



The Discourse of Sustainability in Indonesian Higher Education Institution: Perspective of Media Rhetoric

Aditya Fahmi Nurwahid¹

¹ Universitas Negeri Surabaya, 60231 Surabaya, Indonesia
adityanurwahid@unesa.ac.id

Abstract. This study focuses on how Indonesian Higher Education Institutions communicate and construct the sustainability discourse through their web-based publication. Adopting mixed-methods approach, the research analyzed the rhetorical strategies identified by the Higher Education Institution, focusing on the use of *logos* (logical), *ethos* (ethical), and *pathos* (emotional) style. The results reveal that Indonesian institution predominantly use logical-ethical communication, with 69% of the media content appealing to logos and 20% to ethos. Pathos has less frequent of appearance, with 11% identification. This strategy evoke emotional responses and inspire behavioral change. All of these institutions rely on the scientific evidence and expert opinions to educate the public about sustainability issues. Every institution has different thematic focus and unique concerns related to the Sustainable Development Goals issues, reflecting every unique concerns and areas of expertise. This condition is also contributing to a comprehensive sustainability discourse. This study suggests a balanced rhetorical approach in engaging the public and promoting sustainable practices.

Keywords: Media Rhetoric, Sustainability, Higher Education Institution, Indonesia.

1 Introduction

The Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings are a global performance lists that represents universities based on the measures of United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[1]. Four main areas showed as indicators to calibrated the university performance: research, stewardship, outreach, and education. This phenomenon portrayed the importance of Higher Education Institutions to develop sustainable manners, as they are the key aspect in the social transformation[2]. In Indonesia, the higher education is setting off a more competitive field that aspires to the greatness in societal impact. Within the *Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*; teaching, research, and social empowerment, can all help to support the sustainability agenda in Higher Education Institution[3].

The agenda of sustainability, according to several researches, is not exclusively a 'trend' appreciated by common ground, but also representing the virtues of prudence, hope, and courage in society [4], [5]. It linked to the ethic that guided human activity,

and balanced all aspect of sustainable development, which could be seen based on economic, social, or environmental concern. Higher Education Institution in Indonesia are also left with a huge sustainability obligation, necessitating the implementation of sustainable strategies [6]. However, research found that sustainable practice in Indonesian institution is hampered by the rigid hierarchical and bureaucratic system. Still, it found that Higher Educations agent (lecturers, students, administration) had lack of awareness and commitment, also still the lack of definition of short and long-term policies inside the institution [7].

This study brought the assumption that Higher Education Institution had the social responsibility, as they create a ‘brain print’ they leave, not only for the *civitas academica* but also for broader society. The institution plays a decisive role in the construction of sustainability meaning, also communicate the risks and crises that concerned on this agenda. Sustainability is a multifaceted topic and the discourse are often disseminated by Higher Education Institution as the communicators. Its further confirmed by previous research that scientific articles from higher education came as one of the most Important mediums for communicating sustainability-related knowledge to people [8]. It also connecting the Higher Education Institution with SGD 4. The intermediary role of scientific paper and articles as a mass media channel also not just informing, but also influencing public sentiments [9].

Consequently, the important role of Higher Education Institution as primary communicator in the public entails a significant responsibility, especially the communicative responsibility of *how* the issue is communicated to broader society. The presented study aimed to analyzed how the Higher Education Institution construct and communicate the sustainability discourse through their owned media. This research investigated the sustainability-focused content that published by the SDG centers at the top five Higher Education Institution in Indonesia, as per THE Impact Ranking 2023 – University of Indonesia, Airlangga University, Gadjah Mada University, IPB University, and Bandung Institute of Technology [10]. Using the qualitative content and rhetoric analysis, this article discussed more than just the discourse picture on *what* is communicated related to SDGs agenda but primarily *how* the sustainability issues is communicated – covers what goals, strategies, and rhetoric styles that are used to influence public perception.

This study provided insights on how the Higher Education Institution carry out their responsibility as in communicating, discussing, and promoting sustainable development goals, also highlighting the opportunities and risks of applying different rhetorical strategies in scientific publication to advocate for sustainability related issues. Addressing this dimensions from higher educational perspective contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical implementation, underscoring significant role of Higher Education Institution play in advancing the sustainable development agenda.

1.1 Sustainable Development as an Issue

It is imperative to provide concise definitions of sustainable development in this article, to establish a clear conceptual framework for research discussion.

