

## CREATING PUBLIC ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS THROUGH MUSIC: “PLAY FOR NATURE” PROJECT

*A. Banu Bıçakcı, Asst. Prof. Dr*

Yeditepe University, Turkey

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### Abstract:

This paper examines a voluntary initiative named ‘Play for Nature’ that utilizes music as a mediator to create public environmental awareness. Strengths and weaknesses of the project are scrutinized from a public relations viewpoint. Data is collected via related media coverage followed by an online interview held by the initiator and organizer of the project in Turkey, Fırat Çavaş. It is concluded that the project that is able to reach millions of people, by using the powers of music and social media, should be managed with a strategic communication approach, as to fulfill the main objective. The study offers Play for Nature an applicable communication frame for the future chapter of the project.

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**Key Words:** Environmental awareness, music, strategic communication, Play for Nature, corporate social responsibility

### Introduction

The global climate change and environmental destruction have been raised to a level of major concern in recent years. However, public environmental awareness and education still need to be enhanced as to take significant precautions against all anti-environmentalist activities. Since creating awareness is an important first step toward building audience understanding, influencing opinion and motivating behavior; environmentalist movement should take creative activities, utilizing arts as a way to communicate with the audiences, as an opportunity to create environmental conscience.

This paper examines a voluntary initiative named ‘Play for Nature’ that utilizes music as a mediator to create public environmental awareness, with a rhetorical perspective. Main objective of this study is to figure out how a civil initiative may be successful in reaching its target audiences without support of any corporation or a governmental body, only by using musicians as opinion leaders and role models. Additionally its media selection is questioned, since the project’s utilization of traditional media is very limited and the overall communication is based upon social media. Strengths and weaknesses of the project are examined from a public relations viewpoint. Data is collected via related media coverage followed by an online interview held by the initiator and organizer of the project, Fırat Çavaş, in September 2012.

### Environmentalism and Public Environmental Awareness

Environmentalism, as a social movement and political ideology, varies from the anthropocentric pole to the eco-centric pole. Resource conservation, human welfare ecology, preservation, animal liberation and eco-centrism are major environmentalist streams (Eckersley, 1992:34). Anthropocentrism considers humans as the center of the universe and the top of all creation; human being is the dominator of the nature and natural environment is created for human usage. Anthropocentric attitudes are deeply rooted in Western culture whereas eco-centric form of public awareness is opposed to human-centered system of values while it denotes a nature-centered worldview (Rowe, 1994). Regarding Turkey’s geo-political position and culture, Turkish people’s environmental attitudes are assumed to be in between anthropocentrism and eco-centrism.

Even though both developing and developed countries are facing serious environmental problems (Hoerisch, 2002), the tendency to give priority to environmental goals is much stronger in wealthy countries than in poorer ones (Diekman and Franzen, 1999:548). Countries with higher economic ratings and countries successful in dealing with the local environment are expected to place more emphasis on global environmental problems. According to a global research made by Dunlap, Gallup and Gallup in 1993, for 61% of the Turkish population, environment is a ‘very serious’ issue,

however only 18% of the people think that environment is the most important problem in Turkey (Diekman and Franzen, 1999). In 2003, a nationwide study on environmental attitudes of Turkish people has been accomplished (Tuna, 2004). The research includes environmental issues such as environmental politics, environmental knowledge, environmental degradation, pollution and energy usage. This study shows that highly educated respondents and the ones with prestigious occupations have more environmental commitment (Tuna, 2004). More recent studies on environmental attitudes of Turkish people are mostly focusing on the attitudes of young generations. As concluded in Tuncer et. al (2005), there is a widespread support for conservation of the environment among high school students in Ankara (capital city of Turkey). Another study shows that Turkish university students in Konya (one of the biggest cities in Turkey) are concerned about environmental issues, however only 8,53% of them regularly follow the related publications and just 7,73 of them hold a membership to an environmental organization (Önder, 2006).

