Master Degree Project in Management

Sustainability Strategy in MNCs context - construction and legitimation - A Discourse analysis
(Poststructuralist and CDA approach)

Master Degree Project 2017
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Abstract

Based on Poststructuralist and Critical discourse analysis, this study investigates how MNC is discursively defined and legitimized as sustainable industry leader. The empirical data are based on the sustainability reports published by MNC. The study has two wings. First it identifies the elements of sustainability strategy that is used to construct as a sustainability industry leader which is borrowed from Parker’s (1992) discourse dynamics and second, it critically finds the legitimation strategies which is borrowed from EeroVaara et al. (2006) legitimation model. The finding suggests that sustainability strategy claims as sustainability in its three dimensions; economic, social and environmental. It also pointing out that community or people oriented discourse has more influence in sustainability discourse that makes the company change or shape the society and business in global context but the primary focus is on the economic profit. Further narrative is the powerful legitimating strategy that may idealize organization as sustainability industry leader. The finding also provides that global reporting standards and joint initiatives harmonize the sustainability strategy that contribute to reach a common theme of sustainability.

**Keywords:** Discourse, sustainability strategy, legitimation strategy, construction.
Introduction:

The health of the world’s economy depends on the condition of Earth’s socio-ecological system. Empirically it is proved that the factors for Earth’s warm atmosphere are increasing continuously (IPCC, 2007). There exists an interdependence relationship between the environment, the economy and society which are forcing the businesses to create strategy regarding sustainable development. As a consequence, today’s business is more concerned about sustainable development. The role of business in attaining sustainable development has no boundary, rather it varies by business sectors and an organization’s size. The World Business Council for Sustainable development (WBCSD) published its own vision for 2050 regarding sustainable business. They estimated that during this time population will increase by 30% which will be 9 billion and if people treat the Earth in the present way then the global society will face dangerous degradation of living standards in the world (WBCSD). Though there are business corporations committed to sustainability, such as corporate social responsibility, these incentives are focused only on external adjustment and may lose their value due to lack of intrinsic commitment (Wensveen, 2009). To reduce this risk, business need to change their view of making strategies for doing business. Therefore, businesses need to coordinate sustainability into their fundamental and core strategies.

According to Broman et al (2010), sustainability is seen as the holistic perspective of development which is integrated with organizational goals, internal incentives and evaluation systems, and organizational decision support systems. Therefore, it is easy to find in management literature references to sustainability strategy as a recommendation. But Gupta (2012) stated that there is a research gap in showing the benefit of adopting sustainability as strategy practice. Research on how to carry out sustainability development cannot give adequate guidance for the management field on sustainable development.

Generally social, environmental and economic responsibilities are integrated through sustainability (Gimenez et al., 2012). Sustainability is defined by institutional theory of business organization. Meyer and Rowan (1977) claim that organizations seek legitimacy for survival prospects. Therefore, sustainability requires legitimation with competitive advantage or superior resources or capabilities and also it requires legitimation that fits in terms of external environment and strategic action of organization (Burke and Logsdon, 1996 and Husted and Allen, 2007). Consequently, this strategy creates conflict between competitive goals and social and environmental perspectives. This causes the problem of a firm’s accountability towards strategic goals and keeping track on sustainability. So, sustainability strategy directly affects society and environment as well as the organization itself. This strategy makes sense to the stakeholder in terms of the action of the organization vis-à-vis the future world.

Reinecke et al. (2012) claim that sustainability convergences rhetoric strategy with considerable ambiguous. For example, the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI) establishes a standard definition of sustainability in general where firm level actors may have different understanding about the sustainability strategy practices. DJSI is an index based on sustainability. At firm level, they are the external rating agency. Their definition of sustainability is based on UN GRI
guidelines. By using this discourse, external stakeholders such as DJSI assess the sustainable industry leaders which take a vital place for understanding organizations’ action towards sustainability strategy. Therefore, discourse of this complex phenomenon (re)shapes the understanding of strategy as a practice or more precisely the legitimation process by itself as a socially responsible business leader and also it allows the reader to get the understanding of the logic of text of the message which is given by the organization itself to the stakeholders.

In previous research, many researchers recognized the high complexity of development of an interdependent relationship between business and natural systems embedded in social systems (Whiteman et al. 2004, Roome, 2001). Organizational research on sustainability has drawn on different perspectives. There are resources based perspective, institutionalization perspective, strategic perspective, stakeholder perspective, leadership perspective in management research. Studies (such as Metcalf and Benn, 2012) concerning leadership perspective perceive sustainability as extraordinary capabilities and a holistic view of the organization with embedded complexity of the organization. Boiral et al (2014) stated that from the leadership point of view the leader has the capability to focus on a long-term viewpoint. According to Bansal and Gao (2006) the focal themes of traditional management are resource based view on sustainability, competitive strategy or institutional theory and so on.

Studies such as those of Ganescu, 2012; Peters and Zelewski, 2013; Stead and Stead, 2013, concentrated on the integration of sustainability in strategic management to foster a competitive view. This perspective argues that sustainability should be included into the core strategic point of view embedded with investment, cost reduction, innovation and economic performance to gain competitive advantage (Silvius et al., 2012; Stead and stead, 2000; Santos et al. 2009; Van Bommel, 2011). Again, studies concerning the stakeholder engagement perspective focus on the process of integration between sustainability and business (Lee, 2008; van Bommel, 2011; Lee, 2011; Paraschiv et al., 2012; Lozano, 2015). Research has been carried out on sponsorship, single issue consultation, research cooperation, employee training and volunteerism, certification and eco-labeling, systematic dialogue, common projects and programs, strategic partnerships as the integration process of stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, sustainability studies have been researched on cultural perspectives which focus on environmental and social challenges integrating into strategies (Linnenluecke and Griffiths 2010, Baumgartner, 2009; Borland, 2009). Additionally, sustainability research has been done with emphasis on the macro-level to identify the culture of business. Macro-level means organizational and national levels (Campbell, 2007; Habisch et al., 2005; Matten & Moon, 2008; Maignan & Ralston, 2002). Epstein et.al. (2010) identify the difference between sustainability strategies and other strategies. They stress that sustainability strategy is different because it considers environmental and social aspects which is difficult to measure with a business profit aspect. It also requires re-engineering the current strategies and high investment for getting improved sustainable development (Silvius et al., 2012). Silvius also states that the required investment for sustainability strategies may give return in the long run but in the short run the return process of investment will take time, so organizations must be concerned about the return process for sustainable strategies. For adopting sustainability
strategies, management need to integrate the top-to-bottom stakeholders. Epstein (2010) stresses that in this regard different management systems should be designed and aligned. There are several key factors for this alignment according to Doppelt (2010) which will influence organizational visions, missions, goals, communication, decision-making processes, reporting and discloser requirements. Therefore, there is a win-win situation for business to incorporate sustainability into their core strategies. Hart (1995) suggests that organizations that adopt sustainability in their core strategy, will not only get competitive advantage but also it will help the organization to invent innovative technology and competencies.

Recent research indicates that the discursive analysis on sustainability business in management discipline has started but that there also is focus on legitimization strategies for sustainability and institutionalization (Vaara, Tienari, & Laurila, 2006; Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Van Leeuwen, 2007). Studies regarding the discursive element of sustainability strategy of industry leaders has not received any attention yet. Though research on discursive institutionalization, legitimization for sustainability has been carried out on an organization perspective but research on discursive sustainability as strategy on industry leaders' perspective does not receive attention through the practitioners.

