

**British Petroleum – using rhetoric to avoid the sustainability challenge in its global
2015 Sustainability Report**

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. J. J. J.', written over a horizontal line.

26.07.2017

Abstract

This thesis is a multimodal analysis of British Petroleum's (henceforth BP) 2015 Sustainability Report. It examines how BP has used sustainability to influence stakeholder perception and how the organisation's lack of ethical engagement is reflected in the report. It analyses the language, photographs, infographics, layout, and substance of the document. This allows for a detailed analysis of the data, and draws attention to the motivation behind BP's use of sustainability reporting.

The thesis finds that this report does not aim to fulfil the expected goals of a sustainability report such as transparent reporting, addressing the stakeholders' concerns, and emphasizing the importance of engaging in sustainability. Instead, one of the key findings is that BP is only intending to communicate with a very specific group of stakeholders: businesses, governments, and shareholders. Rather remarkably for a sustainability report, it does not include themes related to sustainability such as the environment, wildlife conservation, and impact on communities. Instead, the report includes those related to success, expansion, and profit. The ethics of BP's use of sustainability reporting as a PR tool is therefore in question. It is to be noted that there is an irreconcilable conflict between the nature of BP's activities and sustainability. After all, the nature of BP's activities may not be compatible with sustainability reporting. As an oil and gas company, BP engages in activities that have questionable repercussions on the environment and local communities. This means that the organisation is unlikely to ever become fully committed to sustainability.

The findings of this research have implications for PR practitioners, and for organisations willing to engage in genuine sustainability. It is hoped that this research will encourage people to engage in ethical and sincere sustainability reporting in order to address the challenges faced today such as depletion of natural resources and climate change. There

are justified concerns held by the public, and organisations ought to be responsible and address them thanks to sustainability reports.

Key words: sustainability, sustainability reporting, ethic(s), values, public relations, tactic, genuine, British Petroleum.

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1. Chapter One: Overview

1.1 Introduction

In 2010, British Petroleum's Deepwater Horizon platform in the Gulf of Mexico exploded, creating the largest oil spill in petroleum industry history and killing 11 men. The oil flowing out remained uncontained for 87 days, having disastrous consequences on wildlife habitats. The Telegraph reports that "an estimated 53,000 barrels per day escaped from the well before it was capped" (2011).

This came after the particularly difficult year of 2006 during which two oil spills, an explosion and workplace bullying placed BP in the media spotlight. In August 2006, the NY Times reported that "The largest oil spill to occur on the tundra of Alaska's North Slope [had] deposited up to 267,000 gallons of thick crude oil over two acres in the sprawling Prudhoe Bay production facilities, forcing clean-up crews to work in temperatures far below zero to vacuum and dig up the thick mixture of snow and oil" (Barringer, 2006). The article drew attention to the fact that the leak occurred in a section of pipe built in the late 1970s, which meant it could have been avoided if attention has been paid to upkeep the infrastructure. Similarly, National Geographic claimed the spill went "undetected for five days before a field worker smelled the crude oil while driving through the area" (Roach, 2006). In 2005, a refinery in Texas City exploded, killing 15 and injuring 170 others. Media claimed it was "the worst workplace accident in this country since 1989" (Schorn, 2006). It was clear the petroleum giant's public image was badly damaged. When the Deepwater Horizon platform caught fire in 2010, the impact was not only environmental and commercial but led to a monumental public relations crisis for BP.

Since these crises, BP has remained in the public eye for various, generally negative, reasons. After the 2010 spill in the Gulf of Mexico, there have been continued literature,

popular media, documentaries, films and social media stories on the topic of BP. The organisation remains at the forefront of public scrutiny to this day, and is often associated with unethical and dishonest practices. Throughout the years, BP has been written about in the media with dramatic headlines such as “BP's clumsy response to oil spill threatens to make a bad situation worse” (Webb, 2010), “BP’s failure made worse by PR mistakes” (McClam & Weber, 2010), and “BP: A Textbook Example of How Not to Handle PR” (Shogren, 2011).

This research aims to find out how genuine BP’s contemporary approach to sustainability is. To do this, it will analyse BP’s 2015 Sustainability Report using multimodal discourse analysis. It addresses the question of whether the annual sustainability reports that BP produces are genuine, or whether they are rhetorical devices used cynically by BP as part of its public relations strategy.

In the context of public relations, it is important to understand what BP’s crisis response was during and after the 2010 spill, and how this is reflected in BP’s current public relations strategy.

Ideally, in order to see whether BP has changed its PR strategy from pre-2010 to now, it would be useful to compare key documents such as BP’s Code of Conduct. However, perhaps in an effort to limit the potential damage caused by bad publicity, BP has removed most of the content available online regarding the organisation before the Deepwater Horizon spill. For example, the Code of Conduct from the years prior to 2010 has been removed. This makes it impossible to know with certainty what BP’s values and ethical claims were before the 2014 Code of Conduct, which is the most recent Code of Conduct.

There is also no available evidence of the company’s position on sustainability before and during the 2010 spill. This has made this research challenging. If these documents were available, it would be an easier task to assess whether BP’s commitment to sustainability

is genuine. The main documents currently available are the Sustainability Reports, Annual Reports, and Statistical Reviews. While these documents reveal a large part of BP's actions and claims, the content that is no longer available speaks volume as well. BP is making sure it has an input into all the content available, which is their way of being in charge of their public image.

BP's Sustainability Report is published every year on a voluntary basis, which is now increasingly common practice amongst organisations. Its goal is to report the actions BP has taken throughout the year to demonstrate its sustainable behaviour, and to reflect on future sustainability initiatives. The report analysed in this research was published on 16 March 2016. It is 56 pages in length, and is available online for anyone to download. A printed copy can also be requested. It can be accessed here:

<https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/pdf/sustainability/group-reports/bp-sustainability-report-2015.pdf>

Available documentation shows that prior to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, BP had already made a number of sustainability claims in its Sustainability Reports regarding climate change and broader sustainability related themes such as safety. In 2008 for instance, BP claimed to be a “leading advocate of strong legislation and international co-operation to address climate change” in its sustainability report (British Petroleum, 2008).

1.2 Deepwater Horizon oil spill: what happened?

Built in 2001 in South Korea by Hyundai Heavy Industries, Deepwater Horizon was a rig owned by Transocean, one of the world's largest offshore drilling contractors. In 2009, Transocean announced that “its ultra-deepwater semisubmersible rig Deepwater Horizon recently drilled the deepest oil and gas well ever while working for BP and its co-owners on the Tiber well in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico” (Transocean Ltd, 2009). The well reached a vertical depth of 35,050 feet. This broke the record for the deepest well ever completed.

The rig was located in the Macondo Prospect in Mississippi Canyon Block 252 (MC252) of the Gulf of Mexico, 66 km off the Louisiana coast.

On April 20 2010 at 5pm, a routine test was conducted to check the pressure level in the Deepwater Horizon rig. The test was meant to make sure there was no leakage in the well. This pressure test did not go well and showed unusual pressure readings in the well. Those in charge suspected something was wrong and feared the well was leaking. However, it was a time of shift changeover with one person's shift ending at 6pm; therefore, someone else was asked to follow it up. This did not happen.

Later, at 7pm, the crew did another pressure test. Again, the pressure in the well was higher than it should have been. The crew decided to wait to see if it was decreasing. The person in charge at the time decided that it was not leaking and ended their shift. Senior Tool Pusher Miles "Randy" Ezell, who knew the first test was showing worrying results, called the team in charge of the tests and offered his help. However, he was told his help was not needed.

At 9:30pm, the pressure in the well increased unexpectedly. The well ruptured and caused a gush of mud and liquid methane. The team tried to close the valves to stop the mud and combustible gas from flowing out. Chris Pleasant (Subsea Supervisor Transocean) told the Captain that he was willing to use the EDS (Emergency Disconnect System), which shuts the well on the sea floor to prevent oil and gas from escaping by separating the rig from the well. This would stop the fire from blowing up and was the only way to save the rig and its crew. While the captain ordered him not to do it, Pleasant made the decision to use the emergency system anyway. Unfortunately, the EDS did not work. The pressure was too high for the crew to stop the flow, which caused the entire rig to be engulfed in highly flammable methane. This condensed everywhere, including in the engine room. Within minutes, the entire rig blew. The massive explosion occurred at 9:49pm. Eleven

crew members died instantly while 115 others made it into the life boats. The Deepwater Horizon rig burnt for 39 hours before sinking. It left a disastrous environmental legacy.

A key factor that contributed to this incident was the fact the well was not sealed properly. One reason for this was that critical decisions about the well were often made 700 km away from the rig by BP's engineering team. One of the main engineers had to determine how many centralisers should be used when putting the cement in the well. He determined that the crew would need 21 centralizers, but there were only six on board. A BP employee therefore ordered 15 more to be delivered to the rig. The next day, John Guide (BP team leader) reversed this decision due to lack of time (Barth, 2010). This had disastrous consequences because only six centralisers were used, therefore the casing was off centre. This is a highly plausible explanation for the leak in the well (Barth, 2010).

Although Deepwater Horizon had functioned for seven years without casualties, Doug Brown said that from the day they started working on the rig it was an absolute nightmare (Barth, 2010). Drilling started in October 2009, and shortly after, a hurricane swept through the Gulf causing the first drilling attempt to be suspended. As a result, the drilling fell way behind schedule, costing BP millions of dollars. In other words, the employees were under pressure to finalise the well as rapidly as possible.

As a result of the spill, more than four million litres of dispersants were used to try to limit the amount of oil that would reach the coast. This resulted in the oil was broken down into small droplets, seeping down to the bottom of the ocean with many indications of long lasting consequences. In order to try and take care of the "PR nightmare" footage of the oil spill, BP, along with the coastguards, burnt as much oil as possible. As acknowledged by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), no one can say exactly what long-term impact the dispersants have had and will have on the planet (EPA, 2010). It is increasingly difficult to obtain independent and unbiased scientific

results, as the people with that capacity are either employed by BP or government agencies who are not prepared to provide the resources (Barth, 2010).

Clean up crews were deployed in highly visible places as shown by the large amount of clean-up photographs available in popular media. Many experts believe this was an attempt to make BP to look good in the public eye but this was not doing much in terms of long term environmental solutions. There were numerous rumours that the clean-up crews were often using inappropriate equipment, meaning the clean-up efforts had more to do with being seen cleaning up than achieving results. BP employed some of the fishermen who lost their livelihoods to clean up. They were all bound by contract not to discuss the spill in public and there was a number of reported attempts to muzzle workers (Barth, 2010).

The media access was restricted to the site of the spill and its surrounding areas. On June 30, the US Coast Guard established a 20m safety zone around all Deepwater Horizon protective boom operations. These protective booms were used to keep the media at distance in order to make the coastline inaccessible. Anyone going past the boundaries could be fined a \$40,000 civil penalty. Cynics claim that this was to ensure that the media would have limited footage of the spill, and that BP would have control over who could report the incident.

This spill had a significant impact on BP's share price. Soon after the spill BP's shares lost 55% of their value, dropping from \$59.48 a share to \$27 in just a few days (Chamberlin, 2014). This added to BP's losses.

In addition to this, a number of penalties were imposed. A ban was imposed until March 2014, and the organisation was not allowed to provide fuel to the military or start new work in the Gulf of Mexico. This ban was lifted after 2014, allowing BP to start business again as usual. The share price has since recovered and, while BP is not back to what it

was prior to the 2010 oil spill, the share price is arguably high for an organisation responsible for the biggest marine oil spill in history.

While BP suffered significant consequences from the spill, it has apparently managed to recover after just a few years. Nowadays, the share price of BP hovers around \$35 (Google, 2017). The way BP has been able to recover from the PR disaster of the 2010 oil spill says a lot about BP's importance in the fuel industry, and about how our society relies on the oil and gas industry.

1.3 The deepwater horizon oil spill: PR nightmare and media frenzy

The media rapidly observed and reported that BP's reaction to the spill was inappropriate and inadequate. This led many to criticise the way BP handled the crisis. Many experts started making their opinions known to the public thanks to the media. This created significant negativity towards BP in the public mind, and raised some important concerns.

The media swooped on BP – and found that they were at fault in the explosion of the rig, publishing headlines such as “BP's reckless conduct caused Deepwater Horizon oil spill, judge rules” (The Guardian, 2014), “Investigation into 2010 BP oil spill finds failures, poor testing and ongoing risks (The Guardian, 2014), and “US judge says BP negligence at fault for 2010 oil spill” (DW, 2014). The role of Deepwater Horizon was to install the well and then seal it temporarily until another rig came to use the well to dig oil. After drilling 4000 metres down in the earth, the BP crew was meant to seal the well and leave it ready for the drilling to begin. If there is a leak and gas or oil gets in, the pressure in the well will rise. As a result, the crew will be able to see if it is leaking or if there are any other problems. In this case, the pressure data were transferred live to the BP offices in Houston, Texas. Jason Anderson, the person in charge of conducting the tests, believed it was a false reading thinking the alarming numbers could be blamed on what is called the bladder effect (Deepwater Horizon Accident Investigation Report, 2010). The bladder

effect is described by NASA as “heavy mud in the riser exerting pressure on the annular preventer, which in turn transmitted pressure to the drill pipe” (2011). As it turned out, this was a big error that may have significantly contributed to the explosion.

