



## Communication Analysis on Environmental Sustainability in the Imaginary of the Spanish Energy Sector

Eva Citlali Martínez Estrella<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** Nowadays it is common to hear the terms climate change, sustainable development and green consumption in the advertisements of different brands or in social networks. In fact, organizations and individuals continuously express a concern for the protection of the planet, so that citizens also demand a commitment to sustainability from companies. Therefore, starting from the dimension of environmental sustainability, this research analyzes the corporate discourse of Spanish traditional energy companies in order to know how they express their environmental sustainability and commitment to climate change mitigation. It also seeks to know the factors that influence customers when contracting their services. To achieve the objectives, a content analysis of the corporate discourse is applied through a review of sustainability reports and websites; as well as an analysis of advertising spots; the selected sample corresponds to 2019. In addition, an online survey was applied in Spain in order to know the vision of users. With these data, the imaginary that exists about environmental sustainability is constructed. The study considered three companies: Iberdrola, Endesa and Naturgy, which are of Spanish origin, are part of the IBEX 35 and, according to the Brand Finance ranking (2020), represent 5% of global investment in the energy sector.

**Keywords:** environmental sustainability; advertising; corporate discourse; energy companies; imaginary.

## Análisis de la comunicación sobre sostenibilidad medioambiental en el imaginario del sector energético español

**Resumen.** Actualmente es común escuchar los términos de cambio climático, desarrollo sostenible y consumo verde en los anuncios de diferentes marcas o en redes sociales. Incluso, las organizaciones y los individuos manifiestan continuamente una preocupación por la protección del planeta, por lo que los ciudadanos también exigen un compromiso de sostenibilidad a las compañías. Por eso, partiendo de la dimensión de sostenibilidad medioambiental, la presente investigación analiza el discurso corporativo de las compañías españolas de energía tradicional para así conocer la forma en que expresan su sostenibilidad medioambiental y el compromiso con la mitigación del cambio climático. También se busca conocer los factores que influyen a los clientes al contratar sus servicios. Para conseguir los objetivos, se aplica un análisis de contenido del discurso corporativo a través de una revisión de los informes de sostenibilidad y los sitios webs; al igual que se analizan en los spots publicitarios; la muestra seleccionada corresponde al 2019. Además, se aplicó una encuesta online en España para conocer la visión de los usuarios. Así, con estos datos se construye el imaginario que existe sobre

<sup>1</sup> Communicator, teacher and researcher on digital communication and sustainability issues. She studied Communication and Digital Media at Tecnológico de Monterrey Mexico City, with a major in International Communication at Jönköping University, Sweden (2015). Master's Degree in organizational communication at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (2020). She is currently working on her PhD studies at the Faculty of Information Sciences of the UCM.

E-mail: [evacmart@ucm.es](mailto:evacmart@ucm.es)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6599-1050>

la sostenibilidad medioambiental. En el estudio se consideran tres compañías: Iberdrola, Endesa y Naturgy, las cuales son de origen español, forman parte del IBEX 35 y de acuerdo con el ranking de Brand Finance (2020), representan el 5% de la inversión mundial en el sector energético.

**Palabras clave:** sostenibilidad medioambiental; publicidad; discurso corporativo; compañías energéticas; imaginario.

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## 1. Introduction

Climate change is the weather pattern change and is related to changes in the oceans, land, and ice sheets at the poles that occur over decades (Australian Academy of Science, 2015, p. 6). Climate change is also a change in Earth's climate. This could be a change in Earth's usual temperature, or it could be a change in where rain and snow usually fall on Earth. Weather can change in just a few hours. Climate takes hundreds or even millions of years to change (Nasa, 2017). Meanwhile, climate emergency is a term derived from this climate crisis and consists of the unexpected acceleration of global warming (Ripple et al., 2019). Climate emergency was first declared on April 29, 2019 in Wales, UK, making Europe the first continent to declare climate emergency (BBC, 2019).