The discourse construction of sustainability is legitimized through the context of expression. The outsider assessment like DJSI also gives the understanding of the sustainability strategy. For example, DJSI excluded Volkswagen from their index by using Media and Stakeholder analysis. This exclusion exercises the power position of DJSI as an external rating agency.

In order to make the reader understand this, I will go for discourse analysis as a form of textual and contextual analysis that focuses on the content of industry sustainable leaders. Discourse analysis unfolds the hidden ideologies that may influence the reader’s view of the world. It is a complete package with theoretical and methodological analysis. It is neither a qualitative nor a quantitative research method, rather a way of asking questions on the assumption of the research, both quantitative and qualitative. It does not provide a tangible answer but it keeps the right to access the ontological and epistemological assumptions. Therefore, it is always a matter of interpretation.

The aim of the study is to examine the construction of sustainability in the industry sustainable leader context with a particular emphasis is on definitional and thematic issues, and to answer the following research question: What are the discursive strategies used when legitimating sustainability in the sustainability report of industry sustainable leader? The study has been done on five multinational companies, which are ranked as sustainability industry leader assessed by DJSI, selected on diversification of business operation.
Literature review:

The key constructs that comprise this project include sustainability and legitimization. This part is included in the generalization definition of sustainability and legitimization.

Definition of Sustainability:
Sustainable is a concept which is involved implicitly in the thinking of businesses which can be found in the ‘laissez-faire’ theory of Adam Smith, the founder of capitalist business (Earhart, 2011). Sustainability is a complex concept that has a great number of different interpretations. Sustainability was first defined in a report from the Brundtland Commission of the United Nations (UN) in 1987. There are lots of theoretical definitions regarding sustainability in research but the definition depends on the perception of the research. According to Winchip (2007), the business activities or strategies which meet the needs of the business and its stakeholders today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need by protecting, sustaining and enhancing the human and natural resources. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), corporate sustainability (CS), Triple Bottom Line (TBL) or 3P are also known as sustainability development. But some scholars separate CSR, CS and sustainability such as Steure et. Al. (2005). They divided the sustainability strategies within the strategy process. They focus on sustainability strategies that work from a social, economic and business perspective with transparency, participation, reflection and integration among the interdependence relations. CSR focuses on stakeholders and CS focuses on long-term business by transparency, participation reflection, while TBL focuses on people, planet and profit. Marrewijk (2003) describes the relationship among CSR, TBL and CS and he also pointed out that CSR is the starting point for strategy making and sustainability is the matured component in the strategy for the business. Common to all studies, sustainability is defined in terms of the economic, social and the environment that will enhance a sustainable society in the long run (Bibri, 2013). In this context, the global business practice towards sustainability has given attention. The sustainable industry leader assessed by external investment agency is the influential factor that will increase sustainable strategy among the business. The compact sustainability definition has been constructed through the sustainable industry leader’s strategic practice that will reshape the corporate behavior to the society.

Legitimation:
In organizational studies legitimization is an important theme which exists implicitly in mainstream research. There is an ambiguity when it comes to knowing the actual meaning of legitimacy and its role in the construction of reality. Kaplan and Ruland (1991) describe organizational legitimacy as a process by which organizations seek the approval or acceptance or avoidance of sanctions to the social world of which they are part. Suchman (1995) stated that
in institutional analysis helps us understand the concept of legitimacy in an organizational context. Organizational legitimacy is an operational resource which is acquired competitively in pursuit of the organization's goals (Suchman, 1995). Studies such as Dowling and Pfeffer (1975); Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) concern the fact that legitimacy is closely linked to power and the process of legitimization is a key part of management. Suchman (1995) argued that legitimacy is pragmatic, involving self-interest, based on normative approval and cognitive based on comprehensibility and being taken for granted. Kostova & Zaheer (1999), define three types of complexity that MNC face that distinguished the legitimacy of MNC as a whole and that of its parts. These three complexities are the legitimating environment, the organization and the process of legitimization. They also analyze the process of being politicized the corporate action and issues and therefore the process of legitimacy of these actions and issues may be questioned.

In spite of lot of advance research on legitimacy, there is lack of attention on discursive legitimacy. Eero Vaara et al. (2006) suggest a discursive legitimacy model that defines legitimacy strategies of MNC’s ambiguous and complex actions such as sustainability.

**Discourse analysis as a method of understanding the social construction of organizational strategy:**

Discourse analysis has become increasingly popular in the field of social science, organization and management studies over the last few decades (Van Dijk, 1993; Hardy et al. 2004, Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Fairclough, 1995; Parker, 1992). Discourse analysis is a complete package that consists of method and theory which are intertwined (Philipps and Jorgensen, 2002) and socially constituted (Varaa et al. 2004). It’s a cross-disciplinary approach for linguistic analysis of the social world (Fairclough, 2003). Therefore, discourses are embedded in language which shapes and reshapes the part of the social world's economic, social and environmental reality. Approaches in discourse analysis vary according to relation with social practice. Text is taken either as what is written or spoken without any social settings or as what the underlying meaning of the text in connection to social practices is (Eero Vaara and Jannee Tienari, 2002). Balogun et al (2014) focus on the discursive aspect of strategy. Discourse is the powerful resources of making and signifying an organization’s strategy since strategy involves talk, either in written or spoken form. The studies of discourse and strategy explore strategy as a composition of actions, interactions and negotiations among multiple actors (Jarzabkowski et al 2007). With reference of Fairclough (2003) strategy discourses are linked to physical, psychological and social settings. Physical connection is related to use of whiteboards, agenda, rooms for meeting for strategizing purposes. (Jarzabkowski et al 2007), psychological connection is related to strategic sense-making by performative power of discourse (Balogun, 2011) and social connection is linked with power relations among the actors for making strategy (Mantere and Vaare, 2008).

Poststructuralist approaches, such as Parker’s Discourse Analysis emphasize the identification of the discourse as a basis of knowledge, power, ideology and consider the role of institutions (Parker,
A discursive perspective on construction of definition/knowledge:
The process of defining sustainability strategy borrows from Parker’s (1992) perspective of discourse. Parker argues that a good discourse should be a system of statements which construct an object. Potter and Wetherell, (1987) define discourse as a method where no sequence of analysis is working, so there is no analytical method for defining discourse. The importance of Parker's discourse dynamics is that it allows the things that are not really in the strong form of argument and once the discourse defines the object, it gives a strong reference that the object is real. Here discourse not only simply describes the social world but it also categorizes the object. According to Parker (1992), discourse provides the framework for debating one way of talking over other ways about reality.

There are seven features in Parker’s discourse analysis. First, it considers the interpretation and reflection of text in all forms (Speech, writing, non-verbal behavior and so on) for defining the discourse. Discourse is not found as it rather depends on the relationships between discourse and the social world. There is no need of an author all the time and discourses are transindividual. In a sense it explores the connotation, allusions and implication of addressed text. Second, the aim of discourse is to identify an object. There are two layers in objectification. The first layer is the reality that the discourse refers to and the second layer is the reflection in the text on a discourse. Third, discourse contains subjects. Subjects can be the author or the perception that the discourse invites. There exist power positions of the subjects. Sometimes the object of the discourse is identified as the subject depends on the perception of the discourse. Fourth, there is a coherent system of meaning in discourse. This meaning is perceived according to one's cultural perspective. Fifth, a discourse is referred to by another discourse. The identification of other discourses may be available by using metaphors, models or analogies. Contradictory ways of identifying discourses may give rise to another discourse. This leads to understanding the interrelationship between different discourses. Sixth, discourse is constructed in its own way. In this sense discourse analysis should be able to reflect on the discourse as a coherent whole. At this point, ideological dilemmas exist and to solve the dilemmas analysis is used to find the hidden meaning of discourse. This promotes the identification of the implicit reflexivity of a discourse. The final feature is that discourse is located in time, in history. In this sense discourse is developed by a consistent system of statement.