The discourse of sustainability has changed significantly, especially in the last of 1980s. The term sustainability become mainstreamed as a fundamental concept for a 'new balance' between the ecosystem and the society. Broadly known, the sustainability definition is based on the formula of United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (UN-WCED) that "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" [11]. This definition is followed with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which have been translated 'from theory into practice' by educational institution, political agency, Non-governmental Organization (NGO) and companies as the guiding principle related to concrete measures of sustainability, also towards the achievement of sustainable development.

In the context of Higher Education Institution, their fundamental role as communicators *of, about,* and for sustainable discourse making them as relevant actors in sustainability debate. The practicability and concrete concept of sustainability is becoming a more popular debate in society, including various normative ideas such as the responsibility and protection for the future, the need of all-round societal engagement. Furthermore, the choice of communication channels used to advance the sustainability discourse is crucial. The challenge lies in recognizing that sustainability issue appeared as just a normative frameworks referenced by society, but merely concrete states which offering guidance on direction and reflection across various of public domains [12]. Following the grow of influence of SDGs in Higher Education Institution's impact ranking, , there appears to be a consensus understanding between the institutions regarding the design of sustainability, its foundational metrics, and underlying values, which needs public debate and negotiation. This will be discussed in more comprehensive in the subsequent section.

1.2 Higher Education Institution and Sustainability

Higher Education Institution are more than just a place for study and getting degree certificate. It becomes one of the central source of information for various knowledge, including the socio-ecological issue, and contributed to understanding the interrelation of many social and ecological system [13]. In Indonesia, within the *Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*, the Higher Education Institution's interest in sustainability-related topics increased significantly from 2000s, as multiple studies have shown [14]. Higher Education Institution are expected to fulfill their role to explain and inform the public through critique and controlling. which in several research showed that it activate public engagement and raise awareness for underrepresented issues. The institution also could be understood as a social system that generate values and construct meaning for societal orientation by establishing norms for society. Also, through their owned communication channel, Higher Education Institution also carry the responsibility to interpreting the social reality, voicing criticism and addressing concerns in their public discourse. The responsibility of Higher Education Institution is manifested in their 'brain print' on the public perception.

Beside the media industry, the Higher Education Institution also had the 'agenda-setting' as they are being able to leave a 'brain print' in the middle of public. This theory describe that Higher Education Institutions' owned media had the topic-setting

function. The issue become socially relevant to the public in line with the more prominently and frequently the institution responds to the issue. In sustainability-related issue, for example, several researches have shown that that public concern grows about inclusive education or environmental problem as the education institution attention about these issues grows, by their scientific paper and academic articles.

As communicators *of*, *about*, and *for* sustainable development goals, Higher Education Institution can indeed act as a channel through which “information can be amplified before reaching the public”, especially *how* they articulate the stance on on sustainability related issues, which should be a critical element in shaping the institutional agenda. This study aims to investigate how Higher Education institution disseminate the information about sustainability its related through their owned media.

2 Methods

The present study aimed to analyze and comprehend how Higher Education Institution carries their responsibility as a primary communicator *of*, *about* and *for* sustainability and how they construct sustainability issue through their publication webpage. To achieve this objective, there are 75 publications related to the five highest-ranked universities on THE Impact Ranking 2023 that have been analyzed.

Table 1. The Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings 2023 [10]

Global rank	Name	Best scores by rank
20	University of Indonesia	SDGs 2, 1, 8, 17
101-200	Airlangga University	SDGs 1, 5, 6, 17
101-200	Gadjah Mada University	SDGs 8, 9, 7, 17
101-200	IPB University	SDGs 8, 2, 1, 17
201-300	Bandung Institute of Technology	SDGs 9, 7, 6, 17

The five institution that were chosen for the analysis have been also the best five universities in Indonesia. Every of them had the SDGs center that published special issue article weekly related on sustainability during the first and second quartal of 2024. The period is also related with the third phase of Indonesia SDGs’ Roadmap [15]. The sample thus included $n=75$ online articles, 17 contents from every institution that seems appropriate for the aim of the presented study.

This study examined the communication strategies of the top five ranked Higher Education Institution regarding the Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on both content and rhetorical strategy. Adopted content analysis as the analytical tools, this article was conducted in two phases. Initially this research is performing qualitative content analysis in all the sample of articles. An inductive approach was implemented to enables a systematic and theory-driven analysis [16]. To implement the inductive approach, the coding and the context were defined and described as a meaningful phrase. This categorization allowed researcher to clustered the sample based on topic. Consequently, the initial phase answered the question of “*what*” institution

communicate concerning sustainability issue, setting the stage for further analysis in the subsequent phase..