Besides, human activity is producing greenhouse gas emissions at a record high, with no signs of slowing down because billions of tons of CO<sub>2</sub> are released into the atmosphere every year as a result of coal, oil, and gas production (UN, 2021). Also, indirectly, the large volume of plastic waste generated by humans, which increases the generation of greenhouse gases (Amico et al, 2020).

Climate change and climate emergency are two different phenomena, which differ in their cause, because the former refers to natural causes and the latter is the result of human action.

For this reason, these facts have been highlighted in the media for several years, encouraging citizens, companies and governments to take measures that support the care of natural resources and the reduction of pollution. If people don't adopt any ecological conscience, temperatures could rise to above three degrees Celsius by 2100, causing further irreversible damage to our ecosystems (UN, 2021).

In this context, companies in the energy sector become polluting agents, which increases the need to know how to reduce their impact and protect the planet. The dissemination of sustainable management is intended to strengthen the organization's relations with its different stakeholders. Sustainability in the business sector requires organizations to take into account biophysical effects and, based on them, to plan the reduction of their environmental impact, reducing their environmental footprint (Khan, 1995; Goodland, 1995; Ekins, 1999). However, sometimes talking

about the protection of the planet does not provide useful information to guide consumers to take concrete actions.

Therefore, the question that arises is to know what the advertising discourse of traditional electric energy companies is and whether they really promote environmental care. It is also interesting to find out if these environmental communication efforts have a direct influence on customers when contracting electricity and gas services.

The aim of this research is to find out how Spanish energy companies communicate externally their commitment to environmental care in order to establish the imaginary they build in relation to climate change and environmental sustainability. Three Spanish energy companies are used for the analysis: Iberdrola, Endesa and Naturgy, which are part of the IBEX 35 and, according to the Brand Finance ranking (2020), represent 5% of global investment in the energy sector.

## **2. Approach to environmental communication**

### ***2.1. Precisions of environmental sustainability***

Environmental sustainability corresponds to one of the three dimensions of sustainable development, which, according to academics, international organizations and historical evolution, is defined as “meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN, 2020). The three axes that comprise it seek a balance within the growth of society, this implies a change of attitudes in ethical, educational, conscience, responsibility and above all, a commitment on the part of the population. The idea of sustainable development is to improve people’s quality of life (López, López-Hernández and Acona, 2005; Theis and Tomkin, 2012).

The purpose of environmental sustainability is to provide a harmonious balance between human beings and the surrounding nature, making this type of relationship last over time. Therefore, this axis of sustainability focuses on the preservation and protection of ecosystems and natural resources that are essential for human well-being; it places special interest in the care of water, the reuse of resources, the rational use of energy and fuels.

Khan (1995) emphasizes that environmental sustainability also implies encouraging an environmental culture that motivates the population to be aware of the need to care for the environment. These systems include the atmosphere, water and land use; all of them must be healthy. This means that their service capacity must be cared for and regenerated (Goodland, 1995; Ekins, 1999).

Consequently, the objective is to maintain the main sources of the global ecosystem that provide raw material inputs such as food, water, air, energy. “Excessive use of a capacity impairs its provision of life-supporting services. The protection of human life is the main reason why humans seek environmental sustainability” (Goodland, 1995, p.14). A balance needs to be maintained, because the depletion of natural capital is rarely reversible and there is no doubt that it has negative consequences such as species extinction, climate change and destruction of the biosphere. Sustainability in the business sector requires organizations and industries to engage

in production, internal management and marketing in a way that takes into account the biophysical impact they cause.

## ***2.2. Advertising and corporate communication: allies of environmental communication***

The management of corporate communication must be effectively aligned, because it transcends messages, defines processes and encompasses the behavior of the entity. It transmits externally and internally the information that represents the DNA of the organization (Van Riel, 1990; Östberg, 2007). For the goals of this research, corporate communication is considered as a process, which consists of “an integral communication system with a vision of the company that allows to meet business objectives, build the brand, corporate reputation and create economic value” (Van Riel and Fombrun 2007, p. 9).