The advantage of this discourse analysis is that it allows discourse not as truth but as one truth that is held in place by language and power (Parker 1992). From this perspective sustainability strategy is defined by a body of knowledge, ideology which considers the institution. The important matter is that it allows sustainability discourse as a form of systematic statement. In relation to knowledge and ideology, sustainability serves to create values or norms to a particular set of audiences such as investors, government laws and regulations. In its simplest form, discursive sustainability strategy as a practice reproduces institutions such as industry sustainability leaders, among other
things. So, Parker’s discourse analysis is concerned with the reflection of why this was said, and not that it was said. This means how the discourse, e.g. sustainability, is defined by the organization itself.

**A discursive perspective on legitimation:**

Strategy can be placed in critical discourse analysis (CDA) which seeks to understand how the organizational phenomenon is socially constructed and links it to the broader social power relation (Balogun et al 2014). Here discursively created legitimacy is constructed by the social world. The CDA perspective of Eero Vaara et al. (2006) on discursive legitimation defines legitimacy as a discursively created sense of acceptance. The main characteristic of this discourse is to define what should be considered legitimate or illegitimate. Therefore, Eero Vaara’s (2006) model is based on the basis of discourse which is taken for granted by the social world. For example, when a multinational company defines sustainability as “creating shared value”, that makes sense in terms of the surrender of business profit to social and environmental welfare. The importance of their CDA approach is that it allows to shift attention from existing legitimacy to the process of legitimation by focusing on concrete discursive practices and strategies used. Hence a specific actor can convince others through various kinds of rhetorical moves. In another way, it portrayed a particular object which is acceptable to a specific audience and other things are constructed as negative. In such a setting, the sustainability reporting of business is in a complex position by itself since the business needs to make a profit. Eero Vaara et al. (2006) have developed a model on discursive legitimation strategies. Their work is mainly an extension of a model of “a grammar of legitimation” by Theo van Leeuwen and his colleagues’ which specifies legitimating practices (Eero Vaara et al. 2006). These legitimation strategies are specific. According to Eero Vaara et al. (2006), there are five types of legitimating strategies, namely authorization, rationalization, moralization, normalization and narrativization. Authorization is the legitimating strategies which refer to the authority. The authority might be the institution itself or anything impersonal, for example laws, customs, regulation or convention. Rationalization refers to utility or function of specific actions or practices that are accepted in a given context and that are relevant for the claiming strategies. There is theoretical rationalization, which refers to a natural order of things, and instrumental rationalization, which refers to goals, uses or effects of specific legitimating strategies as practice. Narrativization refers to reconstruction of discourse based on the mythopoetic side of legitimation. This means the details of the story that show the evidence for the discourse as acceptance, appropriate or preferential behavior. Normalization refers to normal or natural functioning of legitimation strategies that seeks to render something legitimate by a referring example. This exemplarity can be retrospective or prospective. Retrospective is the historical example of similar discursive strategies as practices and prospective is the example of new strategies as practice to be expected. Such a discursive model of legitimation focuses more on organizational strategies, for example sustainability strategies.

In this paper discourse has been taken as a method of understanding of knowledge and power for strategizing sustainability by using rhetoric devices within speech acts and text in the sustainability
This discourse analysis operates the episodic realm of sustainable strategy to reveal how sustainability strategy is legitimized (Balogun et al. 2014). The focus of this discourse analysis is not evaluating the truth, rather the way of using rhetoric devices such as forms of argumentation used for sustainable leaders. Corporate activities such as sustainability strategy can be legitimized and justified to a broader audience by framing the activities in the form of discourse. The linguistic framing of sustainability influences and shapes the corporate image as industry leaders and also constructs the relations between the different stakeholders.

In the context of this study, discourse analysis can in particular discover the pattern underlying the social construction of sustainability in relation to strategy as practice. It can also reveal the legitimized sustainability strategy that claims the industry sustainability leaders. Thus, discursive constructions contain a way of seeing the world (Bibri, 2013). Hence the emphasis is on the common theme in discourse analysis which is constructed and operates as a means of representing the true image of reality that needs to be investigated (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002).

**Sustainability Reports:**
Strategy is all about talk (Balogun et al. 2014). To explore discursive sustainability strategy and legitimation, the scope of this study is limited to sustainability reports. The empirical research has focused on five sustainability reports from DJSI. In this analysis, texts in sustainability reports are studied in terms of how they construct and produce the definition of sustainability, how they engage in action for sustainable industry leaders and how the ambiguous strategy is legitimated discursively.

The sustainability reports selected from the companies represent five different industries: banking, food and beverage, healthcare and equipment suppliers, real estate and energy. The selected companies' origins represent five different countries on four continents. Westpac is a bank and Stockland is a real estate company, both of them from Australia. Nestle is a food and beverage company from Switzerland. Abott is a health care and equipment supplier from the United States and ThaiOil is a refining company from Thailand. This diversification of selection of sustainability reports is helpful to understand how global companies contribute to define sustainability and to figure out their legitimation strategies for sustainability.

The purpose of a sustainability report is either to address an issue or respond to criticism against the company or to create a corporate image as socially responsible or to highlight the corporate achievements. Large companies such as MNCs have the power to shape and reshape the knowledge of sustainability since their sustainability reports can reach a broad range of audiences of shareholders and stakeholders. The internationally recognized guidelines or standards, such as UN GRI or ISO 90001 and so on, make the reports of such MNCs homogeneous. But at the same time these guidelines also provide the room for flexibility in making sustainability reports, as these are not the obligatory guidelines for the companies. And this flexibility makes the reports different from other companies’. Here is the complexity of sustainability reporting in a global context.

The significance of sustainability reports is that they provide the explanatory statements or justification of activities regarding a sustainability strategies of a company. According to Jamseon
(2000), companies explain their goals, mission, vision, strategies, progress and results in their report, not only for the investors and stakeholders but also for the investment analysis, government agencies, the media and the public. This heterogeneous audience places the emphasis on following the guidelines and standards for making the reports homogenous so that they can improve their commitment for sustainability (Baltels et al. 2008). Thus, audiences can compare companies' perception of sustainability.

**Research design and methods of analysis:**
The focus of the study is to investigate a socially constructed phenomenon; the discourse of how sustainability is defined and legitimized through corporate sustainability reports from industry sustainable leaders. The importance of effective discourse analysis depends on the availability of the discourse resources (Hardy & Phillips, 1999). Using this approach may open up or explore new insights from a rather small set of data.

**Data Collection:**
The data used in this study consist of sustainability reports from five MNCs throughout the world. The companies were selected from the Dow Jones sustainability Index (DJSI). DJSI invited 3400 companies for the sustainability assessment across the different sectors and countries. This would help in understanding sustainability strategic practice in a broader perspective since this paper selected the companies by cross-operational perspective. The aim of taking diversified companies across the world is to investigate the discourse as much as possible.