The data, which is still accessible by investigators, repeatedly showed that the pressure was rising. If the well was properly sealed, the pressure should have remained static. This means that the well was not sealed properly, and there was a high risk of a blowout.

Professor Robert Bea (Barth, 2010) believes that BP went into denial rather than admit that the situation was disastrous. They therefore found explanations to explain why the readings were so extreme. He said that, had the crew responded to the early pressure readings, the disaster could have been prevented. It was as simple as closing the well on the sea floor before the pressure was so strong the EDS would stop functioning. It was proved not long after the spill that one of the batteries required for the EDS to work was particularly low, so low that it would not have been able to power the “dead man”, which is a switch that should have automatically operated. There is however no way of knowing if the battery was low before the explosion, or if, as argued by BP, the explosion caused the battery to get low (Barth, 2010).

Another aspect criticised by experts was that the foam cement used in the well was unlikely to settle properly and therefore deemed unstable. At the time, BP was operating the platform but under lease from Transocean who was the owner of the platform. Halliburton, an oil field service company under contract to BP, was responsible for providing the cement used to seal the well. However, BP was not informed by Halliburton that nitrogen was escaping from the cement, therefore increasing the chances of something going wrong. Overall then, all three companies (BP, Transocean and Halliburton) made mistakes, each of which could have caused the explosion to occur

when it could have been avoided. From this perspective, miscommunication between the three organisations and poor crisis response are to blame for the explosion.

Doug Brown, Chief Mechanic on Deepwater Horizon (Barth, 2010), revealed some interesting and important facts during the subsequent investigation. After the spill, people who had been on the rig were questioned by the coastguards first, and then by Transocean's lawyers in an effort to understand what went wrong and who was responsible. Doug Brown was not allowed to have his own lawyer at the time. Prior to the questioning, he and others were kept awake for over 40 hours, which he believes was part of a deliberate strategy by BP. Then, as explained by Steve Gordon, maritime attorney, Doug Brown was made to sign statements along the lines of "I was asleep, I saw nothing, I am not hurt" and was then finally allowed to go home. Brown said he was also pressured into signing a non-disclosure agreement. After this, no offer of help or mental support was offered by BP or Transocean (Barth, 2010).

1.4 A PR crisis

Not only was the spill environmentally disastrous but the ensuing crisis management and public relations was a public relations nightmare. Perception is key in determining what public opinion is and how the public will react in case of a crisis, and hence why it is crucial to be well prepared (Sturges, 2016). This is increasingly important when an organisation's actions impact the lives of thousands as well as the environment and extensive stretches of coastline. A big corporation like British Petroleum is closely monitored by the media, and therefore by the general public. In addition, it was perceived that the same mistakes and negligence as in 2006 once again cost the lives of many. This led to a loss of credibility and highlighted how the organisation had not learned from its previous mistakes (Regester & Larkin, 2008).

Because perception is key to public image, it is crucial for organisations to make sure their motives and actions are portrayed in a positive light and clearly defined. This was particularly important in the case of BP because the organisation had a history of being perceived as hypocritical and greedy due to prior PR crises (Regester & Larkin, 2008). Shim and Yang argue that “reputation and crisis have an effect on the perception of corporate hypocrisy” (Shim & Yang, 2016, p. 75), meaning that it is important for an organisation to be perceived as honest and sincere before and during a crisis in order to be considered genuine.

PR practitioners position themselves as experts who know what is best in case of a crisis, as it is their area of expertise. This is only effective if management listen, and can sometimes create tensions when trying to explain to management why their actions do not necessarily serve the best interest of the company (Kang, 2010). There can be a discrepancy between what PR practitioners think ought to be done, and what organisations want to be done. This often leads to ethical conflicts. As Kang argues, there is a “clear linkage between ethical issues and job satisfaction” (Kang, 2010, p. 155).

Tony Hayward, CEO of BP at the time, made comments that angered the public. This slowed down the recovery of the organisation’s reputation and made the crisis more damaging than it would have been if the CEO’s actions aligned with his words. Arguably, BP’s PR practitioners should have prepped Hayward more effectively in order to prevent reputational damage. It is easy for the public to assume that what the CEO does and says reflects the organisation’s overall stance on specific issues and values. In BP’s case, Hayward’s lack of tact made managing the PR crisis even more challenging.

In the days directly after the oil spill British Petroleum’s CEOs made empty promises, assuring they would make the best possible decisions to make it all right again. Many claimed they only took partial actions. On 30 May 2010, former CEO Tony Hayward said

“We're sorry for the massive disruption it's caused their lives. There's no one who wants this over more than I do. I would like my life back" in an interview with the Today Show (Climatebrad, 2010). He later apologised for making such an inconsiderate comment. Also, it emerged that he had been on holiday while others were cleaning up the spill. These media revelations damaged BP's reputation even more. He also downplayed the environmental impact of the spill during a Sky News interview, saying “I think the environmental impact of this disaster is likely to be very, very modest. It is impossible to say and we will mount, as part of the aftermath, a very detailed environmental assessment as we go forward. We're going to do that with some of the science institutions in the US but everything we see at the moment suggests the impact will be very modest” (Climatebrad, 2010).

With the media highlighting BP's mistakes, the CEO making inconsiderate statements and the public getting increasingly disturbed by BP's statements and images of oil laden coastlines, the organisation soon became ridiculed and perceived as unethical. This has had a disastrous impact on BP's reputation in the short and long term. Ever since the oil spill in 2010, BP has had to work on its communication strategy, which includes annual sustainability reports.

1.5 The changing PR scene

The PR industry has evolved throughout the years, with improvements in technology and easy access to information. The way organisations communicate with their publics and public expectations are different from a few decades ago, and public interest needs to be taken into consideration (Johnston, 2017). Literature shows that organisations are under greater scrutiny, and often accountable for their actions. White argues that “increased scrutiny of corporate behaviour is being demanded by consumers, governments, employees and local communities as well as investors” (2005, p. 37). There is now a

noticeable rise in globalisation and activism, which pushes organisations to put effort towards sustainability-related communication.

Part of addressing the changes in public expectations consists of addressing stakeholders' concerns by engaging in dialogic communication and more specifically in two-way symmetrical communication. Dialogic communication has been considered to be what PR practitioners and organisations should be striving for, for many years. This practice comes under the Theory of Excellence, first coined by Grunig (2008). While still regarded as a valuable theory in the PR industry, the Theory of Excellence can also be considered to be utopian.

Grunig defines the excellence theory as one that specifies “how public relations makes organizations more effective, how it is organized and managed when it contributes most to organizational effectiveness, the conditions in organizations and their environments that make organizations more effective, and how the monetary value of public relations can be determined” (Grunig, 1992, p. 27). From this perspective, two-way dialogic communication is therefore a golden ideal and a goal for effective PR practice.

Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig believe that “at one extreme, two-way asymmetrical communication can help organisations persuade publics to think and behave as your organisation desires” (1995, p. 12). They add that “in terms of game theory, organisations play asymmetrical communication as a “zero-sum” game: your organisation “wins” only if the public or publics “lose” (1995, p. 12). Although it can seem like a beneficial way to run an organisation, two-way asymmetrical communication does not focus on building strong long-lasting relationships and can prove detrimental in the long-run. On the other hand, “two-way symmetrical communication serves as a tool for negotiation and compromise, a way to develop “win-win solutions for conflicts between organisations and public” (1995, p. 13). This is what is regarded as a more ethical and sustainable way

of communicating with the public. It is therefore what organisations should ideally strive for.

Years of public relations practice and research have, however, shown that this theory is somewhat unrealistic, and more of a PR ideal that should be striven for and not necessarily reached. More recent academics such as Browning recommend being nuanced, and question the moral superiority of this model (2015, p. 4). Stoker and Tusinski argue that there is a paradox in dialogic communication. To them, “the very goal of agreement and consensus may well cause the parties to overlook and suppress issues critical to any kind of long-term agreement or reconciliation” (2006, p. 170). Dialogic communication then, should be taken with a grain of salt in order to maintain authenticity and balance.

Grunig argues that “if one takes the term public relations literally he would quickly deduce that the most important questions which a public relations practitioner must answer are ‘Who are my publics?’ and ‘What kind of relations do I have with those publics?’” (Grunig, 1978, p. 109). In the context of this research, publics will be considered as the group of people BP aims its communications at to reach specific PR goals. The organisation’s messages are carefully tailored to communicate with targeted publics.

1.6 The aim of this research

British Petroleum has featured widely in popular media and academic research for many years, particularly since the 2010 oil spill. While the circumstances of BP’s 2010 crisis are specific and unique, BP’s reputation and how the public feels toward the organisation reflects a much broader situation. Organisations in general are more aware of the scrutiny they are under. The public has increasing expectations and opinions about environmental issues. Before the 2010 Gulf of Mexico spill, BP was already in the public eye for different incidents. It was therefore easy for BP’s reputation to be seriously dented.

BP's 2015 Sustainability Report, which is the main data used for this research, was published by British Petroleum on 16 March 2016. It is part of BP's initiative to publish yearly reports, presenting the organisation's stance on sustainability and other related themes. Analysing the data will allow this research to analyse how genuine BP's approach to sustainability is.

This research aims to determine whether or not BP's contemporary approach to sustainability is genuine. In order to do this, it analyses BP's approach to sustainability in the 2015 Sustainability Report and the organisation's PR response. The wider question here is also to determine how BP's use of sustainability reporting as a PR tool reflects on the organisation's ethics. It is my aim that my research will impact sustainability related PR in a positive way, and encourage ethical sustainability reporting.

While BP, and in particular the 2010 oil spill, has been talked about in popular media for many years, there is a lack of academic work regarding BP's approach to sustainability, and in general how BP uses sustainability in its PR strategy. There is also a dearth of literature analysing BP's use of sustainability reporting. This research aims to fill that gap and encourage discussion and accountability.

1.7 The methodology used in this research

This research analyses the language, layout, length and images used in BP's 2015 Sustainability Report by using multimodal discourse analysis in order to see what it reveals about BP's use of sustainability as a rhetorical tool. O'Halloran defines multimodal discourse analysis as "an emerging paradigm in discourse studies which extends the study of language per se to the study of language in combination with other resources, such as images, scientific symbolism, gesture, action, music and sound" (O'Halloran, 2011). Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) allows us to gain an in-depth understanding of BP's use of sustainability as a PR mechanism through careful

observation and analysis of the text, images, infographics, layout and headings used in the 2015 Sustainability Report.

The strength of multimodal discourse analysis is that it is not just limited to language, and therefore takes into consideration all the different elements BP put effort into and how they contribute to the persuasive meaning of the report. It would be a mistake to assume that BP does not appreciate the value of each individual element of the report. Multimodal discourse analysis will help analyse BP's motivations.

Harris (1952) first introduced the term discourse analysis, following his particular interest in the examination of language. He argues that discourse analysis “yields considerable information about the structure of a text or a type of text, and about the role that each element plays in such a structure” (Harris, 1952, p. 30). Similarly, Paltridge explains that discourse analysis “considers the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used and is concerned with the description and analysis of both spoken and written interactions” (Paltridge, 2012, p. 3). For that reason, discourse analysis is an effective way of analysing the data of this research. However, multimodal discourse analysis takes it a step further by taking into consideration more than just language.

Jones, who believes multimodal discourse analysis is a discipline that is developing at a fast pace, argues there has been a “profound shift in the study of discourse in the past two decades from being ‘logocentric’, that is, concerning itself almost exclusively with written and spoken language, to seeing all meaning-making as essentially ‘multimodal’, involving not just words but also other semiotic models” (2012, p. 109). Multimodal discourse analysis then, allows for a more comprehensive approach than regular discourse analysis.

1.8 Who are the audiences for this research?

Using the example of BP this research will provide insight into how corporates use sustainability as a public relations tactic. It will also help reveal the challenges met by PR practitioners when it comes to communicating about sustainability. It will be of interest to academics who are interested in issues of environmental ethics, in relation to public relations. Non-governmental organisations concerned with issues of sustainability such as Green Peace will also benefit from this research as it highlights how organisations can misuse the concept of sustainability to fulfil their corporate agendas. This research is not about BP's actual approach to sustainability. It is more about its PR strategy and how the organisation's use of sustainability is a PR tactic. British Petroleum could learn from it. It is to be hoped that they will make their sustainability report more honest and transparent, as well as engage in genuine sustainability.

1.9 The structure of the research

This thesis is broken down into six chapters. This allows for a clear breakdown of the important dimensions of this research.

In Chapter Two, the literature review will provide insight into the existing literature about crisis communication, sustainability, and sustainability reporting. This will allow the reader to gain a better understanding of the complex nature of sustainability as a PR tool. Chapter Three will then present the methodology and method used in this research. The advantages of using multimodal discourse analysis will be discussed, along with other key elements of analysis. The data will be carefully analysed in Chapter Four, reflecting the nature of BP's approach to sustainability in its 2015 Sustainability Report.

In order to draw conclusions, Chapter Five will discuss BP's attempt at sustainability reporting and discuss learnings. Chapter Six will present an overview of the findings and suggest possible future research.

2. Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the literature about crisis communication in a PR context, as well as in the case of BP (Section 2.2). This essential aspect of PR has been extensively written about in academia. In the case of BP, the way the organisation handled the 2010 oil spill crisis has had long lasting repercussions in terms of reputation. The values displayed during the 2010 oil spill crisis seem to still be BP's values nowadays, which is reflected in the organisation's communications. In Section 2.3 the literature review will present contemporary theories about corporate social responsibility and sustainability from a theoretical public relations perspective. This will define the notion of sustainability that is used throughout this thesis. Section 2.4 will then focus on how sustainability is used by organisations to fulfil their PR goals.

This chapter will provide the context necessary to analyse BP's 2015 Sustainability Report.

By defining sustainability and CSR, and by examining how they are used by public relations practitioners this literature review shows the rise in environmental awareness and therefore increased interest in sustainability reporting, and how that has had an impact on the PR industry.

2.2 Crisis communication

2.2.1 Risk and crisis communication in PR

In the event of a crisis, it is the PR practitioners' role to minimise reputational damage by making sure the organisation's actions reflect the values it claims to be adhering to. The PR challenge is not only to act in an ethical and responsible way, but also to make sure it is perceived as such by the general public and more specifically by the key stakeholders

(Akdoğan, Arslan & Demirtaş, 2017). PR theory advocates planning ahead before a crisis even occurs so that in the event of a crisis, the public does not feel as if they are being manipulated or disrespected (Coombs, 2015). Penrose argues “a certain amount of proactive planning is necessary to counter a potentially disastrous crisis situation” (2000, p. 157), otherwise, the organisation’s reputation is set up for a disaster, which can be irreversible. In order to be proactive, Penrose, Rasberry and Myers advise that organisations engage in the following mechanisms: identification of the crisis potential, development of appropriate crisis teams and centres, development of a crisis management plan and a communication strategy and practice and revision of the plan (2001).

Unfortunately, crisis communication involves working under short deadlines and time pressure. Coombs argues that “determining how to handle a crisis is an example of dynamic decision making and is characterized by time pressure, risk, and changing situation” (Coombs, 2015, p. 72). This means that unless the organisation is well-prepared before the crisis even occurs, there is a chance it will be caught off guard. While public relations practitioners are used to the feeling of immediacy, communicating effectively can prove challenging if the organisation is unprepared. Being rushed can lead to making mistakes, which is why PR practitioners focus heavily on planning what will be said to the media or published by the organisation in event of a crisis.

Coombs argues there are two stages in crisis response. The first one is the initial crisis response and the second one is the stage or reputation repair and behavioural intentions. In this case, the first stage of crisis response is most relevant. It requires the response to be quick, accurate and consistent (2007). His research has shown that information should be communicated during the first hour of a crisis, which puts a time pressure on everyone in charge of crisis communication within the organisation. This is why it is so important to be well-prepared with content ready to be made public before the media fills what many call the information vacuum. BP was not well-prepared and did not respond

appropriately, meaning the organisation got caught off guard with no access to pre-prepared content.

While it can be tempting to hide the unflattering truth during a crisis, PR practitioners should always stay transparent and honest (Coombs, 2015). If remaining vague and shifting the blame can seem like a way to save face in the first place, it can have disastrous repercussions on an organisation's reputation in the long run. Shim and Yang sum up this idea by saying that "a corporation will lose trust and legitimacy if it is seen as being irresponsible and manipulative; thus, to counter any loss of reputation, an organisation must act consistently with social norms and required obligations" (Shim & Yang, 2016, p. 70).

Organisations are now under greater scrutiny than they were a few decades ago (White, 2005). A wide range of stakeholders take interest in how organisations make money as well as how they spend it on their PR campaigns. For organisations such as BP, who have a wide-reaching influence worldwide, the number of people who have something at stake has increased and is not limited to investors. As stakeholders, the public increasingly knows how to access information rapidly and how to find out what activities are undertaken by an organisation. This means that if PR practitioners do not highlight how their client (the organisation they are working for) is benefitting society as a whole, there is a chance of a crisis happening. They therefore need to balance this out or a crisis is likely to occur.

Shim and Yang (2016) also discuss the attribution theory, arguing that emotions play a big role in how an organisation is perceived and the way a crisis will develop and impact reputation. If an organisation is perceived as one with remarkable values before the crisis, it is more likely to get favourable attention during a crisis thanks to the way the public feels about the brand. They apply the attribution theory to the context of public relations

by showing how it is related to CSR: if an organisation is known for its responsible behaviour, the actions taken during a crisis will seem more genuine. The organisation's efforts are in vain if they clash with the values demonstrated by the organisation prior to the crisis.

2.2.2 BP's crisis response

Public perception of BP was very much shaped by the way the organisation handled the oil spill crisis in 2010. This had a lasting effect on BP's reputation. From a theoretical PR perspective, BP's response was inadequate. For example, soon after investigations began, it was revealed that the leaks were due to negligence on British Petroleum's part. While the petroleum giant tried to make up for the consequences of the spill, they did not admit fault. Not clearly admitting the spill was caused by their own negligence made it hard for the public to consider BP as an ethical organisation. In 2010, Urbina wrote in The New York Times about BP's recently published internal investigation. He describes it saying the 193-page report is "part mea culpa, part public relations exercise, but mostly a preview of BP's legal argument as it prepares to defend itself against possible criminal or civil charges, federal penalties and hundreds of pending lawsuits" (Urbina, 2010). He then proceeds to give examples of how BP is trying to shift the blame onto other organisations involved in the drilling process.

It is clear that BP was ethically challenged in this case. Using what he calls the ethic of first and second things, Lewis states that "every preference of a small group to a great or partial good to a total good, involves the loss of the small or partial good for which the sacrifice was made" (Lewis in Veil, Sellnow & Wickline, p. 4). In BP's case, the interest of lobbyists and fuel companies is put over the interest of communities. This extends to business practice and highlights how there are consequences that will come from what you decide to put first and second as an organisation.

Veil, Sellnow and Wickline suggest “the root of BP’s incapacitated crisis response was not in their crisis response capabilities but a fundamental ethical misalignment of first and second things” (Veil, Sellnow & Wickline, 2013, p. 14). In the case of BP, this reflected poor management and a discrepancy between what the company says it cares about and what it actually does care about. The organisation says it cares about sustainability but it does not act sustainably, to the point where it lacks activities to report on in its yearly sustainability reports.

Veil, Sellnow and Wickline (2013) believe that renewal “encompasses an organisation’s commitment to learning from a crisis, communicating ethically, forming a prospective vision, and communicating that vision effectively” (Veil, Sellnow & Wickline, 2013, p. 367). Thus, renewal allows the organisation to heal from a crisis and move forward thanks to ethical core values. Shim and Yang (Shim & Yang, 2016) emphasize this concept by explaining that “PR managers publicizing CSR messages should consider emphasizing “genuineness,” “honesty,” “sincerity,” and a “no-spin policy” in CSR communication rather than an outcome-based spin that often focuses on social recognition and a company’s award winnings” (p. 76). More importantly, when a company has a bad reputation or is caught in a crisis, strategic silence about the CSR effort can be wise in dealing with a public suspicious toward CSR” (Shim & Yang, 2016, p. 76). CSR is therefore a well-recognised strategic tool for crisis management.

As argued by Veil, Sellnow, and Wickline, BP puts profit as a priority over safety and the environment, which affected the way the crisis was handled but most importantly the way it was perceived (Veil, Sellnow & Wickline, 2013). This led to limited possibilities when trying to recover from the 2010 Gulf of Mexico spill. The findings show that the organisation sidestepped sustainability because it found it was fundamentally contradictory to its core business. It seems that BP has not totally ditched sustainability (yet) because it knows how much people care about sustainability. BP is however not

making any real or genuine commitment to sustainability because the benefits of doing so are not evident to the organisation.

Veil, Sellnow, and Wickline (2013) describe BP's communicative response, and highlight that even though crisis response measures were put in place, the organisation's misaligned priorities are what caused the reputation to be permanently damaged. From setting up a website detailing all the actions put in place to cleaning the spill to compensating the victims, BP showed engagement and remorse after the crisis thanks to the "Making it Right" campaign. The apologetic campaign aimed to apologise for the damage created in the Gulf of Mexico and promised to make up for the damages caused by the oil spill.

As part of its crisis response, BP spent 93 million dollars in advertising in the months following the spill in 2010 (Daly, 2010). This caused the public to wonder if this money wouldn't have been better spent on the people affected by the spill rather than in advertising used to manipulate public opinion (Daly, 2010). This demonstrated a gap and dissonance between how BP wanted to be perceived and how it was actually perceived. It created permanent damage to the brand by highlighting that BP's main interest lies in making profit and being seen positively, not in genuinely doing good.

2.3 What is sustainability?

2.3.1 Defining it

While sustainability is a controversial and debated term, there are some definitions which have been widely agreed upon. The most commonly accepted definition of sustainable development can be found in the Brundtland report, published in 1987. This report is the work of the World Commission on Environment and Development, and was put together in the hope of achieving sustainable development. The report defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987).

However, this definition has been criticised throughout the years, with many arguing that it is not specific enough and can be subject to interpretation. Daly (1996) for instance, argues that “while not vacuous by any means, this definition was sufficiently vague to allow for a broad consensus. Probably that was a good political strategy at the time – a consensus on a vague concept was better than disagreement on a sharply defined one” (Daly, 1996 p. 1). This definition then, was not specific enough to hold anyone accountable.

In 2011, the United Nations Development Programme published an updated version of this definition in its Human Development Report. It defines sustainable development as “the expansion of the substantive freedoms of people today while making reasonable efforts to avoid seriously compromising those of future generations” (United Nations Development Programme, 2011, p. 2). This definition does not use the term “needs” which was often criticised for being too vague and particularly soft which is why many consider this a more adequate definition.

An approach to sustainability that has been widely recognised is the triple bottom line (TBL), a framework that helps measure and track sustainability. In 1998, Elkington wrote the highly influential book “Cannibals with forks: the triple bottom line of 21st century business”, a book in which he presents the TBL framework. According to him, there are three overlapping dimensions to business success: profit, people and the planet. Sustainability then, encompasses the economic, social, and environmental impact of an organisations’ activities. Elkington’s insight came about as many were trying to find an effective framework for sustainability. It captures the complexity surrounding sustainability. The aim then, is to find a balance between the three dimensions rather than to focus solely on the profit aspect of things. The TBL helps set specific goals and tracks progress. To this day, many still consider the triple bottom line as a way to measure

performance from a sustainability perspective. The main challenge remains in managing the conflicting relationship between business interests and the environment.

Although many academics have written about “sustainability”, it remains a challenging concept, particularly in a business context. Despite this it has become an essential element of business operations given increased understanding of limited environmental resources as Stoner and Wankel argue. They believe that “we are using the planet’s store of natural capital far more rapidly than it can be replenished by the cyclic processes that have maintained and restored it for millennia” (Stoner and Wankel, 2010, p. 3) and that business operations therefore needs to take sustainability into account. While acting sustainably can mean different things to different organisations, there is consensus regarding how sustainability benefits or should benefit society as a whole. Edwards believes that “sustainability captures whole sets of values, issues and processes that a company must address to ensure delivery of environmental, social and economic objectives” (Edwards, 2011, p. 42). Thus, acting sustainably is a complex process that involves careful forward planning. Edwards’ research highlights that there is more to sustainability than just a few good deeds.

Zheng, Luo, and Maksimov argue that “sustainability is directly related to the core business operations of a firm as it may require the integration of social responsibility with current operations, and hence necessitate their modification or even complete replacement with more responsible ways of conducting business” (2015, p. 391). Penning, taking a more positive view claims that sustainability adheres to “fundamental PR principles” (Penning, 2007). He lists three main dimensions that he believes demonstrate how sustainability is consistent with good PR practice. The first dimension is the economy. Part of managing an economy involves thinking about the future and making sure short-term commercial gain is not the main focus. By building relationships and thinking long-term, this is what public relations aims to do. This is also part of what

sustainability seeks to achieve by aiming for economic stability. The second dimension, is the environment. PR practitioners consider all the parties involved and tailor realistic objectives. Sustainability also considers the different communities and their needs, as well as environmental considerations. The third dimension is related to equality. PR should put the interest of the organisation and the interest of the general public on the same level, insuring fairness and equal opportunities. Similarly, sustainability encourages organisations to strive for the common good. It is clear here that public relations and sustainability have some common long-term goals when it comes to what Penning calls the “fundamental objectives of ethical public relations” (Penning, 2007, para. 12). Overall, both PR and sustainability aim to take into consideration the needs and wants of current and future generations.

2.3.2 Environmental awareness – a growing trend

Brueckner argues that “Over the last 40 years a quiet revolution has been under way on a wave of growing environmental concern internationally the concept of sustainable development that emerged throughout the 1970s and 1980s”. In his opinion, “today, the concept of sustainable development is widely accepted and seen as a cornerstone of political and commercial decision-making processes world-wide” (Brueckner, 2010, p. 11).

Kolk argues that “societal expectations vis-à-vis business have increased more generally, as part of ‘blurring boundaries’ between the roles of public and private actors. This trend has sometimes been directly linked to the debate on CSR or to other notions such as sustainability, the triple bottom line, sustainable development, corporate citizenship or human rights” (2015, p. 24).