Costa (1999), Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) have established that the mission, vision and corporate values are the basic elements of corporate communication, which has the tasks of 1) fulfilling the objectives previously established by the institution; 2) accentuating the corporate identity and 3) creating an integrating structure to link the various stakeholders and let them decide whether or not to become involved with the purpose of the organization. One way of generating interaction with the different audiences is through advertising and public relations actions.

The authors McQuarrie and Mick (1999), Hirschman (2003), Caro (2007), Eguizábal (2007) define that advertising speech has the capacity to guide people's thoughts and behaviors. In this sense, the aforementioned scholars claim that advertising is a communication tool that strengthens consumption. Advertising fulfills its objective when the receiver has memorized the message and thus, at the moment he/she must purchase a service or product, remembers the existence of the advertised object, or of a specific brand.

Talking about perception in advertising, we must mention elements such as the memorization of the message and its understanding by the audience. To achieve this, visual stimuli are required, such as color, type of images, narrative creativity, attractive aesthetics, even the appearance of the characters and the construction of the scenarios present (Caro, 2007; Eguizábal, 2007).

In the representation of environmental issues, Bienvenido León (2016) states that some environmental phenomena are complicated to portray, so a certain level of abstraction is required, such is the case of climate change. For this reason, some images have become icons of the subject, as the same are frequently used. For example, it is stated that there is a high probability that when talking about “climate change”, the first image that comes to mind is that of a polar bear on a block of drifting ice: “this image, repeated ad nauseam, has acquired a remarkable symbolic value, probably because of its ability to arouse emotions” (León, 2016, p. 28).

In order to communicate in an effective way, the environmental sustainability, Sheppard (2012) points out the 5 components that should be taken into account: 1) Clear: that it is easy to see and understand. 2) Reliable: that the representation is honest, balanced and verifiable. 3) Captivating: able to interest and involve the public. 4) Connected: linking environmental issues to people, places and contexts. 5) Feasible: practically achievable.

This promotion of sustainability involves the so-called environmental communication, which aims to produce changes in society towards more healthful habits that are less harmful to the environment; it has the objective of achieving social transformation (Aparicio, 2016). Currently, the Internet is the main media for this type of communication, because it favors the interaction and participation of environmental movements (Fernandez et al., 2011) and social networks, in particular, make possible the virality of messages (Wang and Zhuang, 2017). Social networks play a fundamental role in community awareness and education. These are used as communicative tools to participate in the discussion of climate issues and express what they are concerned about and consider most relevant as a way to contribute to the current environmental situation (Amico et al, 2020).

On the other hand, specifically the advertising spots of energy companies, Antón Álvarez and María Isabel Reyes (2011) state that in the last decade the ads have gone from wanting to visually impact to communicate other values of their organization, which are related to sustainability and care for the environment. Also, it is stated that Spanish energy companies seek to convey more content in their advertising in order to strengthen emotional ties with their audience. “By providing their advertising actions with greater depth of content, they become an example of advertisers that have adopted the so-called emotional advertising” (Álvarez and Reyes, 2011).

In this context, the consulting firm Everis (2020), conducted a study to determine the interests of the energy consumers in Spain, finding that energy companies are increasingly focused on the customer, but this transformation is not happening fast enough; customers are concerned about renewable energy, they are looking for ease of contracting in simple online processes and one of the most important attributes is to have a personalized service. In conclusion, the boundaries between energy and technology sectors are blurring, as companies expand their product offerings to become end-to-end providers.

### ***2.3. Construction of an environmental imaginary***

Imaginary corresponds to a category of consciousness that moves between the concepts of social representation, image and symbolic; the conjunction of the three makes the intersubjective construction of an imaginary possible. Thus, this goes beyond the representation of the denotative characteristics of the object or phenomenon (Ospina and Murcia, 2008). To achieve the expression of an imaginary, it is necessary to give meaning to an image, to know what it represents of reality. Based on the reflections of Castoriadis (1989), Manuel Baeza (2003) defined social imaginaries as mental constructions that are socially shared to give meaning to the practice of the world and to grant an existential sense. Consequently, any imaginary influences social functions.