In order to analyze the text in detail, the number of reports included in the study was limited to five. The sustainability reports selected from the companies which represent five different industries: banking, food and beverage, healthcare and equipment suppliers, real estate and energy. The sustainability report is the framing of sustainability activities of the organization. These sustainability reports are part of public discourse by which the organizations present their corporate environment in a way that provides the relationship between business and society. Livesey (2001) argues that this relationship is the reflection of the corporate behavior of the organization. In this sense sustainability reports have been seen as double orientation, they are used to accomplish action, which is action orientation, and the other orientation is to establish a status, which is epistemological orientation (Potter, 1996). Other than organization, there are several actors for defining and legitimizing the issue but the reflection of the corporation itself by reports may investigate the potentially ambiguous perspective.

The selected company’s origins are from five different countries on four continents. Westpac is a bank from Australia and Stockland is a real estate company, also from Australia. Nestle is a food and beverage company from Switzerland. Abott is a health care and equipment supplier from the United States and ThaiOil is a refining company from Thailand.

Westpac is a bank, established in 1817 in South Wales, Australia. It serves 13 million customers in Australia, New Zealand and the Near Pacific. There are around 40,000 employees working for Westpac. Their focus is on organic growth, growing the number of customers. Their sustainability
Data Analysis:
As sustainability can be understood as socially constructed, a combination of poststructuralist and CDA discourse analysis have been adopted. Discourse analysis entails diversified analytical techniques determined by the objectives that provide different textual insights, that means there is no consensus for analyzing discourses (Philips & Jorgensen, 2002). Discursive approach is suitable for this study as discourse analysis focus on a small set of data. That means the purpose of the analysis is to state a lot about little. But this approach is time consuming and laborious (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, Silverman, 1993). The analysis of data has been done with the following stage.
At first level, all relevant text has been collected that were represented to construct the discursive definition of sustainability. There are no certain rules for reading or collecting text under discourse analysis. In this level, CEOs’ speech and writing language have been considered. Text has been analyzed based on elements of the phenomenon, themes, connotation and social relations for construction of sustainability. In this phase, the author behind the text did not take consideration
(Barthes, 1977) and started interpretation and description of the text by examining all the tissues of text and elaborated the meaning of text beyond subjectivity of the author (Parker, 1992). The second level of analysis has been done to identify sustainability as strategy. In identification process, all the element that involve in practicing sustainability has been investigated. Systematic form of sustainability practice has been taken consideration. The most essential elements included strategic claims, stakeholder engagement, long term planning, leadership claims, materiality, historical position and use of metaphor have been analyzed for all sustainability reports. At this stage sustainability practice is taken as representational practice of sustainability by the sustainable industry leaders. The details description of sustainability practice has been considered as representation of global business practice.

At third stage sustainability has been analyzed for finding the actors such as stakeholder, investors, international standards and so on. The subjects of sustainability practice have been investigated by the appeal of ideology that makes acceptance of sustainability practice to the business society. The power relation with sustainability has been investigated by specifying the actors that influence the global corporate business to make it strategy and in what way they exercise the influence over business.

At final stage an interdiscursivity has been taken consideration. Here the focus is to analyze sustainability in various discourse used by the industry sustainable leaders. In this regard, ways of presenting discourse and identifying different objects such as economic dimension, social dimension and environmental dimension have been analyzed. The interrelationship between the discourses used by the diversified industry in global business have been understood.

Here the construction of sustainability strategy and legitimation strategies have been analyzed. Construction of sustainability have been analyzed with Parker’s (1992) discourse dynamics and legitimation strategies of Eero Vaara et al. (2006) have been applied to categorize legitimation strategies on sustainability reports.

**Discursive construction of sustainability as a strategy:**

The emphasis here is on the discursive construction, themes and metaphors used for sustainability attached to the sustainability reports of the DJSI leaders. The way sustainability is defined through the text in the sustainability report has much to do with industry leadership aspects as a broader context in understanding diversified sustainability practice such as global citizenship, corporate social responsibility, creating shared value, triple bottom line and so on. All the companies use different names for sustainability reports but the texts draw from statements and arguments about sustainability. Each company proceeds with their industry-specific issues when it comes to sustainability. But there are some general issues regarding sustainability of organization that can be interesting to study for management research. Sustainability strategy as practice has been observed as evolving different aspects of using social language. From all the reports of the five leading companies, it was found that sustainability evolves in such a way as to comprehend all the elements and norms set for a sustainable leader to be sustainable.
The sustainability strategy at Westpac, Abott, Stockland and Nestle, is to help the community and people prosper and grow in the future so that the companies can grow simultaneously. At Westpac Nestle and Abott, sustainability is an emerging issue where the company takes the leadership role and thus they can make a positive role and can create the most value. Westpac claims that the aim of their sustainability strategy is "to identify and respond to the emerging societal issues which present risks and opportunities for our business". This is done through a robust governance framework where each level of the organization is responsible and where there is regular assessment of the performance.

Nestle claim that sustainability is a strategic tool by which they can create value for society,

“CSV is the strategy tool that Nestlé uses to operationalise and manage all the actions it takes to ensure it creates value for shareholders and for society.”

Abott believes that sustainability is their core business strategy,

“We are committed to embedding our citizenship strategy ever more closely within our core business strategy”

ThaiOil in turn perceive sustainability as a strategic tool to manage business risk. They also argue that sustainability is embedded within their daily strategic work. They define sustainability as balanced growth in economic, social and environmental aspects. At Stockland, sustainability creates opportunity for their future business.

“Our sustainability strategy focuses on this opportunity to deliver shared value; that is deliver economic value in a way that also creates value for society by addressing its needs and challenges.”

The purpose of sustainability strategy lies in the intention to inform the stakeholders. At Nestle, they make separate provisions for investors, so that they can inform investors specifically about their sustainability. The rest of the companies claim that their sustainability strategy has been carried out for the stakeholders and there exist diversified stakeholders. For example, Westpac stated-

“We regularly analyse stakeholder feedback, industry trends, reports and independent research to understand the emerging issues that matter most to our stakeholders – including customers, communities and employees – and our business.”

When defining sustainability, with the exception of Stockland and ThaiOil, all the companies use metaphors. They define sustainability by using metaphoric words. Such as Nestle introducing sustainability as Nestle in Society, Abott introducing sustainability as Global Citizenship, Westpac as Creating Shared Value.

When introducing sustainability strategy Westpac, Stockland, Abott and Nestle clarify that they have long had sustainability in their strategic work. At ThaiOil, sustainability strategy is has been part of their business for six years. For example, Westpac stated

“Over almost two centuries, this view has motivated us to take a leadership role”

WestPac claims that sustainability is the key success factor of evolving their business over two centuries. They describe their five years’ sustainability strategy that guides them in supporting their customers. ThaiOil explains that they will reach their goal of being a world leader in the industry in terms of business by following sustainability. They also set out a five years’ master
plan to guide them to act towards balanced growth. Abott, Nestle and Stockland fix their goals by setting commitment towards sustainability.

In terms of setting out the sustainability strategy, all the five companies use the reference of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and also, they refer to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) as their guideline for sustainability reporting. When it comes to the stakeholder position in the sustainability strategy, all the five companies agree that their sustainability strategy and reporting is the result of the stakeholders’ demand. Nestle specifically mention the specific text for the investors.