Kolk further claims that “over the years, growing attention has been paid to the ethical, environmental and social dimensions of business. Most often under the corporate social

responsibility heading” (Kolk, 2015, p. 23). Agreeing with the idea that CSR is becoming more prevalent, Edwards argues that “in an era when corporate trust remains depressingly and perhaps deservedly low, one clear strategy for speaking effectively with key stakeholders remains sustainability communications”, which he believed was “a practice of positive change management and brand improvements” (Edwards, 2011, p. 42). Many PR practitioners now understand how crucial it is to incorporate sustainability in their communications strategy, whether it is to communicate with internal or external stakeholders. The existing literature is able to assess the reasons why PR practitioners are willing to use sustainability and the expected or wished for short-term consequences. However, it lacks perspective when it comes to assessing the long-term impact of using sustainability as a PR tool.

Palihawadana, Oghazi, and Liu argue that “the mutual dependence of businesses and society has emphasized the growing importance of the concept of corporate social responsibility” (2016, p. 4964). Nowadays, companies cannot just ignore the global consensus that organisations should behave ethically and in the interest of current and future generations, and therefore in a sustainable way. There is a certain set of expectations, and PR practitioners know that the organisations they work for are under great scrutiny. Organisations and their publics are not two separate entities that can function effectively by ignoring each other’s needs and expectations. On one hand, organisations need to acknowledge the fact that the general public expects them to act ethically and sustainably. On the other hand, the public acknowledges the fact that organisations are businesses that need to make a profit to thrive and survive in a competitive market. BP is ignoring this, as demonstrated by the Sustainability Report (Palihawadana, Oghazi & Liu, 2016).

The challenge remains in determining whether the motivations behind an increase in environmental awareness are genuine. Griffin argues that “prior research has sought to

explain corporate voluntary social and environmental disclosure practices mainly through two competing theoretical framings: those viewing voluntary disclosures as signals to investors and those arguing that voluntary disclosures are used for impression management and legitimacy purposes” (2015, p. 92).

2.3.3 The relationship between CSR and sustainability

This research will focus primarily on sustainability and its representations rather than CSR. However, CSR is still a key component of reputation management. Because of their similarities, the two terms are often confused and misused.

Chandler and Werther argue that “human economic activity is depleting the world’s resources and causing dramatic changes to the earth’s atmosphere – changes that could become irreversible in the near future”. They believe that as a result, “firms that are perceived to be indifferent to their environmental responsibilities are likely to be criticized and penalized” (2014, p. 32). Sustainability then, is one of the five driving forces of CSR, along with affluence, globalization, free flow of information, and brand power (2014).

Zheng, Luo, and Maksimov believes that there are “two extreme CSR forms” (Zheng, Luo, & Maksimov, 2014): philanthropy and sustainability. Sustainability, from this perspective, is a function of CSR. Their findings suggested that “firms will adopt both forms of CSR to accommodate explicit stakeholder demands but will emphasize philanthropy when they pursue greater legitimacy with external stakeholders and sustainability initiatives when they pursue greater legitimacy with internal stakeholders” (Zheng, Luo, & Maksimov, 2014, p. 391). According to Zheng, Luo et al., the use of sustainability can be directed at influencing the perception of internal stakeholders such as employees. Thijssens, Bollen, and Hassink believed that “the concepts of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate sustainability have developed in parallel”, even

though they acknowledged that the two terms are different (Thijssens, Bollen, & Hassink, 2016, p. 87). They also argue that “businesses use the terms interchangeably”. This contributes to the confusion around the two terms, making it difficult for PR practitioners to fully grasp what sustainability really is and how it can be used to benefit an organisation while still being honest. It is important to bear in mind that tools such as philanthropy and sustainability often go hand in hand, meaning that their use should not necessarily be dissociated due to their intertwined impacts ((Zheng, Luo, & Maksimov, 2014). This is a similar perspective to the TBL promoted by Elkington. It seems then, that sustainability is a corporate responsibility.

2.3.4 Greenwashing

“Whitewashing” is defined as “a coordinated attempt to hide unpleasant facts, especially in a political context.” (Pontefract, 2016). Greenwashing is the same thing except it happens in an environmental context. It usually occurs when a company spends a lot of time and money on advertising to seem “green” and socially responsible rather than on actual decisions towards a more sustainable business practice. It is therefore like whitewashing but with a strong use of the appealing aspect of a socially and environmentally responsible organisation.

Vries, Terwel, Ellemers and Daamen (2013) demonstrated that stakeholders can be quick to assume that an organisation is relying on greenwashing rather than genuinely making a difference by incorporating sustainable activities and values in the organisation’s day-to-day decisions. According to them, “communicating that environmental policies and activities are motivated by concern for the environment could elicit positive reactions, but may also lead to accusations of corporate greenwashing –the idea that companies deliberately frame their activities as ‘green’ in order to look environmentally friendly” (Vries, Terwel, Ellemers & Daamen, 2013, p. 142). There is therefore a risk of setting

stakeholders up for deception. The more an organisation claims to engage in sustainable and corporate responsible activities, the more its publics will expect of the organisation. As mentioned earlier with the notion of deception, the line between saying not enough and too much is therefore a very fine one. The use of rhetoric is a key element of any kind of communication, and greenwashing is no exception to the rule. There are key elements that allude to sustainable decision making, and organisations must carefully back up their claims with evidence. Delmas and Cuerel Burbano define greenwashing as “the intersection of two firm behaviours: poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance” (2011, p. 65). In that case, organisations are not backing up their claims with evidence of engagement in sustainable activities, and are therefore engaging in greenwashing.

Horiuchi, Schuchard, and Shea (2009), argued that there are four main prospects as to why companies would resort to using greenwashing (cited in Wolniak, 2016, p. 448). First, the misguided business. This happens when an organisation is making considerable effort when it comes to the environment, but does not necessarily communicate it in the most truthful and effective way. Second, the unsubstantiated greenwash type. Those companies tend to spend more time on communicating about their alleged good deeds than they do acting sustainably. In the long run, they are likely to get blamed for sharing information that is likely to deceive when stakeholders come to realise the organisation does more talking than acting. Third, the greenwash noise, which occurs when an organisation recognizes the importance of acting sustainably but tends to try and talk up any action undertaken by the company. Fourth, the effective environmental communications, which are the ones PR practitioners should aim for. They involve taking part in sustainable activities, and strategically communication about those activities to internal and external stakeholders. This highlights once again how, every organisation is different and no generalizations should be made. The challenge lies in establishing a

relationship based on trust and integrity between an organisation and its stakeholders. If an organisation is known to greenwash, it is likely to lose credibility in the long-term.

Palihawadana, Oghazi, and Liu believe that “whether consumers hold positive or negative assessments of a company’s products may depend on the nature of the CSR’s initiatives the company carries out” (Palihawadana, Oghazi, & Liu, 2016, p. 4965). There is therefore a clear motive for PR practitioners to make sure that the organisations they work for understand the importance of sustainability and the benefits it can bring when used effectively and ethically. There is however always a risk of a backlash when used profusely, especially when that leads to perceptions of greenwashing for instance. OgilvyEarth describes greenwashing as “an extremely serious matter” (2009, p. 2) in its practical guide called “From Greenwash to Great”. To them greenwashing has the potential to “[erode] consumer trust, [contaminate] the credibility of all sustainability related marketing and hence [inhibit] progress toward a sustainable economy” (2009, p. 2).

After the 2010 oil spill, BP was accused of greenwashing and criticized for spending 30 billion dollars on a marketing campaign when the money could have been spent elsewhere (Barrage, Chyn & Hastings, 2014). Many were upset at the fact that BP chose to spend this money to try and improve its public image rather than on the affected communities of the Gulf of Mexico.

BP was aware of the importance of branding and in July 2000, BP launched a \$200 million campaign (Fountain, 2016) to rebrand the company and make it seem more environment-friendly. The name of the organisation was changed from “British Petroleum” to “Beyond Petroleum”, implying that BP was not solely interested in the petroleum industry. The logo was also changed to one with brighter colours resembling the sun or a flower. While

this may seem like a benign change, BP knew that it would have a strong impact on how the organisation was perceived by the general public.

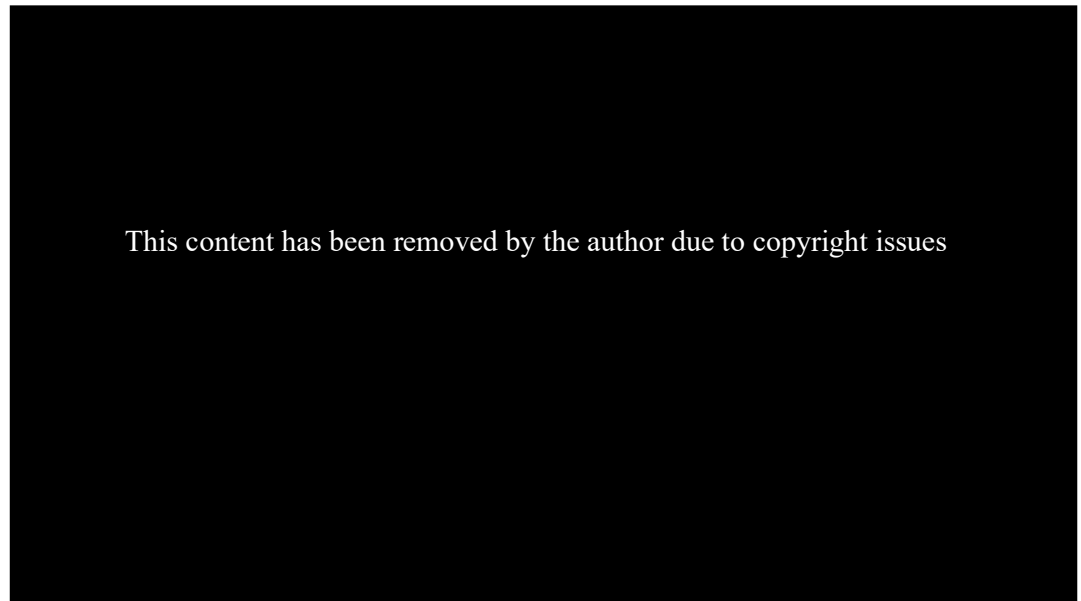


Figure 1 – British Petroleum logo evolution from 1921 to 2000 (n.d.)

As demonstrated by the image above, there is evidence that BP has tried to experiment with greenwashing in the past, but it does not seem to be part of BP's PR strategy anymore. In 2015, Macalister writes about BP abandoning its efforts to engage in meaningful "green energy projects". He argues that "BP pumped billions of pounds into low-carbon technology and green energy over a number of decades but gradually retired the programme to focus almost exclusively on its fossil fuel business" (2015). While BP put effort into investing in research for a more sustainable future, those efforts were not sustained in the long run and were replaced by greenwashing.

With increasing importance placed on how companies behave and communicate, the management team of BP would be mistaken if it assumed that their public would be satisfied with an organisation that shows no care for sustainability. This is where PR

practitioners have to make those expectations clear to management in order to build a relationship based on trust with the general public. It is now clear to organisations that the use of greenwashing is frowned upon, and should be avoided in order to be a genuinely sustainable organisation (William, 2003).

Wolniak believes that the “greenwashing phenomenon is a serious problem that leads to a distortion of the concept of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility” (Wolniak, 2016, p. 448). Unfortunately, greenwashing tends to cheapen the work and efforts of PR practitioners who genuinely believe in the importance of sustainability when it comes to being a “good” organisation (Wolniak, 2016). Many will say that any organisation that claims to be sustainable is simply doing so in order to influence public perception in favour of public image. Using sustainability as a PR tool is therefore about PR practitioners being careful about the claims they make on behalf of organisations and meeting the expectations of the general public with actions rather than words.

Greenwashing is often criticized, and regarded as highly dishonest and manipulative. While business ethics are increasingly considered important, greenwashing is the opposite of transparency and integrity (William, 2003). The line between being honest and dishonest is very fine when it comes to sustainability, and one can easily fall behind the line of greenwashing. While some organisations can embellish the reality without lying thanks to rhetoric, others can be tempted to make up information in order to appear more “green”. Ditlev-Simonsen argued that “corporations presumptively apply ethics rhetoric in their CSR reports to achieve certain communication goals, such as for example enhancing legitimacy” (Ditlev-Simonsen, 2011, p. 68). As a matter of fact, an organisation that displays concern for sustainability is more appealing than one which denies the importance of caring for corporate ethics (Ditlev-Simonsen, 2011). This can push PR practitioners to embellish the nature of their actions. Attention must therefore be

drawn to the fact that not all PR practitioners who use sustainability are engaging in greenwashing.

2.4 The relationship between sustainability and PR

2.4.1 CSR as a PR tactic

Swaen and Chumpitaz (2008) argue that “the positive corporate reputation gained through CSR can determine the perceived quality of products and services” (cited in Palihawadana, Oghazi, & Liu, 2016, p. 4965). This emphasizes the idea that CSR, along with sustainability, can have a profound impact on how an organisation is perceived. Brueckner argues that “originally, CSR was overtly social in orientation and pre-occupied chiefly with business and society relationships”. Nowadays, “CSR goes beyond social aspects, capturing – among others – the environmental dimension as well” (2010, p. 24). This is why it is so closely linked to environmental sustainability.

