less and wear it forever'; instead, there are efforts that constantly make us want more, and sometimes I am influenced by these communication efforts," indicating that emotional communication efforts affect them.

Participants indicated that PO strategies are not applied by every brand in the technology field. Participant 1 stated, "Apple does this, but looking at Dyson, they produce very long-lasting products and emphasize this in their communication efforts. Therefore, not every brand follows this practice," highlighting that brands have different strategies.

Consumer Response

Although consumers expressed their opposition to planned obsolescence, they also indicated that they would not stop purchasing from brands that develop PO strategies and conduct communication efforts on this topic. Participant 1 shared their thoughts, stating, "PO is a norm from the past; it should not be taken very seriously. For instance, even if Apple uses this strategy, I would not stop using it because I like the brand." Additionally, participants also expressed a reaction to the communication efforts made, stating that it is not right to play with consumers' emotions.

Preferred Communication Platform

Participants indicated that PO strategies are often implemented through influencer communication on social media. Participant 6 expressed their thoughts, stating, "No matter how much we strive to be sustainable and conscious consumers, they constantly drive us to consume through campaigns. Especially on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, trends and fashions emerge. There are always new brands and rapid communication; constantly changing trends force us to consume, and sometimes we fall for it." Similarly, Participant 7 stated, "Previously, the concept of fashion was still based on trends, but the duration was longer. Now, trends emerge every three months or sometimes even every two weeks, and a lot of work is done on this. So, micro-trends are now being created through social media."

Relationship Between PO and Sustainability

Three participants indicated that institutions implementing PO strategies contribute

to economic sustainability, while two stated that they only contribute to the economy of these institutions. Participant 2 commented, "I think PO strategies positively affect economic sustainability, negatively impact environmental sustainability, and have no effect on social sustainability."

Most participants stated that PO has no relationship with sustainability. Participant 11 expressed their view, stating, "These efforts create a positive impact within the institution and contribute to the economy."

Participant 1 emphasized that the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainability should be considered as a whole by stating, "Now, think of the ecosystem as a balloon; if you squeeze one side, the other side will burst. Therefore, where there is no environmental sustainability, social and economic sustainability is also impossible."

Conclusion and Evaluation

The Great Depression of 1929 inflicted deep wounds on the world economy, and during this period, PO strategies emerged as solutions to reduce the increasing stock levels. Today, this strategy presents a contradictory structure, especially in the context of the sustainability concept, which has come to the fore more frequently due to the increasing effects of the environmental crisis such as the climate crisis. Companies reduce the lifespan of their existing products to make more sales and increase profit margins, encouraging consumers to buy more. Additionally, within the framework of sustainability, they organize recycling, waste management, and social aid campaigns. However, while these companies increase their sales through communication campaigns that promote consumption and pollute the environment during production processes, causing raw material shortages, their claims of protecting nature and adopting a human-oriented approach highlight the contradictions in this area.

This study aims to reach consumers with knowledge about sustainability rather than addressing all consumers. By doing so, it aims to examine the communication efforts related to this concept in a more detailed context and has conducted in-depth interviews with participants. Based on the findings obtained from the research, three main themes were identified to answer the research questions, and codes were created within these themes.

The first research question is, "What are the sustainable behaviors of consumers in Turkey?" In this context, the theme of sustainable behavior was created, and the behaviors of participants related to sustainable consumption in their daily lives were analyzed. Based on the responses, it was determined that participants who prioritize sustainable living in Turkey engage in five different consumption and living behaviors. Nine participants stated that they do not prefer fast-consumption products. They mentioned that they do not purchase products from brands known as fast technology or fast fashion; however, they include low-quality products from China in this category while excluding brands like Apple. Additionally, the majority of participants stated that they do not consume animal products. Similarly, they mentioned that they do not wear products made from animal materials like leather and do not use brands that conduct animal testing. Consumers who prioritize sustainable living also emphasized the importance of recycling, ecological footprint, and striving to consume durable products. Therefore, in response to the first question, it can be said that consumers who exhibit sustainable behavior avoid fast consumption products, do not consume animal products, prioritize

recycling and low ecological footprint, and prefer durable products.