The claim for leadership emphasizes that their aim is to do business so that they can gain the power of being the dominating actor within the industry. Westpac, Abott, Nestle and Stockland explain that their long history of sustainability practice already makes them leaders within the industry. At ThaiOil, practicing sustainability strategy is to gain the leadership within the industry in terms of economic growth.

“We strive to be a leading fully integrated refining and petrochemical company in Asia Pacific”

The above excerpts are the claim of leadership motivation for sustainability by the industry sustainability leaders. This leadership aspect highlights the way in which to gain a competitive advantage within the industry. Moreover, every company use financial data for applying sustainability strategy thoroughly. They define materiality differently. At Westpac materiality has been categorized in six themes. The six themes are conduct & trust, service leadership, digital innovation, workforce of the future and positive societal impact. They use UN SDGs and divide them into each category. ThaiOil also have seven matrix material issues with UN SDGs goals. Their material matrix consists of corporate governance, employee, occupational health and safety, society & communities, value chain management, environmental management, energy efficiency and climate change. In the case of Abott, they have separate partnerships with external agencies for material assessment. With the partners, they identify 20 material issues which are similar to Westpac and ThaiOil but they include political instability in the assessment. On the other hand, Nestle uses four phases of analysis for material assessment and they identify 17 issues for the year 2016. Their material issues comprised with the UN SDGs' vision 2020. Stockland have a two-step material assessment. One process comprises international standards and the other process comprises strategic future risk.

All reports agree that sustainability strategy is the integration of three dimensions. These are the economic dimension, the social dimension and the environmental dimension. A common idea is that sustainability is of significant strategic importance, as working with sustainability strategy can help the organization gain competitive advantage. This means economic profitability is the underlying goal while the concept of sustainability as a practice tends to incorporate the social and environmental dimensions.
The Economic dimension:
The fundamental objective of sustainability is to make a profit by recognizing future growth opportunity. Sustainability is described as an integral part of business strategy for all the five companies. It also emphasizes that strategic sustainability is to be practiced within a boundary with the intention of making a profit and that business leaders cannot break the boundary by practicing sustainability simultaneously. All their efforts have the same destination, that is to make a profit for the company over the long term. In economic aspects, Westpac’s assumption is to increase profitability by developing service oriented technology, where ThaiOil assess their economic performance by developing corporate governance and creating a culture between employees for sustainable business. Both companies consider employee relations important to their economic growth. Nestle, Abott and Stockland use indirect ways of sending a message that they do sustainability for a holistic purpose, their business perspective shows their corporate governance, supply chain, employees' betterment.

"Nestlé shall, ...., aim for long-term, sustainable value creation. ....Creating Shared Value is ...what is good for shareholders should also be good for society"

They write more about their offer of products for helping the people, where their main intention seems to be to do better for the world instead of economic profit. Moreover, sustainability is more functional to them as sustainability involves product innovation and differentiation. The growth of the business is the main reason for their sustainability strategy. It is a part of the strategy but not the first and foremost objective of business.

The firms differ in explaining the economic dimension of their sustainability strategy. At Westpac, Nestle, Abott and Stockland claim that the environmental product and service innovations are the main part of their economic purposes. Moreover, all companies link to the corporate governance system for the economic dimension. Corporate governance, code of conduct, employee betterment and supply chain are the parts of economic sustainability. For example, Abott argues that employee training and education contribute in to high quality products being manufactured. Weatpac claims that “Our employees are the backbone of our business.” In this dimension, economic profit is not the main factor for the companies. They allow the embedded factors for making profit as sustainability. The economic dimension is constructed so as to contribute to the society in terms of human resource policy, community development supported alongside corporate activities, as Stockland claim:

“Stockland values diversity and aims to create an inclusive workforce which is reflective of the communities in which it operates. We aim to leverage the maximum potential of our people, irrespective of individual differences, such as gender, ethnicity, age, physical abilities, sexual identity, family status, beliefs and perspectives”

Stockland economic dimension focus on corporate governance and employee. All the companies also focus their corporate governance that play important role in profit earning process. The corporate governance has to focus on economic profit as well sustainability strategy that is complex by itself in business.
The Social dimension:
The social dimension in sustainability includes social factors that make companies socially responsible. In this dimension companies deliver their strong commitment towards society about the caring nature of companies.
At Westpac, the social dimension of sustainability represents the initiatives for changing the society. Westpac prefer to recruit from their community to mitigate the unemployment condition. Internship opportunity to asylum seekers and refugees ensures that their workforce is diverse. Moreover targeting 50% leadership for women embraces the societal change. They also focus on flexible working options and leadership training programs for employees which gives them the confidence to be inclusive. Therefore, they are working towards socially responsible business.

At ThaiOil, partnerships with community responsible organizations and supply chain networks are commitments to society. They also focus on social awareness of the environment. They form separate divisions that work for society.

“Thaioil Group, therefore, needs to work with a diverse group of associate partners to understand the characteristics of each community in depth through studying detailed information of community, analyzing social impacts and project value to business and society.”

Social sustainability is thus maintained by applying their expertise knowledge of engineering and energy to manage the resources and improve social well-being. They include community engagement in social culture (religion), education, health and environment. Moreover, they adopted a planned project that keeps the procurement cost low and in this way, they serve the community better, and create products at a low cost.

Abott make partnerships to empower people to get well-informed health care service. They educate their partners, develop good infrastructure for people to get healthcare services and also, they emphasize the IT facilities so that people get information regarding health care.

At Nestle, social commitment consists of rural development, employee betterment and supply chain networks. The social dimension includes the rural development where they are working. They focus on the farmers’ needs to farm their raw materials and also give emphasis to the basic needs of the farmers and their families. They emphasize rural development for the external stakeholders’ pressure. In their words-

“Consumers and stakeholders increasingly want to know what is in their food, where it comes from and how it is made. Responsible sourcing is therefore an essential part of ensuring a sustainable future for our business.”

They develop “Human rights Due Diligence Program” to manage the risk associated with their business, because they believe that they “have a responsibility to respect and promote human rights in ... value chains and operate to the highest ethical standards”. As for their responsibility to society, Nestle claims to have no child labor in their value chain, training their employees for anti-corruption, ensuring safety management for employees, women empowerment in leadership and voluntary training such as “road safety training” to their external stakeholders.
At Stockland, the social dimension is divided into two themes: one is community and the other is customer engagement

“Our goal is to create and shape communities that thrive now and into the future by focusing on three core areas: health and well-being; community connection; and education”

The above statement is from Stockland. They emphasize their capability to shape the society by their expertise and business skills. They focus on their investment, development program and establishing CARE foundation for the community where they work. By understanding consumer needs and assessing consumer satisfaction, they have the tools to engage consumers in their sustainability strategy.

The Environmental Dimension:

In environmental issues Westpac ensure their sustainability by investing in environmental projects and creating innovative financial sustainable instruments. They are finding solutions for their direct and indirect impact on the environment with customers and suppliers. As for ThaiOil, they took initiatives to utilize resources and to reduce business operations' impact on the environment. They claim to have a two-step solution for the environmental aspect. First, they provide efforts for the environment management so that their business operations have zero impact on climate change and secondly, they monitor and assess compliance on relevant environmental laws and regulations. They are doing this by

“setting up a compliance committee consisting of representatives from related work units to assess compliance on environmental laws and regulations in their areas of specialty”

Consequently, they ensure that ThaiOil incurred no fine or legal actions against the violation of laws and regulations. They clearly define water and waste management for their business operation.