Authors such as Grunig and Heath (2006) have argued that “public relations is an occupation which is evolving from early origins in pure publicity and press agency to a strategic management function, which also provides counsel to organisations managing relationships with various stakeholders” (Grunig & Heath cited in Benn, Todd, & Pendleton, 2010, p. 406). Because of this growing function, PR practitioners have had to incorporate corporate social responsibility into their strategic planning and everyday activities. Organisations are now expected to show concern for more than just profit, and to question whether the activities they are undertaking are socially responsible. Ditlev-Simonsen believes that CSR is “ostensibly about doing good”. She however poses the question of “Good for whom?” (Ditlev-Simonsen, 2011, p. 66). It is true that CSR sometimes seems to be more about making the organization look good than it is about actually doing good. Fleming et al. note that “conventional notions of responsible behaviour – especially in the context of major business corporations – maintain a sharp

distinction between communication on the one hand and action on the other.” (Fleming et al., 2013, p. 373). Ditlev-Simonsen (2011) argues that the number of organisations that publish CSR reports has increased greatly, in an attempt to reflect and portray certain ethical and sustainable commitments. She added that “now it is more common to extend the reports to address corporate responsibility and sustainability issues” (p. 67). This displays the effort of PR practitioners who use those reports to show the general public what conscious efforts the organisations are making.

Du and Sen use the example of Dove, a personal care brand, who launched a worldwide campaign named “Real Beauty” in 2004. The aim of the campaign was to encourage women to appreciate their inner and outer beauty in order to be confident, no matter what they look like. During the campaign and to this day, Dove argues that “Beauty is for everyone” and invites “all women to realize their personal potential for beauty by engaging them with products that deliver superior care” (Dove, n.d.). The Dove campaign is relevant in the context of CSR as a PR tactic as it is a clear example of an organisation finding balance between benefiting the public and benefiting itself. Du and Sen argue that “this campaign is already considered a classic example of modern CSR approach of improving consumer well-being while at the same time helping achieve a strategic goal such as market development and increased sales” (Du & Sen, 2016, p. 19). While they believed the Dove campaign to be a huge success, they strongly emphasized the idea that “to integrate CSR successfully into a company’s strategy, it is necessary to know what fosters and what hinders success” (Du & Sen, 2016, p. 19). Just like with any other PR strategy, the use of sustainability should involve careful research and planning in order to be effective.

Unfortunately, the current literature seems to suggest that many PR practitioners rush into using sustainability (Edwards, 2011). This leads to two main risks. The first one, is that the efforts of the public relations practitioners will not reach the expected results due to

poor execution. The second risk, is that it will come across as dishonest to the general public, and have a far more negative impact on the organisation's public image than if nothing had been done. Signitzer and Prexl made similar arguments, saying that "empirical evidence demonstrates that more and more companies publish sustainability reports and start talking about the interdependence of financial, social, and environmental issues with their stakeholders" (Signitzer & Prexl, 2008, p. 15). It seems then, that CSR and therefore sustainability has the potential to benefit both organisations and their public. It however needs to be carefully assessed to avoid the use of CSR as a purely strategic and goals-based tool.

2.4.2 Sustainability as a PR tactic

Sustainability is often used by PR practitioners to influence the way an organisation is perceived by its publics. While there are likely benefits for society when engaging in sustainability communication, the principal appeal for PR practitioners seems to be putting the organisation in a positive light.

Eco-efficiency, which is a company that offers sustainability consulting services, argues that by engaging in sustainability, organisations are likely to benefit from the following: "enhanced brand and increase competitive advantage, increase productivity and reduced costs, improve financial and investment opportunity, minimized carbon risk and improved energy efficiency, and increased employee retention and recruitment" (Eco-efficiency, n.d.). Engaging in sustainability is therefore a sound strategic decision from a PR perspective.

All parties should be considered equally important when it comes to sustainability, as it should be a common effort between the driving forces of the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1998). The role of sustainability in PR should be much greater than that. Last (2013) posed the following question: "PR is often maligned as a purveyor of greenwash but what

if it was employed to play a more active role in building trust and effecting change?” (Last, 2013, para. 3). To him, there is the possibility that PR is about more than just managing reputation. He added that PR could be about “engendering positive future change and accelerating progress on key sustainability issues” (Last, 2013, para. 3).

The challenge with sustainability, is to determine what an organisation deems important and what is not. Unfortunately, one organisation does not necessarily think and behave like another one when it comes to being sustainable, as argued by Ditlev-Simonsen who believed that “the expressed patterns of moral reasoning, varies considerably among the companies” (Ditlev-Simonsen, 2011, p. 76). He demonstrated that not all organisations engage in sustainability for the same reasons, meaning that different motives can lead to different uses of sustainability and therefore different outcomes. Possible motives include, but are not restricted to, innovation, costs, brand differentiation, long-term perspective, customer engagement and employee engagement (Epstein-Reeves, 2012).

Sustainability is now widely acknowledged but not always approached in the best manner. Organisations need to do more than just acknowledge their sustainability related decisions and concerns. While engaging in sustainable activities is a positive first step, reporting about those activities is just as crucial. This is where PR practitioners play an important role. Hawkins argued that “the concept of sustainability should be promoted not from a defensive position but proactively, to exploit the benefits both internally within companies and in the market place at large” (Hawkins, 2006, p. 8). Thus, using sustainability as a tool must be part of a long-lasting and well-planned strategic plan that considers all the parties involved. It should not be a rushed response to a crisis, but rather part of a set of values that are deeply engrained in an organisation’s culture. While sustainability reporting has the potential to help restore favourable public opinion, it can also help the company renew its public image and limit the chances of a crisis occurring again. Regester and Larkin argue that CSR now incorporates more than it used to. In their

opinion, it now “embraces eco-efficiency, business ethics, investment strategies, human rights and a wider social agenda” (Regeister & Larkin, 2008, p. 81).

Edwards argued “sustainability makes issues-focused public relations pivotal in business management innovation” (Edwards, 2011, p. 42). Arguably, using sustainability as a PR tool has changed the way PR operates, putting the emphasis on caring for more than just the organisation’s own profit and public image. PR practitioners understand that a long-term perspective involves displaying concern for the good of society, and acting accordingly. Due to the complex nature of the concept of sustainability, it is important to understand what using sustainability as a PR tool implies and leads to. Mewafarosh and Naeem argued that “ethical behaviour fosters trust amongst all the stakeholders – a precondition for long-term corporate success” (Mewafarosh & Naeem, 2016, p. 11). They added that “it is imperative companies adhere to ethical practices even at the cost of short-term losses so that they come across as a trustworthy brand to all their stakeholders” (Mewafarosh & Naeem, 2016, p. 11). To them, this is the only way companies can ensure to remain “competitive and successful” (Mewafarosh & Naeem, 2016, p. 11). PR practitioners therefore use sustainability to give organisations a long-term prospect.

Acting sustainably is arguably closely linked to acting ethically, and as demonstrated by Mewafarosh and Naeem (2016), that is a key component when it comes to being a successful organisation. While using sustainability is not a guarantee of success, disregarding sustainability would be setting up for failure. PR practitioners know that ignoring sustainable considerations would be a strategic mistake.

Rivero and Theodore believe that “modern public relations has evolved to embrace corporate sustainability” and that “corporate sustainability is built around the organisational structure that embraces public relations theories and practices” (Rivero & Theodore, 2014, p. 21). For this reason, organisations need to listen to the advice of their

PR practitioners. This is why BP's PR practitioners use sustainability as a tool outside the organisation, but also within. By publishing a sustainability report, BP legitimizes its practice with internal and external stakeholders, hoping to make it seem like the organisation is environmentally and societally conscious. For example, BP talks about how the organisation participates in conferences aiming to debate about the environment. This is likely to encourage internal and external stakeholders to trust BP.

Andrew Last (2013), claims there are three main pieces of advice that can be followed to successfully use sustainability as a PR tool. Firstly, he advised to “set and communicate a clear direction on sustainability, which liberates people throughout your organisation to talk passionately and freely about what you’re doing”. (Last, 2013, para. 14). He believes those internal stakeholders will in turn support and recommend your business. Secondly, he believed that it is important to “be transparent about your motives” (Last, 2013, para. 14). According to him, “business needs to pursue business objectives if initiative is to be sustainable” (Last, 2013, para. 14). He noted that PR practitioners should not let “PR wrap [their] business motives in cloying half stories about the social good [their] business is driving” (Last, 2013, para. 14). Thirdly, he strongly advised that PR practitioners should “tell the story of the journey”. To him, it is important to be open and share what works as well as what does not work. For this reason, he argued that “vulnerability plays surprisingly well with sustainability stakeholders and a cynical public” (Last, 2013, para. 14). Then and only then, can sustainability be used as a framing tool that can sometimes be used to engineer consent.

Edwards believe that “one area of mystery for sustainability remains return on investment – a debate familiar to long-time PR practitioners” (Edwards, 2011, p. 43). While there are some evident reputational and ethical benefits to engaging in sustainability, the financial benefits are not as obvious. This poses the question of whether sustainability is an effective tool for PR practitioners or if other more effective tools should be considered

first. It is also important to acknowledge that like any tool, sustainability is efficient only when used appropriately, and with skill. Good practice and effective communication skills are therefore essential. The challenge for PR practitioners is to measure the positive impact using sustainability has. Because it is difficult to specifically measure how an organisation is perceived, PR practitioners do not always have clear evidence of how beneficial their strategy is. This can create issues when management does not see immediate results and therefore does not see the appeal of engaging in CSR.

Another important aspect to consider is whether or not sustainability is a stand-alone tool or if it needs to be used in addition to other tools to be effective and beneficial. While being sustainable should be an important goal for organisations and their PR practitioners, it is evident that organisations still need to act like a business and make a profit. How then, can the balance between benefiting the current generations and the future ones be found? This is a question that current PR practitioners, along with academics, are still trying to figure out.

It is therefore important for PR practitioners to remind organisations that, while sustainability can be used to communicate and increase legitimacy, it also should happen on a deeper level, meaning in all of the actions undertaken by the organisation. Sustainability within the context of PR then, should involve profound changes in an organisation's values, actions and communications (Adams & McNicholas, 2007).

2.4.3 BP, sustainability and the Deepwater Horizon crisis

There has been a lot of criticism of BP's use of sustainability as a PR tactic. According to Bone, "BP developed an insidious corporate culture which grew too fast, got too rich and didn't ask the right questions on ethics, safety, or the environment" (Bone, 2012, p. 3). With its rise to the forefront of the industry, BP marketed itself as a socially and ecologically responsible brand by claiming to care about the long-term impact of its

activities (Beder, 2002). The organisation was accused of greenwashing (Beder, 2002). This set up expectations in the public eye, with people expecting BP to act in a certain way to meet ethical and sustainable standards. This resulted in greater sense of deception when a crisis occurred, as BP did not meet those expectations and therefore created a discrepancy between expectations and what actually happened. Organisations therefore have to find the right balance between setting expectations that are too low or too high. Many mistakes have been made by BP throughout the years, giving a lingering sense of betrayal (Regester & Larkin, 2008).

2.4.4 Sustainability reporting

It can sometimes be difficult for organisations to get a clear idea of what engaging in sustainability reporting entails, and of how it can benefit them. Eco-Business magazine is a publication that publishes news and commentary regarding the sustainable business scene. Eco-Business (2015) argues that if organisations get a clear idea of how sustainability reporting can benefit both society and their organisation, the long-term benefits strongly outweigh short-term concerns. In an explanatory video, they claim that without sustainability reporting, organisations know how their business is doing but not how it is impacting society and the environment because they have not had the chance to reflect on their activities.

Consumers are more likely to buy from brands that practice sustainability and transparency, which helps build brand loyalty by creating long-term shareholder value. The publication believes there are a number of things organisations should engage in as part of a bigger commitment to sustainability. This includes “implementing company measures such as monitoring and reducing usage of resources, transforming offices to be energy efficient and promoting a more inclusive workplace” (Eco-Business TV, 2015).

They also believe that by engaging in sustainability reporting and following the GRI guidelines, organisations get the opportunity to “spot opportunities and increase the organisation’s efficiency and mitigate potential risk areas”. Overall then, the long-term benefits of engaging in sustainability reporting outweigh the initial costs. This provides a new rationale for organisations to be interested in getting involved in sustainability.

A whole industry has now grown around sustainability reporting, due to growing expectations from the public, coupled with an increasing number of organisations engaging in sustainability reporting. It is becoming more difficult for organisations to ignore the need to engage in sustainability for ethical reasons and in order to remain competitive. Lubin and Esty believed that “as public scrutiny, governmental regulation, and customer expectations intensify, companies will need to build capabilities in sustainability reporting” (Lubin & Esty, 2010, para. 33).