Table 2. The Text Styles in Rhetoric Analysis [17]

Styles	Indicators	Operationalization
	<i>Docere</i> (to instruct)	Characterized by emotion free information, signalize objectivity.
<i>Logos</i>	<i>Probare</i> (to prove)	A credible narrative, factual, logical.
	<i>Monere</i> (to warn)	Represent a moral level, rational.
<i>Ethos</i>	<i>Conciliare</i> (to conciliate)	Steering public behavior in a particular direction.
	<i>Delectare</i> (to delight)	Purely for the public enjoyment and entertainment.
<i>Pathos</i>	<i>Movere</i> (to move)	Static sensation pertains to a state of mind, dramatic writing.

To explore more about *how* the Higher Education Institution communicated related on sustainability issue, rhetorical text analysis is used in the present study. The rhetoric’s modes of persuasion, as a specific type of discourse analysis using the concept of *logos*, *ethos*, *pathos*, are used as analysis indicators to undertand the intention of published article. The logical appeal of *logos* appeared in three different text styles: *docere*, *probare*, and *monere*. In the other hand, the ethical mode of *ethos* is divided into two component: *conciliare* and *delectae* technique. Last, the emotional appeal *pathos* has one style of text sensation: *movere*.

The software NVivo was used for both steps of the rhetoric analysis. Author performed both qualitative content and rhetoric analysis in this research. An intercoder agreement has been used to tested the reliability, and it intended to achieve an improvement in coding quality.

3 Results

This research conducted media content analysis to explore how Higher Education Institution’s media communicate and construct the reality related on sustainability issues. The first step of the analysis is content’s coding by subsumed the article in a main category (see Fig 1.). Thus, the seventeen aspect of SDGs are representing every categories. Result show that most media sustainability-related content addresses the good health and well being (SDG 3, 23%), followed by issues regarded to the sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11, 21%) and the Partnership for the Goals (SDG 17, 11%).

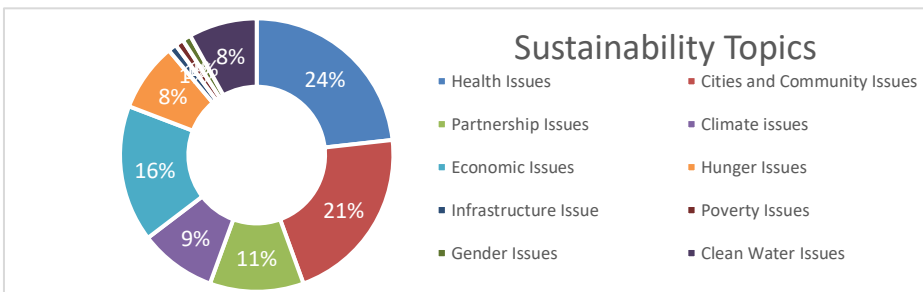


Fig 1. Top 10 Sustainability Topic

How the institutions communicate these sustainability discourse? What of of representation are adopted to gain public engagement? The second phase of analysis addressed with these research question by exploring the content rhetorical style through the rhetoric text analysis. The web-based articles were coded on the identification of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* identification. Results show that media predominantly appeals to the publics using the logic-objective discourse. Sustainability issue mostly was delivered by the informative and factual appeals, or representing *logos* (69%). In the other hand, the ethical appeal (*ethos*) and emotional (*pathos*) was identified in 20% and 11% of the media content analyzed.

As the content are based on the scientific argumentation from research and expert opinion, all of the Higher Education Institution rely on the logical method of persuasssion. There is no differ substantially on rhetoric styles and appeals from every institution. Some differences are indentified in the different methods of persuasion in the text. However, this article found different strategy in the use of *ethos* and *pathos* in the article.

