

# **ACTIVISM AND THE CREATION OF SUSTAINABLE MISSION BRANDS: THE PROBLEMATIC CASE OF TURKEY**

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## **Abstract**

An evaluation of the concept of activism, which is frequently encountered within the scope of various marketing approaches today and is defined in terms of actions carried out to bring about social or political change, makes it possible to deal with the concept as a part of mission marketing. If a brand takes up a target of change on any subject regarding people, nature, animals or society in the process of creating a marketing and brand strategy as its main approach, this can be deemed to be a mission brand which supports social-environmental activism. Examples of this, however, aren't commonly encountered and in Turkey there aren't any brands which have opted to make such a radical move. This study examines the reasons why Turkish brands haven't taken a mission approach which serves social and environmental activism. The literature section discusses understandings of social marketing which have been engendered by modern notions of marketing and activism, which are one of the most significant social paradigms in today's world, and provides an analysis of reflections on marketing, mission marketing and the mission brand concept. In light of these issues, the paper examines why Turkish brands haven't been able to delineate a mission in terms of society and the environment, the most "innocent" branches of activism, and discusses why those issues haven't been taken up as a constant brand strategy.

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**Keywords:** Activism, social and environmental activism, mission brands, mission marketing.

## **Activism and social marketing understanding engendered by modern marketing understanding**

Modern marketing understanding is based on the basis where two or more parties take mutual advantage from this relation and get satisfaction. While companies are trying to ensure continuity of sales, they place the demands and needs of customers into the center of marketing strategies.

They are grounding on the policies which won't ignore the welfare and interests of society. Meanwhile the social marketing which is the backbone of today's modern marketing concept, aims the society to be educated and becoming conscious. It appears to be a term which is used for studies aiming to create attitude and behavior change in target audiences for being able to cope with the problem concerning many issues such as education, health, culture, history, security and to improve social life.

Today, business ethics and social responsibility issues have gained importance at a level that can't be ignored by any enterprise. Both legislative bodies, and civil society organizations are increasingly demanding more stringent legal arrangements to be made (Kotler and Armstrong, 2006, 25). In our country, voluntary organizations like Consumers Association, Tema Foundation, Çevko, Young Civilians, Greenpeace are working in this area, informing and directing modern era's consumers in line with their purposes.

Social marketing concept; expresses a further and wider management philosophy, meeting the criticisms which ignore the conflict between consumer's short term wishes and long term consumer welfare. According to this concept, while the marketing strategy meets the needs of customers by offering value to them, it must perform this in such a way that will protect and improve the long term welfare of both them and the society (Zikmund and D'Amico, 2001, p.21). And the balance of three separate elements is taken into consideration. These are; the profit of enterprise, consumer demands-needs and interests of community.

Meanwhile according to another definition, it is defined as "development, implementation and control process of necessary programs so as to ensure the adoption of the cause of a social thought or an application by target group of people (Cemalcılar, 1998, 15). Social marketers want to cause behavior change just like the product selling institutions, organizations. However this behavior change involves the adoption of a behavior which will create a benefit in favor of the society rather than using a product. Providing benefit to the community is at the forefront for marketers. This understanding aims to create behavior change by utilizing marketing principles and techniques (Serrat, 2010, 73).

Many facts like industrialization, globalization, technological development affect the social life in both positive and negative aspects. In this context, social awareness is of utmost importance. While these developments experienced today are providing major benefits of the society, problems are being seen at many points such as environmental pollution, getting damage of ecosystem, deterioration of human health day by day due to external effects, slaughtering of animals, destruction of the nature, weakening of social relations etc. In this scope, many institutions and organizations are planning and implementing various projects for the sake of

social awareness without seeking profit. Communal-social marketing projects relating to many areas from health to culture, from environment to socialization are being carried out. By means of these projects, it is intended to provide social benefit by changing the social behavior.

### **The concept of activism**

In general sense activism is defined as an action which is done deliberately in an attempt to bring about social change or political change (<http://aktivist.nedir.com/>). Meanwhile according to another definition: An activist is described as a person who engages in active, vigorous and aggressive actions and proceedings, mainly for a political cause. This person deliberates and gathers people who have a common goal of standing for their right or opposing a passed bill. (<http://www.ask.com/question/what-is-the-definition-of-aktivist>) Activists are people who see the need for change, improvement, and motivation on a large scale. They are people driven by passion, keen to share facts they want understood more widely, and led by a vision for a better future. Activism comes naturally to some, while for others, it's something that is thrust upon them as a result of particular experiences or upon learning about something they passionately believe needs to change. (<http://www.wikihow.com/Become-an-Activist>)