Thus, over time companies in various sectors have used environmental iconography, which idealizes natural spaces and mostly usually evokes various adjectives, such as ecological, activism, 100% natural, organic, clean energy, renewable, recycling; just as green color screens appear, shades of brown and some pantones in blue. “Nature usually reflected by advertising is an allegory of the lush and sometimes semi-wild garden, an abstract scenario that due to its iconic simplification is easy to use for advertising communication” (Jimenez, 2017). For this reason, talking about environmental protection already has a socially constructed imaginary, which is be-

tween natural landscapes, reforestation actions, biodiversity care and disseminates a search to reduce pollution (Bermejo, 2014). However, in this imaginary there is little knowledge of scientific data or indexes that support the information related to the protection of the environment.

The environmental imaginary is not a new feature in advertising communication, because several companies, regardless of their sector of origin, have used the global iconography on environmental sustainability to idealize their products or services, referring to their concern about this issue. Even, since 2006 the number of green advertisements has tripled; now the idea of nature is considered an important element within advertising (López et al, 2008; Jiménez, 2017).

On that other hand, there are several studies carried out in Spain on the environmental awareness of the population; for example, research conducted by the Sociological Research Center (CIS) (2010); Brands with value (2020) and the 2019 Barometer conducted by the Centro Reina Sofia about Adolescence and Youth (2019). In these works that analyze the adult population and young Spaniards, it is found that citizens have ascending environmental values, because most of their actions are not sustainable (CIS, 2010). Specifically, the research done by the CIS showed that nature was not perceived as a resource, but as a delicate balance (7.1 on a scale of 10). Likewise, there was a close relationship between nature and the beautiful or harmonious (6.2 on a continuum of 10), (CIS, 2010). The main problem was that nature was perceived within a holistic world, not as a fragment necessary to continue human life.

It is also highlighted that 58% of Spanish citizens with children under 20 years old nowadays believe that their children will buy brands that are authentic and sustainable (21 Gramos, 2020) and according by Barometer 2019, 7 out of 10 young Spaniards (74.3% women vs. 70.7% men) affirm that the defense of the environment is the first social cause worth taking risks for and being part of movement in social networks (Rubio et al., 2019).

As a result, building an imaginary requires the conjunction of attractive aesthetics, semantic strength, and images allusive to the concept. This combination not only creates the ideals of sustainability and climate change, but also generates some kind of link with the audience, because it starts from their experience with the reality in which they live.

### 3. Methodology

The methodological approach of this research is exploratory and relies on non-probabilistic samples with quantitative and qualitative data, where the variables of interest have been studied to meet the following objectives:

- To find out how Spanish energy companies communicate externally their commitment to environmental care in order to establish the imaginary they construct in relation to climate change and environmental sustainability.
- To evaluate whether the communication of environmental sustainability influences the contracting of services offered by Spanish energy companies.

Within the exploratory stage, an online survey was applied that was in circulation for 16 days (May 25– June 9, 2020), in which there were 160 responses coming from

9 Autonomous Communities of Spain; men and women between 20 and 65 years of age participated. The survey link was active in open forums related to sustainability and the universe of the sample was also obtained through groups in What'sApp at work and the Complutense University of Madrid.

The questionnaire was focused on knowing the degree of knowledge and understanding about the environmental sustainability actions carried out by these companies and to know if they have influence in the contracting of the services they provide. The language used was colloquial and close, avoiding over-generalization of terms. The requirements that were contemplated to select the survey sample were:

- 1.) Residents in Spain with at least two years of seniority (minimum as of 2018).
- 2.) That the participant was responsible for choosing the company providing electricity and gas services in his/her home/office.
- 3.) The electricity and gas services had to correspond to traditional energy, not be supplied by a renewable energy company.

In parallel, a content analysis was conducted to determine the components that disseminate environmental sustainability within the corporate discourse of the three selected companies. The following materials produced by the three selected companies were analyzed: Iberdrola, Endesa and Naturgy.