Like many other organisations, BP uses international reporting guidelines from the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the IPIECA to report its sustainability performance and is a signatory to the UN Global Compact Global Reporting Initiative. The organisation uses the GRI G4 guidelines, a comprehensive set of indicators covering all dimensions of sustainable development. BP also complies with the GRI Oil and Gas Sector Supplement (OGSS) due to the nature of its activities. The GRI website claims the following:

The UN Global Compact and GRI signed an agreement in May 2010 to align their work in advancing corporate responsibility and transparency. As part of this agreement, GRI will develop guidance regarding the Global Compact’s ten principles and integrate UNGC issue areas into the next iteration of its Sustainability Reporting Guidelines. The UNGC will adopt the GRI Guidelines as the recommended reporting framework for the more than 5800 businesses that have joined the world’s largest corporate responsibility platform. (GRI, n.d.).

Willis (2003) argues that “the GRI aims to develop a voluntary reporting framework that will elevate sustainability reporting practices to a level equivalent to that of financial reporting in rigour, comparability, auditability and general acceptance” (p. 233). It seems then, that having standardised guidelines for sustainability reporting is an encouraging step towards transparent and effective sustainability reporting.

According to GRI (on their website), “Sustainability reporting enables organisations to consider their impacts of a wide range of sustainability issues, enabling them to be more transparent about the risks and opportunities they face”. They also add that “A sustainability report is the key platform for communicating sustainability performance and impacts – whether positive or negative”. Organisations are therefore encouraged to provide a full spectrum of their activities. Young and Dhanda believe “the best approach for a company is to report significant achievements and acknowledge weaknesses. By openly sharing information, a company can convey good faith estimates with regards to sustainability” (2012, p. 245). This is why transparency is key in sustainability reporting. Sustainability reporting therefore has the potential to have a positive impact. As summed up by Edwards, “the transparency and authenticity of sustainability communications can imbue a brand with a sense of progress, determination and good intentions -all of which contribute to a global solution for managing our collective future” (Edwards, 2011, p. 43).

Alternatively, more pessimistic academics such as Cho, Laine, Roberts, and Rodrigue argue that “contradictory societal and institutional pressures, in essence, require organisations to engage in hypocrisy and develop facades, thereby severely limiting the prospects that sustainability reports will ever evolve into substantive disclosures” (Cho, Laine, Roberts, & Rodrigue, 2015, p. 78).

2.5 Conclusion

This literature review has shown that there is significant academic interest in sustainability and its relationship with public relations. This interest is widely reflected in PR literature. CSR and sustainability have particular PR functions. Some see them as tactics. The key concern is that sustainability is frequently used to fulfil corporate goals. There is a body of well-researched crisis management theory. According to this theory, BP's response to the 2010 oil spill was insufficient. Its current sustainability communications can be seen in light of this communication mismanagement. The literature has shown that BP's inadequate 2010 crisis response has reflected non-genuine engagement with sustainability and has had ongoing consequences such as reduced stakeholders' trust, negative reputation and added costs. This is reflected in their current sustainability approach, particularly in their sustainability documents. In order to demonstrate that BP uses sustainability as a PR tool, the rest of this thesis examines a Sustainability Report from 2015.

CSR and sustainability have particular PR functions and are seen by some as tactics. There is a body of well-researched crisis management theory, according to which BP's response to the 2010 oil spill was insufficient. The organisation's current sustainability communications are a result of this communication mismanagement and reflect its current values. Knowing this, BP should appreciate the importance and role of a genuine sustainability report, and understand how genuine sustainability can benefit the organisation in the long run.

3. Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This research consists of a detailed analysis of how sustainability is applied in BP's 2015 Sustainability Report. In order to do this, I analyse the report using multimodal discourse analysis, Social Judgement Theory, and propaganda theory to analyse the persuasive elements of BP's Sustainability Report. Then, I used the TARES (Baker & Martinson, 2001) and Five Ethical Pillars of Public Communication (Parsons, 2007) to comment on the ethics of this from a PR perspective.

This thesis was motivated by my desire to shed light on the challenges faced by PR practitioners when it comes to using sustainability as a tool. I was also interested in exploring how some PR practitioners are following the unethical practice of using sustainability simply as a tactic. It was also sparked by my anger about the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill and the suspicion that BP has never truly faced up to it. As a result of this I had a number of concerns and came to the conclusion that BP's current approach to sustainability was worth investigating in detail.

I chose a multimodal approach to analysing BP's current approach to sustainability reporting because it allows for a thorough analysis of all elements of BP's 2015 Sustainability Report, not just the language. By doing so, this research will determine how genuine BP's current approach to sustainability is.

I conducted a preliminary search and read BP's 2015 Sustainability Report when researching this topic. In my background research, part of the method was to conduct a preliminary search to look for data and determine what BP has kept online and what it has removed. These searches revealed that on its website (bp.com), BP provides press releases, speeches, images and address topics that portray BP in a favourable light such as accomplishments, investments, expansions, and new partnerships. An online search

shows that the official internal information published by BP about the Deepwater Horizon disaster is limited. BP is presenting a sanitised account of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, and negative information about the 2010 oil spill is non-existent on BP's website. This makes it difficult to grasp what really happened before and during the crisis. It is clear that BP is carefully controlling public access to negative information about the 2010 oil spill.

The official BP website has clear headings such as “sustainability” and “environment”. However, their content is one-sided and seems to be promotional rather than informational. They completely ignore issues such as the consequences of the 2010 oil spill and the ongoing impact on the affected communities. This website and these headings are also part of BP's goal and effort to influence public perception. BP has been putting extensive resources into its communication about sustainability but the question is whether this effort is used in the “right place” or to benefit BP's reputational and financial gains. These are impressions gained from doing preliminary research. This research aims to reveal how genuine BP's contemporary approach to sustainability is.

3.2 Methodology

In order to investigate the research question and determine whether or not BP's contemporary approach to sustainability is genuine, this research focuses on the 2015 Sustainability Report which, at the time of writing this thesis, was the most current report.

The primary methodology I chose to analyse the report was multimodal discourse analysis. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) define multimodality as “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined” (p. 20). Multimodal discourse analysis then, takes into consideration multiple semiotic modes and how they create meaning when combined. I chose this methodology because it allows for a close analysis of how

language, graphics, layout, headings and images create perception. This approach provided a method to analyse the rhetorical strategies BP uses in its 2015 Sustainability Report.

While all of the content published by BP reflects the organisation's motives and values, the 2015 Sustainability Report appears to be the most significant when it comes to assessing BP's approach to sustainability. The report is a significant document that clearly claims to represent BP's sustainability endeavours. Because of its rhetorical and carefully crafted nature, the report is enough on its own to be able to draw conclusions. Rather than looking at a range of reports, this analysis focusses on numerous examples within the one document. However, it needs to be analysed in details and from a multitude of angles. This is where multimodal discourse analysis provides the necessary tools for that deep analysis. This detailed focus on one source of data is a well-known multimodal approach. Chapter Four will therefore look at the one report from different angles in order to pull out themes related to the topic of sustainability.

One of the advantages of a multimodal methodology is that it has the potential to reveal not only what BP includes in this 2015 Sustainability Report but also what it excludes. As explained by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), multimodal discourse analysis provides a deeper understanding of the language used in the 2015 Sustainability Report. They argue that "where traditional linguistics has defined language as a system that worked through double articulation, where a message was an articulation as a form and as a meaning, [they] see multimodal texts as making meaning in multiple articulations" (p. 4). Multimodal texts such as BP's 2015 Sustainability Report therefore create meaning by combining multiple elements.

3.2.1 Propaganda theory as a way of analysing rhetorical intentions

In this thesis, the emphasis is on unpicking BP's rhetorical and strategic intentions when it developed the 2015 Sustainability Report. It is clear that BP crafted the report with specific goals in mind. The aim of using propaganda theory as part of my methodology is to demonstrate that in its report, BP uses elements of propaganda in order to reach its goals. Here, propaganda is used as an analysis tool for discourse. It will allow us to pass judgement on BP's 2015 Sustainability Report.

Public relations and propaganda have been related topics for many decades. This has shed a negative light on PR practitioners, although many cannot clearly explain why propaganda has historically been associated to PR (L'Etang, 2008). Lasswell defines propaganda as "the control of opinion by significant symbols, or, so to speak, more concretely and less accurately by stories, rumours, reports, pictures, and other forms of social communication" (1928, p. 9). He adds that the word propaganda comes from the need for a word which means "the making of deliberately one-sided statements to a mass audience" (Lasswell, 1950, p. 284). This implies a malicious and manipulative intent.

There are a number of definitions of propaganda. For example, "the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 1992, p. 4) and "the consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea, or group" (Bernays, 1928, p. 25). There are a number of recognised elements of propaganda such as card-stacking, simplification, glittering generality, testimonial, and bandwagon (McClung Lee, 1945). As it will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, as a result of the data analysis, BP's 2015 Sustainability Report presents many aspects of propaganda rhetoric such as card-stacking and glittering generalities.

The use of propaganda in PR is closely related to ethics, as it questions the intent and motivation behind BP's decision to write and publish a sustainability report. Fawkes questions whether ethics can save PR from the charge of propaganda (2007). This suggests that in order to be ethical, organisations must avoid using propaganda and avoid manipulation.

3.2.2 Social Judgement theory – Theory of audience analysis

Another methodological tool used in this analysis is Social Judgement Theory (SGT) (Sherif & Hovland, 1962). The significance of this theory to this analysis is that it is a theory of audience analysis. An understanding of the public is essential when analysing what BP's intentions were when publishing this report, as it impacts BP's decision-making process.

SJT can be used to explain why an organisation would choose one message over another. This framework provides an explanation as to why people pass judgement the way they do. By gaining a better understanding of how judgement is passed, organisations can target specific groups. In BP's case, the organisation is trying to push a certain message to a particular audience. That message is one related to profit and success, rather than one related to sustainability and ethics. SJT helps BP "predict" what its stakeholders will value and how they will judge the report's content.

According to the SJT (Sherif, 1962), when we hear a message we judge where it should be placed on an attitude scale in our minds. To him, there is a subconscious action that occurs at the instant of perception, and it leads to the evaluation of an idea by comparing it to currently held attitudes. This is why strategic actions are used to lead to a favourable organisational reputation. SJT then provides a general understanding of how we process information. It also provides a way of analysing audiences.

Mallard (2010) defines the Social Judgement Theory as “a way to explain when persuasive messages are most likely to succeed and how people make judgements about them” (p. 197). There are different latitudes, as we have different levels of tolerance on any given topic, even if we share similar attitudes. People therefore have a personal position on any given topic, which is what each person believes is acceptable. The three latitudes determine how we process and categorise the information we hear every day. However, there are contrast and assimilation errors that occur when people judge the messages they encounter. Contrast error occur when “people judge messages that fall within their latitude of rejection as further from their anchor than they really are” (Griffin, 2015, p. 181). Assimilation error on the other hand occur when “people judge messages that fall within their latitude of acceptance as less discrepant from their anchor than they really are” (Griffin, 2015, p. 181).

A key element of SJT is audiences. There are two types of audiences, the non-commitment type and the committed type (Sherif, 1962). BP seems to be targeting the non-commitment type of audience, meaning people who do not hold strong opinions regarding sustainability, and who are therefore less likely to hold BP accountable for its sustainability claims. Environmental activists for instance, who by definition hold strong beliefs when it comes to sustainability related issues, are more likely to be sceptical when reading BP’s report than someone who is reading it out of financial interest, for example and with no real commitment to the topic.

When an attitudinal change occurs, two main phases are involved. First, we judge how far or close a message is to our anchored position. Then, we shift our anchor and adjust somewhat to accommodate the new input. In that case, “stakeholder groups would adjust their reputational assessments in response to new cues, thereby changing the firm’s reputation” (Mishina, Block, & Mannor, 2012, p. 18). The way individuals process information and react to ideas is an automatic mental process, which BP has no interest

in disturbing. Whether it would be worth it for BP to try and make people shift their latitude of acceptance/rejection will be discussed in Chapter Five.

When utilising SJT, it is important to take into consideration the level of ego involvement. This impacts how relevant a topic is to someone's self-concept and self-esteem. In the case of some of BP's stakeholders, the topic of sustainability is not a top priority. The report is partly targeted at investors who are more concerned about BP's financial performance than they are with sustainability.

Ultimately, SJT affects how we communicate, persuade, and most importantly in BP's case, how it directs its sustainability related communication. BP directs its message to the public who want BP to continue expanding and thrive financially. They are not concerned with sustainability, and therefore do not hold BP accountable for the way the organisation reports on sustainability. Maybe there should be a drive for a more altruism-driven approach to communicating audiences. Griffin argues that "perhaps by acknowledging the organised hypocrisy embedded within corporate sustainability talk, decisions, and actions, a more constructive dialogue can develop that improves corporations' sustainability reporting and challenges their justifications for actions undertaken to meet only the market demands of core stakeholders" (2015, p. 92).

There are two main reasons why BP would, could, and should try to convince stakeholders, with words and actions that they are ethical. The first one, is that it is the right (ethical) thing to do and is a goal that good businesses should always strive for. The second one, is that by doing so more people will think highly of BP and it will impact the organisation's reputation favourably. However, it seems that BP does not care about either reason. Arguably though, BP would not benefit enough from convincing people that the organisation engages in sustainability for the effort to be worth it. The question

then, is whether that is bad and unethical practice, or just the way BP does business and prioritises.