Activism has different activity forms such as project development, network generation, lobbying, demonstration marches, campaign execution into which subjects are formed by activists. Originally activiste in French, this concept that has been translated to our language from English activist word, even if it is named as activist, militant, the person who initiates the action directly in order to achieve objectives, it represents a struggle understanding which is regarded as “reasonable” by some, passing beyond the dictionary meaning up to today from its usage. (<http://meydangazetesi.org/gundem/2013/03/21-yuzyilda-teslimiyet-teorileri-ve-pratikleri-aktivizm-mine-selin-sayari/>)

The word of activism is often used synonymously with protest or dissent. However activism can take place in numberless political orientation and can occur within a wide form range: Up to the strikes or even guerrilla tactics from writing a letter to a newspaper or politician, political campaign, economic activism (like supporting preferred companies or boycotting), meetings, preparing blogs and street marches (<http://aktivist.nedir.com/#ixzz2w8dqz7rw>).

The answer, which was given to the question of “what does activist mean” that was asked to the Ricardo Scheleff who is the regional coordinator of the Greenpeace among the leaders of activist project, is as follows: “Activist is a person who feels responsibility for the surroundings in order to create a social change”. The word of “activist” which is being heard

frequently especially in social media and news broadcasted on televisions in recent years, is perceived as synonymous with the word of protester by many people. “Activism”, which means to do action deliberately for realization of a change in general rules, habits and behavior manners accepted by the society itself or political circles, also means opposing or supporting a particular opinion. It won’t be wrong to say the word of activist is also in the policy when it is perceived as opposition or supporting. As well as activist people may perform various actions for change of government’s laws, sometimes they may organize protests independently from governments’ actions or laws for the change of community’s behaviors. In this context, it can be said that the person who is defined as activist doesn’t only organize or participate in protests for political purposes, but also arranges actions about the events arousing the interest of the society in general sense. One of the most prominent characteristics of the activist formations and of the people who call themselves as activist is the execution of subject-oriented study. Activists, who perform field study in many different subjects like women rights, LGBT, animal rights, environment, globalization, nuclear-war opposition etc., are trying to generate a kind of sensitivity by organizing campaigns on the issues engaged. Social issues are now considered within the scope of “responsibility”.

Boycotting companies can also be defined as an activism action. Boycotting the products and services of the companies which are claimed to violate the animal rights during production process, is also an example to activist movement. Even criticizing institutions and organizations by writing blogs which are alleged to cause environmental pollution may be sometimes deemed as an activist action. Politicians supporting their own parties by opposing other parties can be defined as an activist movement because of opposing other party by supporting one party in all discussions where parties are available is included in the definition of activism. It can also be asserted that people’s support and opposition movements in different areas are activist actions because the meaning of this word is very wide.

Apart all from these “transformational activism”, which is among the thoughts drawing attention in the last era, is addressing the activism concept in a much wider manner and argues the necessity of change in the core of human. Transformational activism, which argues the necessity of change primarily in the cores of individuals constituting the communities for realization of change in communities, can be applied to the economical or political field. This transformational activist thought, associated with names like transformational policy or transformational economy, targets the change of resource flow in the society along with the raising awareness of the people. When it comes to integration of the said transformational activism into politics, the idea is being also asserted that the power should be in the

hands of everybody in line with the relations of individuals with each other not in one person. Transformational activists, who think in this way, also think that the society will become more creative upon distribution of the power equally in each individual (<http://www.merakname.com/aktivist-nedir>)

### **Mission marketing and mission brands**

A brand may address the change target in any subject related to human, nature, animal or society as the main strategy of the brand when creating the business and brand strategy. This is an approach which gives the opportunity to create a brand acting alongside the pulse of the society if it can be prepared in a well manner with a suitable ground (the country's socio-economic, political and judicial status) although this approach is a radical approach. This approach implies an ambitious target such as managing the brand as the driving force of the development in the selected subject from the very beginning. That is to say, it means to undertake the main business of the company as a mission, a duty which will improve one of the social or humanitarian subjects not being beneficial to the society by doing charity work after earning profits by doing business.

Mission brand creation strategy, having examples seen especially in America and Europe, has emerged with the rise of civil society concept and raising consumer awareness. Consumers, who are becoming more conscious with each passing day, have begun to respond against the consumption society asking them to consume more constantly and misguiding them. Consumers have felt the necessity to take a stand against this trend where natural resources are decreased, cultures are degraded with each passing day.