Table 1. Materials analyzed

Company	Sustainability reports	Corporate website	No. of spots broadcast from January 1 to December 31, 2019.
Iberdrola	Sustainability Report 2019	<a href="http://www.iberdrola.com">www.iberdrola.com</a>	23
Endesa	Sustainability Report 2019	<a href="http://www.endesa.com">www.endesa.com</a>	22
Naturgy	Corporate Responsibility Report 2019	<a href="http://www.naturgy.com">www.naturgy.com</a>	20

Source: Own elaboration

The selected sample is from 2019; the advertising speech in the spots produced by the three companies and the corporate communication present in their websites and sustainability reports are analyzed. Both materials are chosen because a corporate discourse can be composed of visual codes that arise from the organization's communicative capacity and social use.

The spots used were broadcast from January 1 to December 31, 2019 and appeared on national television, websites, institutional social networks and in cinema. Six videos from each company were evaluated, which were obtained from the Mosaic 2 space of the [Infoadex.com](http://Infoadex.com) platform.

For the review of these contents, the units of analysis described below were created, established thanks to the theoretical review and the conceptualization of the key terms: environmental sustainability and climate change.

Table 2. Description of the units of analysis

Unit of analysis	Description	Variables
Language management	To know what the focus of the information is, what is the use of the words.	– Optimistic – Neutral – Pessimistic
Tone of speech	It refers to the intention of the communication.	– Informative – Educational – Commercial – Emotional
Representative words	Explicit mention in the discourse of words or terms related to environmental sustainability and climate change.	– Related to sustainability. – Related to climate change.
Inclusion of verbs	The activities carried out to reduce the environmental effect produced by the company are described.	– Global actions – Corporate actions – Individual actions
Environmental risks/ impact	The approach taken in mentioning the risks generated by the company's activities, the impact on health, the environment and ecosystems.	– Calming – Neutral – Alarmist

Source: Own elaboration

Through content analysis, the words that the companies have instituted in their organization, which represent environmental sustainability and their respective imaginaries, are known. With this, it is possible to determine what is behind the words. It should be noted that for the review of the spots, two units of analysis were added to this list:

1. Nature– appearance of natural landscapes or scenarios that would show biodiversity.
2. Colors– which refer to nature or have become symbols of it, such as shades of brown, green, blue and yellow.

Once all the data was collected, the analysis of the information was carried out in order to report the findings and conclusions of this research.

#### 4. Results

Thanks to the review of corporate discourse, it was found that the three companies report the environmental risk they have, but without going into statistical details; although the websites do describe the actions and projects, they have to join in the fight against the climate emergency. When referring to climate change solutions, no mention is made of individual actions that can be carried out by the clients themselves. The following table shows the keywords that correspond to each unit of analysis.



Table 3. Analysis of the corporate discourse of energy companies

Analysis unit	Iberdrola	Endesa	Naturgy
Language management	Optimistic	Optimistic	Optimistic
Tone	Informative	Informative	Emotional
Representative words	Model and sustainable energy Renewable energies	Sustainable, open and digital energy Energy transition	Sustainable profitability Environmentally friendly Energy transition
Inclusion of verbs	Digital transformation	Building a healthier energy model. Digitalization	Contributing to global engagement
Environmental risk/ impact	Reassuring	Reassuring	Reassuring

Source: Own elaboration

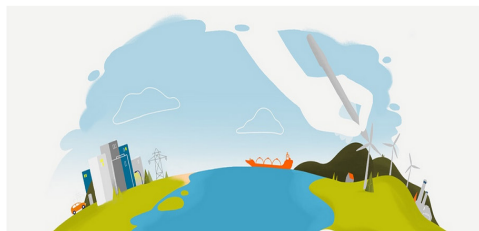
It can be seen that Iberdrola talks about complying with a sustainable model, thinking about the three axes: social, economic and environmental. Similarly, it specifies its proposed solution through a digital transformation; however, saying “healthier energy model” is ambiguous. In addition, to create a sense of belonging to the planet, one of the corporate values was chosen to be: “integrating force”, which also works to unite the organization with its stakeholders.

Fig 1. Visual representation of climate change Iberdrola Endesa Naturgy



**Contribuimos a la lucha contra el cambio climático**

Cambio climático y transición energética



Sources: Iberdrola, Endesa y Naturgy, 2020.