Concerning the sensitivity of businesses to environment, it is possible to recall the environment oriented corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. In Turkey, although the major CSR topics include education and societal issues such as healthcare, there are serious CSR projects on environmental issues, as well. Many corporations are sharing sustainability reports or index results with their stakeholders. Today, there are 226 participants of United Nations Global Compact<sup>1</sup>, from Turkey

[http://www.unglobalcompact.org/participants/search?commit=Search&keyword=&country%5B%5D=202&joined\\_after=&joined\\_before=&business\\_type=all&sector\\_id=all&listing\\_status\\_id=all&cop\\_status=all&organization\\_type\\_id=&commit=Search](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/participants/search?commit=Search&keyword=&country%5B%5D=202&joined_after=&joined_before=&business_type=all&sector_id=all&listing_status_id=all&cop_status=all&organization_type_id=&commit=Search), yet there is not enough data on these organizations' overall environmental attitudes and behavior. A research made particularly on hotel business in Turkey has found that the policies and practices of Ankara hotels generally lack attributes relevant to environmental protection and conservation. The authors concluded that the hotel managers mostly lack the necessary environmental knowledge and interest to meet the objectives of societal and environmental responsibility (Erdoğan and Barış, 2007).

Another research topic deals with the effectiveness of various communication channels utilized in creating public environmental awareness. A comparative study proves that the role of media in creating environmental awareness is definitely the dominant one compared by personal experiences in daily life, personal discussions and formal education at schools, both in developing and developed countries (Hoerisch, 2002). A recent study investigates the use of integrating mobile technologies, data services and multimedia messaging services (MMS) to increase university students' use of mobile technologies and to develop environmental awareness. The study concludes that these new technologies are useful in developing environmental awareness among young people (Uzunboylu, Çavuş and Erçağ, 2009).

According to United Nations (UN) education program there are several ways to increase public environmental awareness and education. Promoting responsible action in the community through the media by involving key public players, decision-makers and opinion-builders in such campaigns is one of these ways. <http://www.unep.org/DEC/OnLineManual/Enforcement/InstitutionalFrameworks/PublicAwarenessEducation/tabid/99/Default.aspx>. A project called 'Play for Nature' aims to increase the level of awareness towards environmental issues, by making celebrities involved in their project, in which music is a mediator between this initiative and the public.

### **Play for Nature Project: The Need for a Strategic Communication**

'Play for Nature' is not an association or a foundation; it is a project realized by more than 200 volunteer, amateur and professional musicians. Inspired by an American originated project called 'Playing for Change' <http://playingforchange.com/>, 'Play for Nature' project was developed in 2008, in Turkey, with the objective of creating and enhancing public awareness of the environment and natural life. This is a civil initiative which tries to take attention to the environmentalist NGOs

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The UN Global Compact is a strategic policy initiative for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/index.html#environment> and <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/index.html#anti-corruption>

activities and to help raise their funds <http://www.dogaicincal.com/index.asp?sayfa=anasayfa>. While music is a universal language that unites everybody and helps product/idea recall and recognition (Stewart and Punj, 1998), to reach the highly heterogeneous target audience via music seems to be a proper tactic. They explain their essence as follows:

Our starting point was the shared, universality of environmental problems and music. Nature as a provider of housing and resources has a strong connection with music, which is a common language of all human beings. [...] Now, it's our responsibility to find solutions and carry them into action; we should remember and remind people of this every chance we get. Despite knowing that change is a necessity, we still don't seem to listen or do what we're supposed to do. So, can a song then be useful and remind us of what we should do every time we listen to it? We hope that it may at least bring some awareness and consciousness to the people who listen to it. <http://www.dogaicincal.com/index.asp?sayfa=playfornature>

As Çavaş claims, this is a project to raise awareness; they do not have a concrete aim as collecting funds or planting trees (Diker, 2012:52). Çavaş calls Play for Nature a social responsibility project with the goal of directing people to get information from nature associations. So, a number of nature associations are their 'natural' stakeholders. However, he is complaining that other than TÜRÇEK (one of these associations) none of them has responded and none of them has sent an e-mail of appreciation. In addition to that, none of the existing associations has had any intention to meet and cooperate with them, even though this project is realized to help fulfill their objectives. Other stakeholders of the project are media, volunteers and sponsors. This volunteer project makes barter agreements with their sponsors; a software company provides the software they need, a technology company gives them the necessary equipment and all the rest, from recording to mixing, is handled by Çavaş himself (Diker, 2012:58).

Play for change is a social responsibility project. Any social responsibility campaign should start with research. This research includes the search for the organization itself, the current situation and the publics (Lattimore et al., 2009). Çavaş mentions that, Play for Nature, claiming to be an amateur social responsibility project, have neither defined its target publics nor made any research on the public's previous environmental attitudes. This is the major weakness of the project, which disables them to have clear objectives.