Collaborations named as “social partnership” between non-profit civil society organizations with private sector have begun to be established in an attempt to provide social benefit at the beginning of the 1990s. Governments alone were inadequate in solving social problems, increasing reduction of nation-state sovereignty and the increasing powers of corporations formed the basis of this collaboration. These developments have led to the revival of marketing understanding defined as “Mission Marketing” developed by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman in the 1970s. This field has dissociated rapidly from “Social Marketing” and “Institutional Social Responsibility” concepts. Kotler, Zaltman and Alan Andreasen have already described the fundamental differences between Commercial Marketing, Social Marketing and (mission) (Cause-Related Marketing) objective-based marketing when they were laying the foundations of this concept. Social marketing includes studies related to non-profit organizations marketing themselves as a private company. This field can be exemplified with marketing of associations and foundations in our country, marketing of

churches, education, social projects in the world. Institutional Social Responsibility concept describes the allocation of a portion from their profits by organizations so as to contribute to a social event. The most popular project example in recent years was the Snowdrops Project performed with the partnership of Turkcell and Association for Supporting Contemporary Life. And the project of “Race For the Cure” fighting against the breast cancer supported by Avon in Turkey is an example for the projects carried out in more than one country. (<http://www.temelaksoy.com/etiket/misyon-pazarlamasi/>)

And the mission marketing is taking a social issue on as a task by a company itself and accepting this as the essence of its brand strategy. This is a model whereby the company spread its values from inside to outside and naturally it is not something that can be achieved only with advertisement and public relations. On the contrary this is a value-focused innovative business model in which commerce and ecological balances are integrated, new products and new life styles are created.

We can define the mission marketing as establishment of a “values chain” where all stakeholders of the company like suppliers, distributors and customers come to an agreement on the principles of a life philosophy. This chain is formed by sincere implementation of agreed principles, in the entire process from the design stage of the product until entering the lives of the consumers. To invest in human, to base on the good governance, both to grow the company and to create benefit at the highest level for the economy, to elevate the life quality for everybody, to develop an organization which consumes less resource, produces less waste and creates more value are the parts which are invisible on the scene but in fact as big and strong as the sub-section of the iceberg.

Some major brands have begun to develop strategy over sensitivities and social issues, towards the end of 1990s, in order to create a sustainable value rather than a compulsory philanthropy, i.e. to perform mission marketing. These brands have begun to challenge established order by developing new leadership forms and to implement and say loudly the values by being a side of these values they know to be true on many issues. Mission brands don't market products and images. The brand in mission marketing becomes itself of a phenomenon.

Mission Marketing, like its name, is a change marketing. It is established on a human-oriented and fair management at institutional aspect while it aims the change in individual consumption, behavior manner, life style. Meanwhile at macro level, it is a philosophy and life view demanding the implementation and creation of necessary policies for social, cultural and economical development. This approach, naturally, also adds a “soul” to the brand together with a mission. Customers form identity and have the

opportunity to realize themselves and their ideals at the same time while they are purchasing the belief of the brand. For example in the world, Benetton, Body Shop are the examples which come to mind first among the brands making mission marketing. Benetton has become a power that supports cultural diversity, overcomes the prejudices and confronts the racism with its advertising campaigns. Body Shop is not only an animal and environmental friendly corporation that supports recycling, not testing its cosmetics on animals, but also acted as respectful to the local resources in 3. World countries, guarantor of “Fair Trade”.

Mission marketing is not just superiority of competition, it is a way for creation a sustainable difference and creation of voluntary brand ambassadors. However this strategic choice must be dealt with on a voluntary basis and inside-outward. Otherwise this approach always implies threats like being perceived as “emotional abuse” and hypocrisy. Therefore, it is important for a brand to select an attempt overlapping with its field while determining a mission and to be “real” in all activities and to demonstrate a sincere volunteering not only outside but also inside.

There are some significant points that must be taken into account while creating new paradigms for mission marketing. These points have been listed in the “Citizen Brands” study of March Gobe. (Gobe, 2002, 121) Firstly, seeing customers as “people” who are sharing the world view of the brand, having emotions, responsibilities, stances appears to be the first priority; instead of seeing them as people whom we sell products in exchange for their money.

Gobe’s another emphasis is also on honesty. To be honest can be defined as to comply with some commercial rules, to pass through inspections with a clean report. But this doesn’t mean “to be reliable” always. Companies engaged in mission marketing are not just honest companies fulfilling statutory obligations but at the same time they must be trustworthy companies before all business stakeholders.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Research**

This study examines and discusses in a critical way why many global mission brands which make their social and environmental activism a part of brand identity cannot be created in Turkey.

### **Research method**

This study takes the Turkish market as its basis and uses the case study method among other qualitative methods.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

It is known that customers don't make purchase decisions only on the premises of a benefit-cost axis by taking into account the fact that they are buying "experiences" not just products. Business must be carried out along the lines of the targeted mission and make this internal to the entire process and functions of the company so that customers acquire this experience from the outset of a product's design stage until it enters their lives.