Endesa, for its part, has as a proposed solution in its vision, to make energy open and digital; this desire is reflected in its corporate values, because innovation is one of them. In no component is communicated the belonging with the planet and to refer to the protection of the environment the words “overcoming challenges” stand out, which do not clarify the actions that are carried out.

Naturgy’s corporate speech explicitly mentions “care for the environment” in its three components, and it emphasizes the value of respect. Naturgy seeks to have a closer communication with its users since its discourse tends to be emotional. The company disseminates its concern for executing corporate actions under social values; additionally, it conveys complicity with its customer.

The tone of the speeches in the three companies has an informative approach, showing that there is no tangible concern on the part of the companies to promote and educate environmental awareness among their users.

As regards the semantic part, similar verbs are used. Iberdrola and Endesa use the verb: to contribute, but with a different approach, because the former expresses that it has an aspiration to help, while Endesa assures (in plural) that it participates in the fight. Naturgy lists a series of infinitive verbs to explain its environmental commitment; for example: “to support international climate change negotiations and market mechanisms that drive the development of the most appropriate technologies at each stage of the energy transition” (Naturgy, 2020).

Furthermore, the main distinction that exists between the communications of each company is in the visual part. While the companies make use of nature landscapes, photographs of biodiversity and illustrations alluding to it, Naturgy wants to strengthen the relationship with its customer and evoke that this stakeholder is an important part of the organization, giving it prominence. Most of its illustrations depict people working as a team to take care of the environment.

Fig 2. Naturgy gives prominence to its customers



Source: Naturgy, 2020.

The Iberdrola commercials are also dominated by the color green, and the most frequently shown on screen is a sport. Wind energy is given prominence; as for the characters, an attempt is made to balance between men and women. Endesa’s storyline is more humorous and combines humor with the presentation of its services.

Naturgy is the one that presents more creative narratives and seeks to make a difference, because it uses animations instead of actors and does not make use of dialogues, but only musicalizes and combines the text on the screen. This decision may be risky because it demands more attention from the audience, since they must necessarily pay attention to understand the information transmitted. In addition, since March (2019) Naturgy put into circulation a series of short videos asking what you would ask your energy company, this action translates into a search for empathy with its customers, to let them know that the company adapts to their needs.

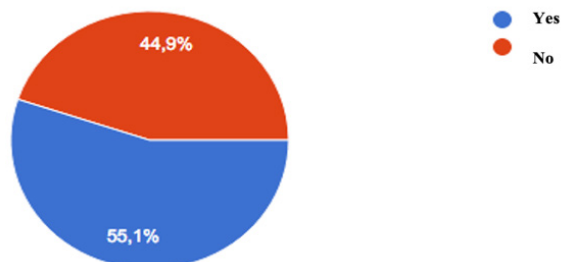
Fig 3. The fantastic world of Naturgy



Source: Naturgy, 2020.

As for the results of the survey, it was online, and the link was active for 16 days; the period was from May 25 to June 9, 2020. The universe of the sample corresponds to: men and women from 20 to more than 60 years old, Spanish residents. 95% of those surveyed were professionals in the fields of teaching, journalism, communication, industrial engineering, systems engineering, architects, lawyers, accountants, pilots, health personnel, among other professions. Nine Spanish Autonomous Communities participated: Andalusia, Aragon, Castilla y Leon, Castilla de la Mancha, Catalonia, Extremadura, Madrid, La Rioja and Valencia. 52% corresponds to people living in Madrid, followed by 19% in the Valencian Community; 16% in Catalonia; 5% live in La Rioja and the remaining 8% are distributed evenly among five Autonomous Communities.