Chapter Five discusses how predictable is the response of the people who are going to read the report is, and how much BP can predict that response thanks to SJT. This is possibly what allows BP to not try that hard for the Sustainability Report. It is important to keep in mind that BP has been in the industry for decades, and therefore knows what the expectations are and what they can “get away with”.

3.2.3 Tests for ethical authenticity

The aim of this research is to determine how genuine BP’s approach to sustainability is. One way to look at the term “genuine” in the research question is to look at BP from an ethics perspective. This allows this research to take into consideration the ethical implications of sustainability reporting from a PR perspective. This research will rely on the fact that it is easier to judge what is unethical rather than what is ethical.

In an effort to define what PR practitioners should strive for in terms of ethics, Parsons provides fundamental principles called the Five Pillars of Ethics in Public Communication (Parsons, 2007). She suggests the five ethical pillars can give guidance to PR practitioners, arguing that they “carry the weight of ethical decision making in public relations practice” (Parsons, 2007, p. 20). If followed, they should ensure ethical PR practice. The five pillars are veracity, non-maleficence, beneficence, confidentiality and fairness.

The TARES test (Baker & Martinson, 2001) allows us to ask big ethical questions. It is a framework for ethical guidance when it comes to framing a message. It is not part of the analysis but allows us to pass judgement. It will be used in Chapter Five to make informed comments about whether or not BP has used sustainability reporting ethically. The TARES test can be used to assess BP’s approach to sustainability from an ethical

perspective, and to help go beyond the words used in the sustainability report. The TARES test consists of five principles of ethical persuasion, and is a somewhat objective way of addressing the report's ethical value. It enables this research to analyse how BP frames its message in the 2015 Sustainability Report.

3.3 The data chosen for analysis

The 2015 Sustainability Report provides insight into how the business is performing from a sustainability-related perspective, and highlights the rhetorical intent of the report. At the beginning of the Sustainability Report, BP states "Our reporting is aimed at our key stakeholders – those who are affected by our organisation and who affect us". This is a broad statement, which makes it necessary to dig deeper to understand why and how BP uses sustainability reporting.

BP first published sustainability reports in 1998 and has published them every year since then. The reports are available in English, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese for the most part and are usually around 50 pages in length. While this research focuses on the global 2015 Sustainability Report, BP also sporadically publishes sustainability reports for Angola, Australia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Oman.

The organisation uses international reporting guidelines from The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association (IPIECA) to report on its sustainability performance. There are however no legal obligations requiring organisations to engage in sustainability reporting. According to the GRI, thousands of companies, including over 90 percent of the largest 250 companies in the world and over 70 percent of the largest 100 companies in 41 countries, now disclose sustainability information (GRI, 2013). As explained in Chapter Two, sustainability reporting has become an accepted and expected practice even though it is

done on a voluntary basis. This means that BP is expected to report on its performance in relation to sustainability to the point where it almost becomes compulsory.

For the purpose of this research I focus on the most recent report written in 2015 (see Appendix). This report was chosen as a representative selection. It is used as a means of examining how BP wants to be perceived and which values they believe are most important. As with any promotional material, what is said is important, but what is not said or addressed is just as important.

It is 56 pages in length and has text and pictures on almost every page. The report, which is available online, is in A4 format and of a size of 4.2 KB. There is unfortunately no way of knowing how many times the 2015 Sustainability Report has been read and by whom. It comes in a printed version which is available, free of charge, by request through the post. The printed version is printed by Pureprint Group Limited, UK on Oxygen paper and board. Oxygen is made using 100% recycled pulp, a large percentage of which is deinked (Sustainability Report, p. 56). The pictures and images are in full colour throughout the entire report and they are of high resolution. There is a balance of text, images, and charts throughout the whole Sustainability Report, which contributes to the overall reading flow. There is great attention to detail throughout the report, for example with the infographics, carefully crafted to look appealing.

One of the advantages of analysing this Sustainability Report is that it is current. During the process of writing this thesis, the 2016 Sustainability Report was published. That was however after this research was well under way. While this research could have used more than one of BP's sustainability reports, the goal was to assess BP's current PR tactics. For this reason, the 2015 Sustainability Report was the best possible data.

3.4 Conclusion

The 2015 Sustainability Report is a carefully crafted public relations tactic on the part of BP in an effort to affect public perception. Multimodal discourse analysis provides the necessary methodology to analyse the 2015 Sustainability Report and its data. Each of these modes is a carefully chosen rhetorical device that contributes to BP's overall use of sustainability as a PR tactic.

Not only were the visual modes significant but the language used is also significant. Therefore, I also used propaganda theory to examine the rhetoric used in the report, and shed light on BP's PR strategy and goals. SJT helped explain how BP decides to address its publics, and what messages it is sending. Finally, I will use the TARES test (Baker & Martinson, 2001) and Five Ethical Pillars of Public Communication (Parsons, 2007) to assess how genuine BP's approach to sustainability is, and that could not have been done without the guidance of an ethics related perspective. This is where the TARES test and Five Ethical of Pillars of Ethics proved useful, providing guidelines to assess BP's actions.

4. Chapter Four: Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the multimodal elements of BP's 2015 Sustainability Report. It addresses the physical elements of the report and the language used. Analysis of the data highlights the discrepancies between what one would expect of a responsible organisation and what BP has included in its 2015 Sustainability Report.

The chapter focusses on how sustainability is represented in the report. The methodology used in this analysis is multimodal discourse. This methodology allows for analysis of the images, layout, language and infographics used in the report rather than focusing solely on language. This approach provides rhetorical insight into BP's intentions.

The analysis of the data will provide insight into how BP uses sustainability to fulfil its current public relations objectives, as well as how BP's broader approach to sustainability is reflected in the 2015 Sustainability Report. This will help determine how genuine BP's approach to sustainability is.

4.2 The 2015 Sustainability Report


BP's 2015 Sustainability Report, which is the report used for this analysis, was published on 16 March 2016. At the time of submitting this thesis, the latest sustainability report published to date was published on 6 April 2017 and was therefore not available when this research began. The report is accessible on the BP website (bp.com) under the section "Sustainability". The pathway is then "BP and Sustainability", and "Downloads and Archives".

While easily accessible, the sustainability reports are not advertised on any of the main pages of BP's global website.

The 2015 report is 53 pages long, with a total of 46 images and 41 infographics. Of the 46 images, 33 of them are stock images which are fairly generic and look professionally shot for use as promotional content. This emphasizes the idea that BP produced this report with the intent of communicating a very specific message to its readers, rather than as a true reflection of BP's activities. Of the other images, seven are portraits of BP executives, and six are photographs taken during events. These events include meetings and conferences. 16 of the 33 stock images included one or more men wearing hard hats, and six of the portraits are of men. Only one woman is shown throughout the entire report.

The following image, which is on the cover page of the report, displays two working men wearing hard hats. As this is the cover page, it establishes the tone for the rest of the report and sets expectations with the readers. It also lets the readers know what they can expect from this report. It shows two white middle-aged men with hard hats engaged in earnest conversation. The man with his face to the camera is smiling. The image has three panels. On either side of the men are images of metal. On the right are metal bars. On the left scaffolding and cranes. These are images of progress and construction in relation to the gas and oil industry.

While it may seem like an over-exaggeration to have expectations for the whole report based on the cover page, one must bear in mind that BP put thought and effort into choosing which images would go on the cover page of the report. As demonstrated by the data in this chapter, BP has a business and profit-orientated approach to sustainability, which is reflected in the choice of those images. Nature is presented as a resource to exploit; not one to cherish.



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Figure 2 – Front cover of the 2015 sustainability report

4.3 Sustainability reporting expectations

As discussed in Chapter Two, sustainability is a contentious and disputed term that has many interpretations. As also discussed in Chapter Two, a widely agreed upon definition is that behaving sustainably is acting in a way that cares for the current generation without jeopardising the well-being of future generations (United Nations, 1987). BP provides its own definition in its 2015 Sustainability Report. On page 3 of the report BP defines

sustainable success as “acting in the long-term interests of [their] shareholders, [their] partners and society” (2016, p. 3). BP’s definition is in agreement with the commonly accepted definition of sustainability. Both definitions refer to preserving resources for the future. This means that because BP’s definition of sustainability is similar to commonly accepted definitions, BP’s sustainability reports should meet common sustainability reporting expectations. Therefore, it could be assumed that a genuine approach to sustainability, and a will to report on the organisation’s performance, should take into consideration the three main dimensions of sustainability: environmental, social and economic (Elkington, 1998).

There are a number of key features that one would expect to see in a sustainability report. One would therefore assume that terms such as, but not limited to, ‘sustainability’, ‘nature’, ‘environment’, ‘communities’, ‘wildlife’, ‘pollution’ and ‘ecosystem’ would be used frequently throughout the sustainability report. When examining other sustainability reports such as Coca Cola’s latest sustainability report, these recurring themes and key words were clearly evident. While the Coca Cola sustainability report is not a perfect example of what a sustainability report should be, it does address key elements of sustainability. It helped determine what themes and terminology should be found in an organisation’s sustainability report.

4.4 Compliance with reporting guidelines

As mentioned in Chapter Two, BP uses international reporting guidelines from the GRI and IPIECA to report its sustainability performance. It therefore uses the GRI G4 guidelines. These are a comprehensive set of indicators covering all dimensions of sustainable development. BP also reports against the GRI Oil and Gas Sector Supplement (OGSS). These are well developed standards for sustainability reporting that have been adopted by many corporations such as General Motors, Solvay and Coca-Cola.

The sustainability reporting guidelines are adopted on a voluntary basis, which means organisations are not bound to any of the suggested standards. However, BP is a member and makes claims that its reporting mechanisms adhere to the standards.

The GRI guidelines define sustainability reporting as “the practice of measuring, disclosing, and being accountable to internal and external stakeholders for organisational performance towards the goal of sustainable development” (Sustainability Reporting Guidelines, 2011, p. 3). By publishing a sustainability report then, BP makes openly available a document that indicates the way the organisation approaches sustainability on a broad and specific level. While the report is published annually and only touches on a few topics, it is important to note that BP’s approach to sustainability in its report highlights how BP approaches sustainability on a larger scale. The report is the medium BP has chosen to represent the organisation’s approach to sustainability during the year of 2015, which creates a set of expectations from the readers’ perspective. On the second page, there is a section called “About our reporting” that states the following:

This Sustainability Report and bp.com/sustainability concentrate on performance and activities from 1 January to 31 December 2015. We aim to report on all aspects of our business, including joint ventures where we are the operator. Where appropriate, we also seek to provide an overview of joint venture activities where we are not the operator, but where we have significant influence on our partners.

We validate the content with our external assurance provider, Ernst & Young, whose remit includes commenting on the prominence given to each topic and identifying any gaps.

We apply the Global Reporting Initiative’s G4 guidelines, and we use guidance from our industry association IPIECA. We also report against the UN Global

Compact's 10 principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. (BP, p. 2).

This section tells the readers what they can expect from this report, and gives it a sense of credibility, by referring to well-known entities that have an already-established reputation. The organisation calls upon external entities as greater authorities. It also implies that because BP is following guidelines, the content of the report can be trusted and considered unbiased. The adoption of official reporting guidelines implies to readers that the content of the report they are about to read is influenced by a multitude of entities and not solely by BP.

When it comes to sustainability reports, especially because they are voluntary, organisations have the liberty to choose the best way to report on sustainability-related issues and challenges they have encountered. However, there is a consensus that a sustainability report should address and assess what an organisation has achieved in an effort to be a more sustainable business. The report should be as transparent as possible, and raise any challenges the organisation has encountered and present how it is intending to attend to those challenges. Sustainability reporting makes the position of the organisation on sustainability-related issues as clear as possible.


Upon researching the way the GRI's guidelines and frameworks are constructed, and who has an input in determining how they have evolved throughout the years, it is evident that many entities have had involvement. GRI has what they call working groups, which they define as "temporary bodies, comprised of experts responsible for developing new and revised content for the GRI Reporting Framework – including performance indicators and measurement protocols. Their membership provides geographical and constituency balance". Some of those group members include BP, Eni, Hess, Shell, Statoil and Petrobras. The GRI assures they "work to align wherever possible, in order to best serve

the oil and gas community's reporting needs". While it is perfectly acceptable for BP to be one of the contributing members, this is not made obvious in its sustainability report. For transparency purposes, it would have been beneficial for BP to disclose its impact on the GRI guidelines and more specifically on the GRI Oil and Gas Supplement. This gives a sense that BP is being partially dishonest and knows that admitting their role in the development of the GRI Reporting Frameworks would lessen the credibility of the sustainability report.

It is surprising to note that as a contributing member, BP plays a role in determining the recommendations of the GRI guidelines for sustainability reporting. While BP has this influence in deciding the guidelines, the organisation does not appear to adhere to these recommendations. This poses the question of how valuable those guidelines are if even the organisations contributing to them do not apply them. There is no evidence of BP being held accountable for the degree to which the organisation follows the GRI guidelines. This means that BP can claim to follow the GRI guidelines without implementing them fully.