In environmental issues, Abott also claims two steps of the impact for their business operations. They admitted that their business is more sensitive to the environment. They assess their direct and indirect impact on the environment and set up a committee for taking initiative for reducing the impact gradually. Abott set up their priorities into three environmental issues such as climate change, water management and waste management.

Nestle emphasize water specially for their environmental consideration. Besides water they also focus on reducing emissions from their production.

“opportunities to make cost savings by improving our resource use efficiency – including raw and packaging materials, energy and water – and by avoiding waste”.

The statement specifies their initiatives regarding the environmental dimension. Beside this they put more emphasis on water management. They have a program for proper use of water and also they are focusing on zero withdrawal of water technology for their production.

“Protecting water resources helps protect the future of our Nestlé Waters business and helps ensure that the sourcing of our raw materials remains competitive”

They invested with partners for a water treatment project so that they can ensure future water needs for their production.
Stockland do not have a separate segment for their environmental sustainability. They include their environmental responsibility into their responsibility to community and business operations. By providing environmental solutions to their operations they get a rating as a green star residential.

At Stockland, we develop new land for housing, including infrastructure and social amenities, to create sustainable, thriving communities. Developments on greenfield sites can impact local bushland habitat, ecological communities and protected or significant species. As part of our strategy to deliver shared value, we aim to minimise and mitigate these impacts to protect the biodiversity of our surrounding environments.

Thus, by focusing on environmental issues they differentiate themselves from others through products that serve the environment.

Judging by the studied texts, partnership is the main solution to environmental issues. By making partners such as NGOs, governmental authorities, local authorities and international organizations, companies share their responsibility for the environment. Further, companies give different training to their employees and researchers’ training to mitigate the environmental issues. Also, environmentally friendly technology is preferable to the companies. That’s why they invest large amounts of money in technology innovation. Besides these they also focus on resource utilization, especially in the use of water. Nestle, Abott and ThaiOil are taking initiatives for new environmentally friendly projects within their production area. Therefore, water management and waste management are getting more attention from the manufacturing industry.

Discursive legitimation strategy:

Now moving on to finding legitimization discourse of sustainability practice by the industry leaders. The sustainability report is a source of discursive construction of legitimization of sustainability practice. Focusing on how specific discourses were used in actual practice of legitimating purposes. Turning to the strategy, the emphasis should be on how the corporation legitimize their sustainability strategy in their report. By analyzing their sustainability report here Eero Varaa’s legitimization model has been used to critically identify legitimation strategies. There are five types of legitimization discourse for strategizing sustainability: Authorization, Rationalization, Moralization, Normalization and Narrativization.

Authorization: From the studied texts, sustainability reports are written by the organization itself. Authorization legitimizes the sustainability report by reference to authority. In all five reports, the important and main authority is the organization itself. The CEO and Chairman are the formal authority for the sustainability strategy. The reference of sustainability strategy such as the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals was found to be a strong external authority for sustainability practices for the five companies. Moreover achievements, rankings, and awards given by external authorities are the key actors for legitimating sustainability. In the case of Westpac, it is seen that top management, employees, customers, and partners served as legitimating authorities. Reference to their view was a general discursive strategy that the organization want to reveal to its stakeholders. Besides these achievements, awards and ranking in index as an industry leader of
DJSI are important examples of authorization. In the case of ThaiOil, the company itself serves as the main legitimating authority. Additionally, different awards and achievements are also supporting the authority of their sustainability strategy. The sustainability report allows for the different voices for approaching sustainability as in the following:

“In addition, RobecoSAM announced in Sustainability Yearbook 2017 that Thai Oil PCL achieved Gold Class level, the highest ranking of Oil & Gas Refining & Marketing companies worldwide”

Moreover, LRQA Independent Assurance Statement and GRI guidelines also serve as an important actor. These authorizations legitimize ThaiOil’s sustainability practices.

In the case of Nestle, the organization itself holds the power of authorization for sustainability. They use their goals and their progress to date which serves as an authorization of sustainability. Their different initiatives also play an important role. They give emphasis to stakeholders’ feedback and their response. This feedback session also authorized their sustainability.

In the case of Abott, the sustainability strategy is based on their priorities which were fixed by scientific research, external experts and internal leaders. They are important actors for legitimizing sustainability strategy. Additionally, certifications, awards and industry partnerships also serve as specific authorization.

In the case of Stockland there is absence of formal authority who can legitimize their sustainability. The organization is the only authority who have the responsibility to legitimize a sustainability strategy. Besides this, comparing sustainability progress with the external standard such as UN SDGs or GRI initiatives also serve as authority that has the responsibility to legitimize sustainability strategy for all the five industry leaders.

**Rationalization:** Rationalization legitimizes the functional activities or the utility of doing sustainability as strategic practices. It deals with the purpose and actions for the sustainability strategy of the organization. In this study, this is an important discursive strategy since sustainability claims social and environmental benefits by doing business. Rationalization typically involves financial figures that are calculated by the organization.

“We are investing $10m to find 200 Westpac Businesses of Tomorrow”

Through this statement, Westpac emphasizes the abstract benefits of doing sustainable business. As a financial institution, Westpac innovates and invests in the Clean-tech project, which issues Westpac Climate bonds and also invests in the environmental service sectors. In this context innovating on a large scale in financial instruments based on environmental issues implies the abstract benefit and actions that are consistent with social continuity and utility. Economic efficiency and functional actions of environmental issues are used to legitimize the sustainability practice of Westpac. ThaiOil rationalizes their sustainability by increasing their infrastructural development and expanding business.

“To prepare for these challenges, Thaioil plans to expand our refinery facilities to increase capacity from 275,000 barrels per day to approximately 400,000 barrels per day.”
The benefits of practicing a sustainability strategy served as a rationalization for sustainability for ThaiOil. By using “Creating shared value” Nestle rationalize their sustainability in a way that makes sustainability aligned with their business. Through product diversification innovating product development continuously leads their sustainability strategy. In their report they did not mention any abstract form of benefits they gain, rather they rationalize sustainability by using objectives and their progress in terms of the goals. “we have recently analyzed the performance of our businesses with an aboveaverage Nutrition, Health and Wellness (NHW) .....these businesses performed better ......was below average.”-Nestle, 2017

Through their report Abott are focusing on innovation of new products by which they will help people and thus will increase their opportunity of business. “the Abbott Fund, invested $37 million in community initiatives during 2015. We focus investments on engaging in areas that align with our business”

Stockland rationalizes their sustainability as the growth of economic to deliver shared value. The value which will be utilized for the growth of profit. They are sharing their economic goals with the society and the environment. This means to grow by itself with the contribution of social and environmental aspects. Their words are such that

“Our sustainability strategy focuses on this opportunity to deliver shared value; that is deliver economic value in a way that also creates value for society by addressing its needs and challenges.”

When it comes to rationalization, all the industry leaders are focusing on their economic benefit which will be earned in the future. Only Westpac and ThaiOil have specific numbers on economic growth, but others use only investment rather than the return from the investment. They focus on finding new business opportunities through sustainability strategy.