The second research question of the study is, “What is the awareness of consumers in Turkey regarding the sustainability communication strategies implemented by companies, and how do they evaluate these strategies?” When examining the research results, it was observed that despite the high practical application of these concepts in their daily lives, consumers’ knowledge levels regarding companies’ communication efforts on this topic were low. Although participants mentioned that platforms like social media are used more frequently, they expressed that companies generally conduct communication efforts related to recycling or water consumption and that these efforts do not seem convincing to them. Additionally, participants stated that they more frequently encounter negative news criticizing the sustainability efforts of companies through the media. In this context, in response to the second question, it can be said that consumers who exhibit sustainable behavior in Turkey find the sustainability communication efforts inadequate and unconvincing.

The third research question is, “What is the awareness of consumers in Turkey regarding the communication strategies implemented by companies within the context of PO strategies, and how do they evaluate this communication?” Participants suggested that companies frequently engage in psychological obsolescence. In this context, it was mentioned that social media, especially influencer communication, is used frequently. Participants emphasized that communication periods have shortened and that the frequency of consumption-oriented communication for new products has increased.

Finally, the fourth and last research question of the study is, “How do consumers in Turkey evaluate the PO efforts of companies in terms of sustainability?” Some participants stated that sustainability efforts contribute to economic sustainability, have no impact on social sustainability, and harm environmental sustainability. Despite many studies in academic literature that consider sustainability only from an environmental perspective, the concept of sustainability should be considered as a whole under three structures. In this context, only one participant stated that PO strategies are not sustainable in any way.

The findings suggest that companies undertake sustainability efforts because it is a popular topic, and this situation is noticed by those who prioritize sustainable living and meet with a negative attitude. As long as companies continue to actively develop (PO) strategies and accelerate the launch of new products, convincing consumers about sustainability will remain a challenge. Additionally, as discussed in the literature review, consumers define sustainability as an important concept but struggle to integrate it into their consumption habits. Those who are more conscious of sustainability tend to be more attentive to these issues and prefer sustainable products. However, the communication efforts carried out by companies are often unrecognized, even by consumers with awareness in this area, leading to wasted time and resources. It will not be sufficient for companies to conduct only communication efforts. The sustainability concept that can reflect on their brand ideologies and the efforts made in this regard will be more perceived and positively evaluated by consumers. This study provides a snapshot of consumers’ perceptions of companies’ activities related to these two concepts and aims to guide future campaign-based performance research and new studies in this area.

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Planned Obsolescence And Sustainability in the Context Of Corporate Communication Strategies: A Qualitative Study on Consumers

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Extended Abstract

The various corporate communication strategies employed by organizations to manage their relationships with stakeholders and influence their behaviors contribute significantly to the establishment of a positive image and reputation. In this context, organizations gain both reputation and legitimacy in areas such as environmental protection, social development, and economic growth through their communication efforts related to sustainability. These efforts are crucial as they help build a brand image that resonates with consumers' growing concerns about environmental and social issues. However, the planned obsolescence strategies adopted in their brand communications create a contradiction, particularly in the context of environmental sustainability, where the very practices aimed at maintaining market demand and economic viability clash with sustainable development goals.

The concept of planned obsolescence emerged during the 1929 Great Depression as a means to stimulate economic recovery. This strategy involves pre-determining a product's lifespan before it is introduced to the market, essentially involving the strategic forecasting of the product life cycle. By shortening the lifespan of products, manufacturers can sustain consumer demand and increase sales, ensuring a continuous market for new products. This approach was initially intended to boost economic activity by encouraging consumers to purchase more frequently, thus driving production and employment. However, in contemporary discourse, sustainability is defined by the principle of meeting today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own, presenting a framework that conflicts with planned obsolescence. The conflict arises because planned obsolescence promotes increased consumption and waste, which are antithetical to the principles of sustainability that advocate for reduced consumption, waste minimization, and long-term environmental stewardship.

In the context of economic and social sustainability, planned obsolescence can contribute to employment growth and economic stability, contingent upon the continuity of production processes. Increased production leads to more jobs and economic activity, which are vital components of social sustainability. However, from the perspective of environmental sustainability, planned obsolescence leads to several adverse outcomes. The strategy results in increased water consumption during production and supply processes, heightened waste generation, the depletion of natural resources, and the exacerbation of the climate crisis. The environmental cost of continually producing and disposing of short-lived products undermines efforts to achieve sustainable development goals, which aim to balance economic growth with environmental preservation and social well-being. Consequently, a conflicting relationship emerges between planned obsolescence strategies and environmental sustainability goals, highlighting the need for a reassessment of how products are designed, produced, and marketed.