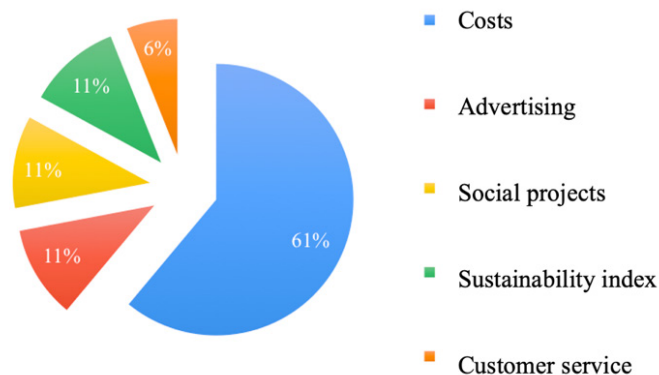
Fig 4. Do you check whether the company is sustainable before contracting the service?



Source: Own elaboration.

Despite the fact that more than half of the respondents say that they check the sustainability indexes before contracting services, it is striking that when asked what specific actions on environmental care they are aware of, only 28.8% had an answer, and of those, some were ambiguous phrases such as “has sustainable strategies” or “seeks to curb climate change”. Of 45 responses reviewed, 18 correspond to a specific action taken by the company in favor of environmental sustainability. The actions most frequently recalled belong to Iberdrola and Naturgy; such is the case of the elimination of paper in invoices and the use of clean energy through wind farms.

Fig 5. Which factor determines the contracting of the service?



Source: Own elaboration

Based on the results reviewed in the survey, it was found that the decision to contract the service depends on the tariff plan offered by the company, followed by customer service; according to the respondents, advertising is the least important element. The review of environmental indicators or the contribution to sustainable development appears as an element of medium importance. As for the generational block, the response was similar across all age groups.

Finally, the findings for constructing the imaginary were determined by asking the respondent to write down the first thing he or she thought of when hearing environmental sustainability. The words with the most repetitions were renewable/green energy (33); green (20); protection of the planet (17); Greta Thunberg (13); nature (12); environmental care (10) and pollution reduction (8).

As for the establishment of the imaginary, it has not shown major modifications in comparison with previous studies. The main evocations generated by the environment are: natural spaces or landscapes, green color, easy ecological actions such as planting trees, recycling, and the need to take care of the planet. Nevertheless, the two new elements considered in this imaginary are the presence of activist characters such as Greta Thunberg or Al Gore, who can be considered icons of the cause, and also, people now have an idea about the production of clean or renewable energies, since a recurrent reference was to wind energy. Although there is greater clarity in the factors that refer to renewable energies, the awareness that the population can have about individual actions that really add to the fight against climate change is still weak.

## 5. Discussion

According to the review of the corporate discourse of the websites, it can be interpreted that the purpose of the three companies (communicatively) is to be part of the energy transformation and to disseminate that their contribution to environmental protection is found in the reduction of gas emissions and investment in renewable energies. All three adopt the term “energy transition” in their corporate discourse and position themselves as leaders or key players in it. In addition, they claim that digitalization processes contribute to the reduction of pollution and the mitigation of climate change. However, a unique identity message is not distinguished, because they use the same words within their mission, vision and corporate values, as is the case of sustainable, digitalization and innovation, to mention a few.

On the other hand, the discourse used in the spots is traditional, since narrative techniques are not mixed, storytelling and testimonials taken from interviews are used. Iberdrola is the one that most communicates elements of environmental sustainability in its videos, because 100% of its videos express some element referring to the subject. Endesa includes the fewest factors related to environmental sustainability. In addition, Endesa and Iberdrola maintain a very similar visual style. In general, the three cases use a warm color palette, have a close language and seek to attract attention visually, because in the hierarchy of information, attention is focused on the characters in the spots.

Symbols that already exist on the subject are used by the corporate websites. One of the main representations of climate change is an arctic landscape, as pointed out by the authors Bienvenido León (2016) and Isidro Jiménez (2017), the dominant colors are blue and green, and to make reference to the environment, open shots of nature are appreciated. Similarly, according to Sheppard’s theory (2012) to effectively communicate sustainability 5 components are needed, of which only two are met: clarity and reliability. The spots lack captivating scenes that really involve the public, nor do they cause an emotional reaction.