**Moralization:** Moralization refers to specific values of sustainability strategic practice. Sustainability claims a moral or ideological basis by which moralization legitimizes sustainability strategy. In the studied five reports an explicit moralization strategy has been visible based on the values that a sustainable leader upholds or should uphold. In this study, it is found that all the companies used more or less moralistic texts in the reports. Moreover, moral integrity and values were constructed as not just preferable but actually obligatory for a sustainability industry leader. Specifically, Westpac and Abott have their own separated department for the moral and ethical issues. The responsibility for being a sustainability industry leader has been taken for granted and there are personnel responsible for ethical issues.

In the case of Westpac, they have a separate department for dealing with ethical issues. In their text, ethical issues are seen as separate elements of sustainability strategy. There have been authorities who are responsible for the ethical behavior of Westpac.

“Our banking licence is a privilege.... responsibility to earn and maintain the trust of our customers ....... have not always met the expectations”-Westpac

This is a typical example of the legitimating moralization of Westpac. They present more humanistic, people and environmentally oriented strategies than an economic agenda. This
discursive strategy is more controversial and ambiguous by itself because of them being a financial company and not focusing on economic profit. When analyzing ThaiOil’s text, less moralistic explicit texts are found that legitimize their sustainability. Their text focuses on more expansion of production instead of focusing on development of a global socio-economic environment. There constructs irresponsible moralization of being sustainability industry leader.

“All 42 commitments are directly aligned with our business and the majority are now supported by objectives towards 2020”

The moralization of Nestle has been created by their own commitments and they stated that their sustainability is supported by the external entities. Their moralization strategy also claims a more humanistic approach. They took responsibility for people’s health and nutrition.

In the case of Abott they also have a separate ethical department through which their moral influence for sustainability has been done. The ethical and compliance department serves the moralization and thus legitimizes their sustainability work with their business. In their report, Stockland moralize their sustainability by striving for the community for whom they do business. They also claim a more humanistic approach in their strategy. For example, they explicitly expressed:

“…we create by focusing on health and wellbeing, community connection, and education. We believe we have the ability to make a positive contribution in these three areas because they align with our skills and experiences”

Therefore, industry sustainability leaders legitimize their moralization by integrating with their own business skills and experience.

Normalization: Legitimization by reference to normal or natural requires special recognition which is called normalization. It’s a primary type of legitimization. The main focus is to seek exemplarity. Normalization legitimizes sustainability by involving prospective references which are part of being normal.

In Westpac’s report, they constructed sustainability as way of doing general operational activities as a financial institute. They emphasize on their historical attendance in sustainability perspective for last two centuries. Their new financial instrument which is created on sustainability issue basis make sustainability as normal. For example, Westpac invents Climate bond as financial asset that is the normal business operation for them as a financial institution. They also claim such as,

“We issued the Climate Bond in May 2016, raising $500 million to fund renewable energy and low carbon commercial property in Australia. This initiative is providing investors a high-grade fixed income investment”.

In case of ThaiOil, their mission of business connected with sustainability: “To create a high-performance organization that promotes teamwork, innovation and trust for sustainability”. By focusing on their business mission with sustainability they normalize their sustainability strategy. In case of Nestle, they reference each and every initiative that is relevant to their product development. This makes their sustainability as normal strategy. For example,
“Through Nestlé’s range of fortified foods and beverages, such as Nido Fortigrow, we can reach out to children and families where their needs are greatest, to offer a potential positive impact on health” - Nestle, 2016

Abott as a health company normalize their sustainability by focusing on their investment on their R&D department by which they will get new product and also have continuous product development. Thus, normalization takes place that legitimizes their sustainability. Stockland also normalize their sustainability by using historical position of their business where sustainable project is taken as normal business.

**Narrativization:** In this study, narrativization is used frequently. Narrativization refers to the way of telling the story that provide acceptance, appropriateness or preferential behavior. In case of Westpac they use customers, partners, employees for the story used in report by which sustainability construct by narrative construction. Thus, narrativization legitimizes sustainability as strategic practice. For example, one of their customer explains his experience-

> “After a long career in the police force, Herb Smith returned to his hometown of Wellington in country NSW with a business idea: he would take his grandmother’s lemon myrtle biscuits to the world. With the support of Westpac, Herb is bringing his dream to life. With Qantas as his first major corporate customer Herb is planning to grow his Dreamtime Tuka business while strengthening his community’s foundations.”

ThaiOil also use to explore all their initiative towards sustainability. They describe each and every initiative they took. For example,

> “Besides the cultivation of coral reefs by researchers from Chulalongkorn University and the process during nursery phase done by the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources to make healthy coral larvae, Thaioil Group also focuses on raising awareness of natural resource conservation, particularly marine resources”

In case of Nestle narrativization occurs when they wrote their projects towards sustainability as a provider of sustainability. In their texts, they are the story teller. By stating about each and every initiative and their progress which are the root of the creating shared values can be seen as narrativization. For example,

> “Nestlé became a founding member of the California Water Action Collaborative (CWAC), a platform for stakeholders to work together on projects designed to improve water security in California for people, business, agriculture and nature.”

Abott and Stcokland also did the same story telling process for legitimating their initiatives. For example, Stockland explored one their initiative towards innovation and optimization of natural resources as such,

> “Previously under pine plantation and grazing, the land of Stockland’s Aura residential development was becoming dominated by pine tree regrowth, melaleuca and casuarina regeneration, with a high fuel load of introduced weeds and grasses. A controlled
All companies narrativization tells the same pattern of struggle. It seems that the main attention is on heroic-narrativization. All the companies use their heroic initiatives that would influence other and also explore their potential concern regarding sustainability strategy. The companies glorify this story by focusing on the issue that value most to the stakeholder. In particular, companies focus on the issues that make them leaders among their own community. Their story emerges the win-win situation in adopting sustainability strategy. The above discursive legitimization strategy for sustainability practice implies the purpose of the message they are sending to the stakeholder through publishing sustainability report. In case of Westpac moralization and narrativization play the dominant strategies.

**Discussion:**
The intent of the study is to examine the construction of sustainability based on a thematic aspect from the perspective of multinational companies who work in the global corporate environment. This was done by textual analysis of sustainability reports focusing on the construction and production of sustainability strategy and on the examination of the discursive struggle over sustainability that emerges from business goals and social claims. Based on the text analysis, it was found that sustainability strategy entails all aspects of rhetoric strategy with embedded complexity (Reinecke et al. 2012). This embedded complexity makes sustainability strategy different from other business strategy (Epstein et al. 2010). This strategy involves long-term planning, multiple stakeholder engagement, justification by financial key performance indicators, quantifiable progress and initiatives for being a good social and global corporation which is the reflection of the holistic purpose of sustainability (Broman et al. 2010). The construction emphasizes the importance of sustainability strategy for an organization to gain in success in business. This strategy makes the business responsible that makes value or differentiate them from others in the industry or competitiveness in the global competitive environment.
The discourse of sustainability strategy involves different stakeholders. It emphasizes the external stakeholders, specifically investors. All the firms explicitly claim that their sustainability is the result of external pressure. Such external pressure functions as soft rules for the business that is working in the global environment. But sustainability research on business describes the integration process (Lee, 2008; van Bommel, 2011) that ignores the power position of stakeholders for making sustainability strategy. This discourse discovers the soft rules that influence the organization to involve in sustainability strategy. By using long term time framing for sustainability strategy can be lead the product innovation and technology innovation. This also motivate to achieve competitive advantage on the business area. Consequently, gaining competitive advantage give the space to lead the industry towards sustainability. Combining all the reports it is also clear that sustainability strategy embraces most of the requirements for being an industry leader. This discourse describes organization as inspirational roles to lead the business
society by changing and improving new products, product differentiation, technology innovation and proactive collaboration with external partners (Boiral et al. 2014).