Day by day it is becoming increasingly difficult to be a brand that will be preferred by consumers simply through awareness and the adoption of certain perceptions. Developing a strong characteristic is an approach that has gained in popularity for brands and for that reason mission brands must establish a dialogue based on common value judgments and principles with all stakeholders. In this way, the brand can create the conditions that will make its existence accepted in a sustainable manner in the process of constituting a platform to realize the ideals of stakeholders and, perhaps most important of all, customers. Such efforts should reflect strong values and principles for the brand and represent a means for bringing the mission to a broader audience. Through such an understanding, products or services can actually become mission-loaded instruments. In the meantime, customers become voluntary ambassadors who embrace and share this mission while carrying out their own missions via the platform created by the brand. Creating mission marketing necessitates a paradigm shift that extends beyond conducting corporate social responsibility campaigns. The benefits of making such a strategic choice for a brand are great, because embracing a mission entails the creation of meaning for customers and makes it possible for them to use that meaning in the construction of their own identities.

However, the adoption of such an approach is a radical choice. Creating employment, value and wealth by doing business in a competitive environment while striving to accomplish a mission that is worth fighting for brings about certain risks. The creation of an environment in which the brand's employees and other stakeholders have a joint cause and customers are brand ambassadors is invaluable with regard to the brand's value. However, it is quite difficult in the Turkish market to create a mission brand advocating any form of activism. While there are many types of activism, such as social, economic, cultural, political and environmental activism, those that are perceived as being the most innocent and that are most widely accepted are environmental and social activism. It is quite difficult to discuss the others in an environment such as in Turkey where creating a mission brand advocating even these two types of activism is challenging.

In marketing, it is an accepted fact that power and being a leading brand in a given sector are critical factors. In light of this, Body Shop has emerged as a pioneering activist brand due to the fact that it has taken up a



social and environmental mission. However, it doesn't appear that many other brands have entered the market with an activist agenda and maintained it as a brand strategy. Occasionally, brands have taken an activist stance in the Turkish market, as in other parts of the world, and as a result we can see that a mission of social or environmental activism is a periodical marketing strategy for brands. The brand Karaca, which was founded in 1917 and changed hands in 2002, perpetuated the environmentalist mission supported by the owner, Hayrettin Karaca, but it was unable to continue with it as a brand strategy. Beko and Arcelik, which are among the giants in the white-goods sector dominated by Koc Holding, have occasionally adopted environmental missions and emphasized advertising that promoted its products in a way that encouraged protection of the environment and nature. Brands that adopt such a mission in line with green marketing trends are deemed to be working within a new marketing paradigm and periodically exhibit a mission brand policy concerning the environment.

The purpose of this study is to examine and discuss the reasons underlying companies' inability to create mission-based Turkish brands that serve social and environmental activism. As mentioned above, in the Turkish market there aren't any brands that have maintained a long-term activist approach. The reason for this is that in the Turkish context, activism entails risks for a brand because activist movements (whether they be cultural, political, social or environmental) seek to question political power. In short, brands must be situated within environments where the rule of law is protected and there is strong democracy if activism is to be pursued as a strategy. A brand that seeks to maintain an activist role in Turkey (even supporting environmental issues, the most innocent of all) may face certain challenges. It has been noted that the political authorities have used financial audits, which increase workload, decrease productivity and potentially result in fines, to put pressure on companies. There is a general belief that this is the reason why such approaches are avoided in business partnerships and cooperation with the public sector. Social and environmental activist attitudes which are likely to fall foul of public policies can engender consequences that may adversely affect competition among brands.

While examples of activist brands can be seen in countries where democratic rules of management and free market economy norms are well established, there are political, judicial, social and economic factors that make it difficult to create activist brands in countries like Turkey where those norms haven't been firmly put into place.

In recent years, activism has been appearing frequently, particularly in visual, textual and social media, and for many people it has come to be synonymous with the notion of political protest. Activism, which entails actions carried out for the realization of changes in habits and behavior

generally accepted by society and political circles, has been defined in terms of opposing or supporting particular opinions. In this way, activism plays a part in policies that are perceived as being in support of or opposing perspectives on certain issues. In addition to rallying for changes in state laws, activists may also organize protests in defiance of the government to initiate changes in societal behavior. In terms of politics, opposing the government may not just be a costly problem for brands but can also result in the severance of public relations in terms of employment. For example, a company that takes up activism may experience difficulties in getting loans and obtaining permission for exports and imports.

Most importantly, activism sets forth an antithesis. In other words, it necessitates a stance that opposes another position, and in turn that will cause some consumers to align themselves with that perspective and others to oppose it, resulting in the narrowing of a brand's potential target audience.

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