Naturgy’s communication encourages the public to imagine other realities, while keeping a link with the reality of the users, because scenes of buildings, a kitchen and a shower are interspersed. The company’s facilities or energy generating plants are not visible. Using images of immense natural landscapes, power plants and even recreating scenes of castles and dragons, users do not immediately identify with the message and do not feel connected or linked to the company.

When we talk about an imaginary, we are referring to the fact that not only the population creates specific representations about the environment, but also energy companies have designed a semantic and visual universe that suits them to communicate their supposed commitment, without going into details about the environmental impact they cause, or the concrete results of the actions they lead.

Whenever is a direct reference to climate change, the three companies have an optimistic speech, seeking to position themselves as part of the solution and avoid transmitting an alarmist message. Climate change is presented as a global situation, but it is far from households and does not directly affect each user.

The imaginary built by energy companies alludes to landscapes rich in biodiversity, in which bright and warm colors stand out. There is no harmful human presence, but the resources of these spaces are used to generate energy. The corporate narrative manifests an optimistic environment, in which each actor fulfills 100% of

its commitment to protecting the planet. By not presenting images where ecosystems are harmed, an alarmist feeling is not conveyed. Nature is perceived as a resource; it is no longer just an element of contemplation as established by the CIS in the environmental awareness study carried out in 2010. Another similarity between the three companies is that there is no presence of images linking a joint work between the organization and its customers.

The positive view on environmental sustainability actions is reinforced by the inclusion of verbs that serve to support the companies' actions. This imagery is intended to reassure and gain the trust of customers.

Regarding the surveys, the companies state that they seek to raise people's awareness; however, in the exploration it is observed that people did not manage to remember the concrete activities, and neither is it clear what sustainability is. It was found that the most remembered actions are those that happen in everyday scenes at home, as is the case of eliminating paper when receiving the bill from your energy company. The public needs to have a reference that is not alien to them and can make it their own in their daily lives.

## 6. Conclusions

It was found in the imaginary constructed by the Spanish energy companies, that they use the system of values and symbols that exist socially around environmental issues; for this reason, their communications include universal elements that correspond to the structure of reality and the forms of representation.

Likewise, the imaginaries between the companies studied and the population have many coincidences in the visual and semantic representations; both allude to the energy transition. In this order of ideas, it stands out that energy companies are not identified as an agent that seriously damages the environment.

In consequence, organizations have the possibility of connecting with their public through concerns that are close and well known, as is the case of the climate emergency. However, in this accountability mechanism, information is sometimes found to be vague and tends to be expressed ambiguously; a fact that hinders the dissemination of the activities carried out by companies. Environmental issues can generate an emotional reaction in the public, which can be useful in fostering a closer relationship with users. Undoubtedly, an essential element in the discourse will be to maintain an optimistic language with a reassuring tone, thus minimizing the sense of alarm that may be caused by talking about certain issues.

Also, in order to achieve a complete understanding and acceptance of the message, it is necessary to use contexts that refer to the consumers' reality; in this way, cultural resources could be considered to facilitate identification and bonding with the organization. It is worth noting that the lack of significant differences between the discourses of the three companies affects their recognition among customers.

On the other hand, it is interesting that the planet care options conveyed in the corporate and advertising discourse really transform consumption patterns. However, in order to achieve this, informative and educational plans are required through which organizations work in coordination with their different stakeholders, especially with customers. These programs are currently non-existent or lacking in dissemination. It is necessary to find ways of translating this contribution into simple

and precise messages, so that promoting environmental sustainability assertively becomes a challenge for advertising speech.

One of the main limitations of this work is that having an exploratory approach and due to the limited access to a wider sample, the results of the survey cannot be considered representative; consequently, it cannot be catalogued as a leading research within environmental sustainability and climate change of the whole Spanish energy sector.

For future lines of research, it would be interesting to extrapolate this methodology to other industrial sectors, or to make a comparison between the advertising discourse of traditional energy companies and renewable energy companies.

To conclude, it is considered that advertising works as a communication tool, which should be a support for the strengthening of sustainable behaviors, because thanks to it, trust and awareness are generated with the collaborators. Therefore, it is intended that assertive communication of environmental sustainability becomes a social value of energy companies.

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