The discursive construction of sustainability strategy is based on instrumental view, since the performance of sustainability is strictly reported by numerical view. That means, relationship among economic profit, social issue and environmental issues is very hierarchical ways, that economic profit sets the agenda of responsibility towards society and the environment (Silvius et al. 2012, Stead & Stead, 2000). The responsibilities are quantified and numerically measured. Therefore the discourse of sustainability advocates the relationship between sustainability and financial performance is be positive and justification of this positive relation is not borne out by conclusions from academic research such as Boiral et al. (2014). Further sustainability can be measured and assess through the disclosure. The motivation of using financial indicators and progress in numbers indicates that global business is increasingly adopted the environmental and social responsibility according to international standards and guideline. Such approach also does not get the point of motives and values for the business behavior towards sustainability. Rather sustainability become as usual business strategy that support the core business strategy (Hart, 1995).

The construction also considers the historical position of sustainability strategy within the business. Sustainability strategy has been adopted for long time such as five years and this long-term timeframe emphasize the caring and responsibility corporate behavior toward society and environment (Lee, 2008). Because time framing makes the firms more responsible, active and committed actors in the global business environment.

Sustainability strategy as a discourse is combined with a set of established discourses such as economic, societal and environmental discourses. The finding is pointing out sustainability strategy claims as sustainability in its three dimensions; economic, social and environmental. Corporations are engaged in different discourses that influence sustainability strategy. The discourses are overlapping to each other and the emphasize depends on the perception of sustainability strategy. But most of the company focus on community discourse that means social oriented discourse promote the sustainability strategy. This finding in line with Parker’s (1992) discourse that refer to other discourses. Moreover, this also helps to see sustainability strategy in other’s lens. The other discourses define sustainability strategy in business terms. In this study community or people oriented discourse has more influence in sustainability discourse that makes the company change or shape the society and business in global context. This also create rooms for leading the global business towards sustainability strategy as practice (Livesey, 2001).

Further it is important to underscore that sustainability strategy tends to be incorporated with all social and environmental aspects, the primary focus is on the economic profit (Burchell & Cook, 2006). The coherent meaning of the sustainability strategy is that economic profit plays dominant role in the sustainability strategy of the companies working in the global corporate environment. Moreover, the sustainability strategy in global corporate context, is more ambitious strategy which is surrounding by the aim of doing profit. Additionally, the construction of sustainability strategy
encompasses an interesting theme which is the movement towards technology innovation and product innovation (Hart, 1995). This technology and product innovation leads to gain competitive advantage over the industry.

The second finding is to investigate discursive legitimation of sustainability strategy in MNC context (Eero Vaara et al. 2006). Here CDA provides a useful approach that critically analyze controversial MNC strategy (Eero Vaara & Tienari, 2008). In particular, the central role of discursive strategies those suggested by Eero Vaara et al. (2006) have been demonstrated as concrete means through which complex strategies are legitimized. It is important since it helps to see the senses of legitimacy that has been created and manipulated at textual level.

Here authorization legitimized industry leader as a responsible leader and also it is found that authority arises in different way. Various establishment of authority require more investigation (Vaara et al. 2006). Rationalization construct the functionality of sustainability strategy and emphasize the benefits of adopting such strategy. Moralization legitimizes the ethical position of the company on the report. It is found that sustainability strategy by itself belongs to the moral values. Narrativization and normalization makes the sustainability strategy as part of the business operation. It seems that legitimization strategies weight differently that define certain ideas more legitimized. For example, moralization is more suitable on the construction of sustainability strategy. Moralization appears in each and every text of the reports. This will contribute to change the corporate behavior as industry sustainable leaders (Vaara, 2002). Normalization strategy makes the sustainability strategy more inherent part of the organization. Narrativization strategy construct moral tales for legitimating organization’s strategic practice that may idealize organization as sustainability industry leader. Therefore, narrative is the powerful legitimating strategy (Eero Vaara et al. 2006).

To summing up discursive construction of a strategy such as sustainability in reports convey self-understanding in reporting and limited reflexivity is required to develop a form of knowledge. Parker’s (1992) discourse dynamics is careful to construct discourse without denying materiality such as physical presence of corporate personnel. In this study, construction of sustainability strategy of business corporation is ambiguous and complex in reports that emerges the discursive analysis. Moreover, Eero Vaara’s et al. (2006) discursive model helps to understand the complexity, ambiguities and contradictions of legitimation process that easily ignored in traditional legitimating approaches (Eero Vaara et al 2006).

**Conclusion:**

The objective of this study is to increase understanding of discursive construction of sustainability strategy and legitimating strategies in sustainability reports in MNC context. This was done through closed reading of text in the reports. In text studied, there are several elements in the discursive construction of sustainability strategy. First discursive construction of sustainability
strategy consists of a set of different elements. Companies claims sustainability strategy is becoming an integral part of their business. The inherent purpose of strategy is to leverage economic profit. In contrasts this, companies reveal that their sustainability engagement is the result of external stakeholders’ concern. It is seen that companies’ responses are reactive results of a specific problem regarding sustainability that has been raised by stakeholder.

Secondly companies frame their sustainability strategy in broader terms in their reports. They discursively construct as a responsible industry leaders by contributing to the society through their core business activities and following the international standards which are created by other social actors. This seems that both business and social and international organization have similar interest in sustainability issues. However most of the discursive elements create a commitment to the society that are following by the companies but discursively this also acknowledge the boundaries of corporate capabilities.

Thirdly by collaboration and partnership companies shifts their responsibilities with other social actors. In addition, companies highlight their responsible activities in their reports that also have great impact and influence on other business within the industry. Furthermore, companies are discursively seeking an influential and responsible leader by taking initiative to address global challenges and thus encourage the corporate behavior changes by setting up an example.

The discursive knowledge of sustainability strategy portray company as an active actor who lead the societal change through business boundaries. Thus, companies discursive struggle has been observed to balance different expectation of different stakeholders. Particularly in text companies combine all relevant elements of sustainability as strategy to address a wide range of audience and interest group by highlighting the motivation and initiative toward sustainability.

The finding also provides that global reporting standards and joint initiatives harmonize the sustainability strategy that contribute to reach a common theme of sustainability. However, companies are the one broader entity that are struggling in discursive construction of sustainability strategy but on the other hand by partnership and following global standards, it can argue that there has been continuous process of evaluation to reach a common theme throughout the global business.

The significance of this study is that less used methodology such as discourse analysis has been adopted and the results also extend the current sustainability discussion in MNC context in order to understanding of global sustainability. This finding also carries the managerial contribution towards sustainability. In particular, how companies in global context construct their sustainability concern through reports. By exploring influential and potential text in their reports, this study illustrates the communication process of sustainability to their wide audience.
**Limitation and future research:**

This study sought to enhance the understanding of sustainability strategy in MNC context. Particular focus is diversified industry leaders to gather all element of discursive sustainability strategy. The scope of this research is limited with the number of companies’ reports in order to allow the understanding of common elements of sustainability strategy. Also, it is limited to take the companies from an investment rating agency. For future research, it could be interesting to take sustainability strategy in different context within discourse analysis. For example, it would be interesting to find different discourse in cultural analysis or critically find the discourses within industry and so on.
Reference:

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