The project takes the advantages of social media to spread their videos to the public. Facebook and Twitter are the most utilized media. Via social media, the project can reach the public easily and quickly; however it has some disadvantages as Çavaş claims: Being easily criticized by people. There are interesting comments reaching them over the social media, for instance one of the audiences has criticized the musicians' instruments being made from wood, highlighting the paradox between protecting the Mother Nature and playing wooden instruments. Some traditional media, including the major national TV channels (TRT, CNN Turk, Show TV, ATV, Kanal D, TV 8, Cine 5, Fox TV, Dream TV, Kral TV) and radio channels (TRT, Radyo Klas) are supporting the project, as well <http://www.dogaicincal.com/index.asp?sayfa=biz&pid=3> . Conducting a communication audit for understanding the channel effectiveness would be beneficial, since there has not been such an attempt. Media planning should be based on research outcomes.

There are many celebrities that are voluntarily supporting the project, by singing the project's songs. Among these names, there are well known singers and actors of Turkey such as Levent Yüksel, Cahit Berkay, Gökçe and Levent Üzümcü. Celebrities are opinion leaders for the public and they have the power to take the public attention to a certain subject. Thus, their support and participations are significant to reach masses and affect their attitudes positively on environmental issues. Since the volunteer celebrities are only supporting the project with their voices as Çavaş mentions, it would be better to lead them to use their social media accounts as to spread the project and give environmentalist messages. It is noticeable that Play for Change project, except its name, which actually is not a message but the theme of the initiative, does not have clear messages for their public. Without messages, it is not possible for the target public to understand their real objective and the major peril is that the audience will listen to the songs just for amusement. Designing campaign messages consistent with the soul and main goal of the project is a part of strategic communication approach, and it would be useful in realizing the objectives.

Regarding the evaluation of the project, Çavaş emphasizes that 'Play for Nature 4' project's video has had 2 million clicks in 5 months time, from a single link on the YouTube. The project gets

lots of positive feedback from primary and high school teachers, as well. Play for Change is adored because of its musical quality, synthesizing a lot of music genres and for making folk songs popular among the younger audience (Diker, 2012:56). As visible from the comments, the positive feedbacks are irrelevant to environmental issues, which are primary aims of the project. While the project is lacking objectives depending on existing data, it is not possible to make a real evaluation to measure the success. The question ‘How much this project has contributed to public environmental awareness?’ is still without an answer.

### **Conclusion**

Climate change, global warming or other environmental issues are not priorities for the Turkish government and major corporate social responsibility activities are focused on education and health issues in Turkey. As a result of minimal media coverage on environmental issues and lack of critical perspective on controversial topics such as nuclear power and ecological risks, Turkish public is not enough aware of the environmental threats. To find a common ground for those who are not aware of the environmental perils and the urgency of creating a positive behavior towards the environment is quite problematic. Play for Nature is an amateur initiative that aims to raise the public environmental awareness through music. However the study exposes that the project lacks a strategic communication approach to help meeting the objectives.

While this amateur and well-intentioned project seems to reach huge masses, it is not clear that whether they have helped people creating positive attitudes towards environment. It would be beneficial to conduct a strategic communication plan for the future versions of the project including the following points:

- Organizational analysis: What are the capabilities of the organization? What are the strengths and weaknesses? Who are the volunteers? Who are the major stakeholders? What is the major problem with the environmentalist NGO’s: defining the problem and providing an ongoing communication with them. An analysis of the feedbacks for the previous chapters of the project.
- Situational analysis: A scientific research on the present environmental attitudes of the public. It might be sponsored by one of the relevant volunteers.
- Audience research: Defining the audiences: Demographic and psychological factors included.
- Defining long term and short-term goals depending on the research findings: What will be the main strategy and the tactics? What are the sociologic, economic, political and cultural barriers? How can they be surpassed?
- Designing the messages for various publics: Relevance of the lyrics and the messages should be considered
- Media selection: Scientific media planning according to the research findings. Integrating social media with the traditional media would be useful since the target audience is too broad. Mobile technologies should be considered.
- Opinion-leaders: Making volunteer celebrities the project ambassadors. Provide a sustainable support of them for the initiative, not only once by singing a song. Persuading them to talk about the project both in traditional and digital media.
- Evaluation: Measuring the level of success periodically and if necessary, re-designing more realistic and measurable goals.

As a conclusion, Play for Nature is successful in reaching the people and attracting their attention, however, the project is lacking a strategic communication approach as to reach the basic objective of creating public environmental awareness. This study proposes above-mentioned outline to manage the communication of the future chapters of Play for Nature strategically.

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