Companies often create a perception among consumers to renew or replace their

existing products through corporate communication strategies that support planned obsolescence. Simultaneously, they strive to convey an image of greater environmental sensitivity through sustainability communications. This dual messaging can confuse consumers, who may find it challenging to reconcile a company's environmental claims with its encouragement of frequent product replacement. Thus, the communication efforts impact the attitudes and behaviors of their target audiences, fostering a positive perception of the organization's sustainability endeavors while promoting consumption patterns that contradict sustainability principles. This dichotomy presents a significant challenge for companies attempting to navigate the complex landscape of modern consumer expectations and environmental responsibilities.

This research aims to evaluate the perceptions and attitudes that companies' planned obsolescence strategies and sustainability communications create among consumers. To examine the effects of these strategies on individuals within the context of corporate communication, a qualitative research method employing in-depth interview techniques has been utilized. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of consumer attitudes and behaviors, providing insights that quantitative methods may not capture. In this regard, the study focuses on consumers' awareness levels, emotional responses, and behaviors concerning planned obsolescence strategies and sustainability.

The population of the study consists of individuals in Turkey who possess an awareness of sustainable consumption. In selecting the sample, a form of purposive sampling known as criterion sampling was employed, ensuring that participants met specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 consumers who are aware of sustainable consumption. The questions posed to participants aimed to elucidate their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding sustainability and planned obsolescence. This method enabled the researchers to gather detailed and nuanced data, providing a comprehensive view of consumer perspectives on these issues.

This study analyzes the relationship between sustainability communication and planned obsolescence strategies, assessing how companies convey messages to consumers through these approaches. The sample consisted of consumers with an awareness of sustainability, whose sustainable behaviors, knowledge of planned obsolescence strategies, and evaluations of sustainability communication were examined. Utilizing in-depth interviews as a qualitative research method, the study generated codes under the themes of sustainable behavior, planned obsolescence strategies, and sustainability communication. These codes help organize the data and identify key patterns and themes that emerge from the interviews.

For sustainable behavior, the identified codes included cruelty-free or vegan consumption, avoidance of fast consumption products, recycling practices, ecological footprint awareness, and the consumption of durable products. These behaviors reflect a commitment to reducing environmental impact and promoting ethical consumption. Under the theme of sustainability communication, the codes encompassed negative media reflections, conscious water consumption, preferred communication platforms, and recycling campaigns. These elements highlight the various ways companies communicate their sustainability efforts and the channels they use to reach consumers. For planned obsolescence strategies, codes were developed regarding awareness and communication of the concept of planned obsolescence, preferred communication platforms, consumer responses, and the relationship between planned obsolescence and sustainability. These

codes illustrate how companies' planned obsolescence strategies are perceived and the impact of these strategies on consumer attitudes and behaviors.

Ultimately, the findings indicate that while consumers may exhibit sustainable behaviors, they often do not perceive the sustainability efforts of organizations as genuine. This perception gap suggests that companies need to align their sustainability communications more closely with their actual practices to build trust and credibility with consumers. Consequently, based on the research findings, this study offers a critical perspective on the contradictions between corporate communication strategies related to sustainability discourse and planned obsolescence strategies. It underscores the importance of transparency and consistency in corporate communications to foster genuine engagement with sustainability issues among consumers. By addressing these contradictions, companies can enhance their reputation and legitimacy in the eyes of increasingly discerning and environmentally conscious consumers.

Keywords: Corporate Communication, Planned Obsolescence Strategies, Sustainability Communication.

Bu makale **intihal tespit yazılımlarıyla** taranmıştır. İntihal tespit edilmemiştir.

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Bu çalışmada “**Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi**” kapsamında uyulması belirtilen kurallara uyulmuştur.

In this study, the rules stated in the “**Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive**” were followed.

Araştırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.

The research was conducted by a single author.

Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile **çakar çatışması** bulunmamaktadır.

There is no **conflict of interest** with any institution or person within the scope of the study.

Etik Kurul İzni | Ethics Committee Permission

Within the framework of the decision taken during the meeting by Yeditepe University Humanities and Social Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee dated 16.09.2024 and numbered 54/2024; the study does not contain any ethical issues.

Yeditepe Üniversitesi Beşeri ve Sosyal Bilimler Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etik Kurul Komisyonu'nun 16.09.2024 tarihli toplantısında alınan 54/2024 sayılı karar çerçevesinde çalışma etik açıdan bir sakınca içermemektedir.