Table 3. Rhetoric Text Analysis (*samples*)

Text Passage (<i>translated to English</i>)	Rhetoric Technique	Persuasion
“The relocation of Indonesia’s capital city to IKN is based on several considerations of regional advantages.”	<i>Docere</i>	
“Based on data from the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemenkes RI) in 2022, it shows that cholesterol sufferers in Indonesia reached 28% of the total population.”	<i>Probare</i>	Logos
“Kennel disinfection activities are a clear example of how a concerted effort can have a positive impact on health, both human and animal.”	<i>Monere</i>	
“Islamic Social Justice is an action by Muslims to ensure that there is social justice in society. There are at least 4 ways how zakat can realise the SDGs.”	<i>Conciliare</i>	
“Waqf institutions have provided a broad platform for women to showcase their capabilities and use their resources for the benefit of themselves, their communities, and their descendants.”	<i>Delectare</i>	Ethos
“At UGM, we endeavour to inspire and empower students to become agents of change in supporting the SDGs, as they are the future leaders who will continue this sustainability agenda.”	<i>Movere</i>	Pathos

Based on the analysis, the predominant style that used to communicate sustainability discourse described as ‘logical-ethical’. This style used to warn and educate public by

showing the reason. Mostly, the sustainability health and community issues is not exclusively constructed and delivered by a bare facts. The Higher Education perspective try to construct the discourse frame in persuading the public to engage in ethical behavior and adopt more rational practice related to sustainability.

This research explore the deeper discourse about the sustainability issue in higher education media, and found that every institution develop their content's topic based on the primary concern of sustainability problem. Every institution has different concern on this sustainability issue, and it affect their responsibility as communicator *of, about, and for* sustainability. These findings expand the state of the art, by elucidating *how* the Higher Education Institution positioning themselves in public debate related on sustainability issue, based on the thematic insight that has been discussed above.

The choice of Higher Education Institution in Indonesia to conducted the sustainability communication with an educational tone also could be seen as the content strategy to hide the risk of moralizing the discourse. Several researchers found that the strategy of media to moralizing their discourse could make the public experiencing the feeling of being judged [18], [19]. But, the educational appeal should be not overused, especially when bringing the style of *monere*. This logical-morally strategy could bring the Higher Educational perspective in the sense of public education, shaping the public perception, but also trigger the action of public mobilization.

In addition, the media tendency to narrate the 'populist perspective' of sustainability for public purpose should also be addressed. Higher Educational Institution could used the other strategy ore often t brought alternative perceptions. For example, adopting the *delectare* rhetorical style for more articles. This could serve more enjoyable article for public, as it combined with another aspect of content such as video or information graphic. Moreover, The institution could increase the adoption of strong emotional appeals, such as using *movere* rhetoric style, to trigger the behavioral change of public

This research presents some limitation, as future research should accommodate broader sample in terms of content, official media, and institutional representation. Moreover, every institution had their main concern in sustainability issues, which makes this article could not describe a more comprehensive picture.

4 Conclusion

Higher Education Institution in Indonesia communicate and construct sustainability discourse through their publication on their official websites. Based on the analysis, it revealed several key insight in handling the sustainability discourse. The Indonesian institution use a predominantly 'logical-ethical' style of communication, which framed on *Monere* rhetorical style. It emphasizes the *logos* and a touch of *ethos* perspective to educate the public, also to avoid potential pitfalls of moralizing the sustainability-related discourse.

The primary focus of the Higher Education Institution communication of sustainability issues is on factual and informative content, with 69% of the analysis are identified in *logos* rhetorical style. This logical appeal is supported by scientific

argument based on research and expert opinions. It is also underscoring the Indonesian's institution reliance for using objective and rational methods of public persuasion. The adoption of logical lens in communication sustainability issues, the institution tend to inform the public about the signification and impact of the issue, also encourage the reasonable public action toward sustainability.

Ethos, or ethical appeals, is identified in 20% of media content. It showed that institution leverage their credibility as educational institution to build trust and persuade the public. Using *ethos* style emphasize the sense of trust and reliability of Indonesian Higher Education Institution among the public. However, the emotional appeals (*pathos*) is identified in 11% of the institution's media content. Even this rhetorical style is used for less frequent by the institution, it could be evoking emotional responses in public and inspire behavioral change. *Pathos* style could be particularly effective in motivating public action on sustainability. The attachment of visual element such as videos and infographic could enhance the emotional impact of the sustainability message, and bring more engagement for the public.

Each of Higher Education Institution addresses Sustainability Development Goals issues based on their primary concerns and areas of expertise. This variation reflects the unique perspective of every institution, contributing to a broad and comprehensive sustainability discourse in Indonesia. Higher Education Institution in Indonesia provide a multifaceted view of sustainability challenges and solution.

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