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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Persuasions by Corporate and Activist NGO Strategic Website Communications: Impacts on Perceptions of Sustainability Messages and Greenwashing

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Abstract
The present research was guided by the important need for a diversion from an economistic to a humanistic management perspective of sustainability. It concentrates on the current importance of digital strategic communication, particularly regarding the concept of corporate sustainability in the context of the conflict arena of the oil industry. The focus is on the comparison of the persuasive effectiveness of the framings of corporate versus activist NGO website communications and their impacts on the perception of the triple pillars of sustainability and, corporate greenwashing with respect to a proposed bituminous oil pipeline in Canada. The results of these pro and con messages were analyzed within the Elaboration Likelihood Model demonstrating a "non expert" peripheral route to a positive persuasion from exposure to the corporate communication versus an "expert" central route to a negative persuasion from the activist NGO communication. Subsequent exposure to the opposite website communication further emphasized the predominance of a negative persuasion based on both groups now being motivated as "expert" viewers of these strategic communications, leading to an important perception of greenwashing by participants resulting from vague claims, visual and linguistic contents of the corporate communication versus the mainly verifiable factual ones in that of the activist NGO.

Keywords Humanistic management · Corporate sustainability · Elaboration likelihood model · Business education · Millennials · Greenwashing

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