As discussed in the Literature Review, this fits with those who criticise the GRI, arguing that they encourage sustainability reporting rather than good sustainability reporting, which often leads to nothing more than a superficial PR effort on the organisations' part. Throughout the years, the GRI has encouraged an increase in the number of organisations who are reporting on their approach to sustainability, but has done so without enforcing strict standards and expectations.

The GRI Oil and Gas Sector Supplement (OGSS) provides insight into why there are guidelines specific to the oil and gas industry. While sustainability reporting should be consistent across industries, there are dimensions that apply specifically to the oil and gas sector. Those dimensions would otherwise not be of concern to organisations in other sectors and their stakeholders.



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Figure 3 – Screenshot of the GRI Oil and Gas Sector Supplement (OGSS)

Overall, BP's Sustainability Report addresses the issues presented in Figure 2. However, they are not all given the same degree of importance, and some are therefore put aside while others are manipulated in BP's favour. For instance, BP writes at great length about supporting the carbon tax, but it does not provide a clear plan of how it is planning on contributing to a low-carbon future. It seems that BP has repeated key terms taken from the guidelines for the report, but is failing to address significant issues such as waste management, labour practices, ecosystem and biodiversity impact which are equally

important to the carbon tax. A few key words are therefore present in the report but are not used to address serious aspects of sustainability.

BP's motivation to publish the Sustainability Report is not what is expected of an ethical organisation. It is likely that some of the stakeholders' expectations when it comes to sustainability report are not met. This report then, does not meet the promises of a sustainability report. The rest of the analysis in this chapter will help determine whether that is a mistake on BP's part or if it is a carefully crafted decision that allows BP to reach its PR goals.

4.5 The use of infographics

Another key component of the sustainability report is the carefully crafted infographics. They are used throughout the report (41 in total) and are part of the data analysed in this chapter. The 41 infographics all use nature-associated colours such as different shades of green and yellow. They contribute to the overall appearance of the report, breaking down the otherwise lengthy sections of text in the report. They also make the report more pleasant visually. They aim to catch the readers' eye but the text is too small to encourage genuine or deep engagement.

The following chart is part of a greater chart that presents BP's two main operating segments: the upstream segment and the downstream segment. BP defines its upstream segment as "responsible for activities in oil and natural gas exploration, field development and production, as well as midstream transportation, storage and processing" (bp.com, 2017). On the other hand, the downstream segment has "global manufacturing and marketing operations" (bp.com, 2017). It involves three main aspects of BP's business: fuels, lubricants and petrochemicals.

While it is relevant to present what oil and gas activities BP engages in, it would be even more relevant in the context of this report to have a chart explaining what sustainable activities BP engages in.

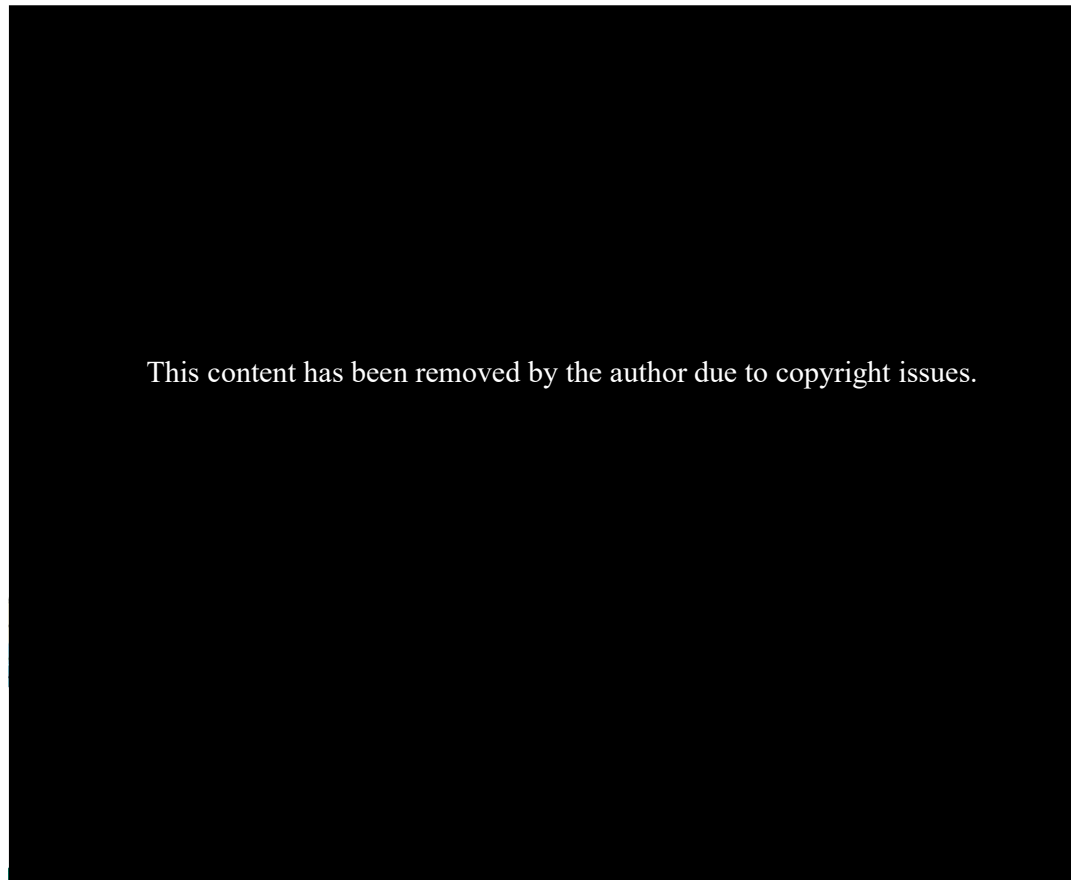


Figure 4 – Screenshot of page 5 of the report

A close analysis of Figure 5 reveals that it focuses on economic value rather than on sustainability-related numbers. It is also important to note the small annotations under this chart, which say that it “excludes amounts associated with the Gulf of Mexico oil spill” as well as excluding “any fines, penalties or other amounts paid to governments in relation to the Gulf of Mexico oil spill”. While BP is being transparent and stating that those amounts are not included in the chart, it seems dishonest to not include them in the

numbers. The small print is also particularly difficult to read, meaning readers could easily miss that important piece of information.

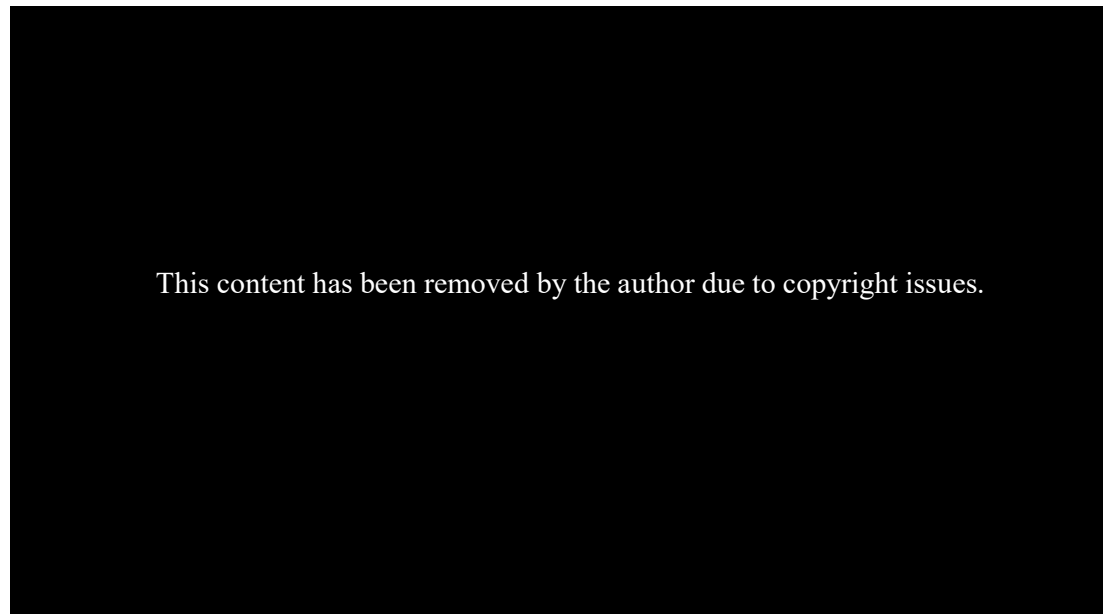


Figure 5 – Screenshot of page 4 of the report

The report fails to address sustainability in a genuine way and only superficially addresses the real challenges of trying to be a sustainable organisation. The word sustainability is used in only 31 instances throughout the whole report. 13 of these are in the independent assurance statement written by Ernst & Young and 11 are in the cautionary statement. This means the word sustainability is only used 7 times in the actual report. Similarly, the term “sustainability” does not appear in any of the titles of this report. The titles of a report provide insight into the content of the report, and into what the organisation deems most important. In BP’s case, the decision to not include the word sustainability in any of the Sustainability Report’s titles reflects a lack of authenticity.

At the beginning of the report, the Group Chief Executive makes the claim that BP is a responsible operator: “To earn the support of society, we need to be a responsible operator that is prepared to recognize and help to resolve many different concerns – among them

environmental issues, economic impacts and relationships with communities, suppliers, customers, partners and governments” (p. 2, para. 4). While this follows an earlier claim that BP aims to be a sustainable business, it does not make any real promises or commitments. In this report BP fails to recognize and help resolve those concerns.

On page 3, BP defines “sustainable success” as acting “in the long-term interest of our stakeholders, our partners, and society” (para. 3). This definition is particularly vague. It is a rather standard and broad definition. While this allows BP to not be held accountable to specific actions or achievements, and allows BP’s approach to sustainability to be blurry and inconsistent.

The analysis shows that BP’s definition of sustainability is vague and inconsistent. The report demonstrates that BP does not follow its own definition of this key term throughout the report. On page 2, the report claims that “A business that aims to be sustainable has to order its priorities accordingly. It has to make safety its top priority. It has to earn and maintain the support of society. And it has to take actions to help safeguard the environment for future generations. So, issues of sustainability are vital for the future of our business” (para. 2).

4.6 “Safety” – a recurrent theme

There is a section at the end of Bob Dudley’s (CEO of BP) message on page 3 called “Our strategy and sustainability”. This section is the closest that BP comes to fully addressing what sustainability means to the organisation. If the whole report was to follow this tone, this report would have been much more likely to meet the expectations of a sustainability report. The concerns and values raised in this section are however not followed up on later in the report. BP also mentions sustainability on page 10 saying “the scale and nature of BP’s operations mean that we manage a large number of sustainability issues”. This section then lists seven different issues that are related to sustainability

according to BP: accidents and oil spills, climate change, managing risks, business ethics, human rights, value to society and local environmental impact. However, these issues are not all addressed in the report.

Safety is a recurrent theme throughout the Sustainability Report. The word “safety” is used 134 times. There is an entire section about safety starting on page 34 of the report. The description of this section states “Everything we do depends on the safety of our operations, our workforce and the communities around us. We strive to create and maintain a safe operating culture. Putting safety front and centre of everything we do”. Close reading shows that BP sees safety as a way to protect its physical assets rather than as a concept to apply to the economic, environmental and social aspects of sustainability.

The following quote then applies to BP: “Businesses eventually realised health and safety benefited their bottom line. They need to recognise sustainability does the same” (Nair, 2014). It seems that BP’s understanding of safety is different from what one would expect in the context of sustainability. The way BP approaches safety in its 2015 Sustainability Report reflects a particularly narrow view of the notion of safety. It is both selfish and limited, as it is primarily centred around BP and its employees only. This could go unnoticed to the casual observer.

On page 17, BP says that “BP’s Energy Sustainability Challenge programme, based on the research of 15 university partners from around the world, looks at the potential effects of natural resource scarcities on energy supply and demand”. While this statement might seem encouraging at first sight, it is more concerned with allowing BP to use available resources to their full potential than it is concerned with making sure no resource is over-used. This mind-set is also observable on page 31 where BP says that “the sustainability of biofuels can vary greatly depending on the raw materials used and agricultural conditions” which is why they “plan [their] investments and run [their] business to

address concerns related to food security, water, responsibility to the community and other sustainability impacts”.

4.7 Relationship with communities

On page 32 of the report BP says the following: “we work to maintain relationships with local communities through regular meetings, field site visits – including those by our board committee for sustainability issues – and support for local community events”.

While the committee is also mentioned on page 10 of the report, BP has not introduced the committee and its purpose anywhere in the report. This is once again an example of BP diverting attention and not providing detailed information. There is also no clear mention of who BP considers local communities to be. This enables BP to not be held accountable by specific communities if they happened to read the Sustainability Report.

Page 32 of the report quotes Jill Douglas, whose title is “Global sustainability specialist, upstream procurement and supply chain management, BP”. However, her section is related to human rights risks in the supply chain and how BP makes sure those risks are assessed. This section fails to make any bigger ethical considerations and to link it to sustainability on a broader level.

It is important to note that BP does not acknowledge alternative definitions of sustainability, therefore not searching for a deeper understanding of the complex notion. This is a limited and very narrow perspective on sustainability, which by definition is the opposite of being sustainable. Throughout the report, BP is oriented on what it perceives to be most important, not putting things into perspective and considering others. This displays a lack of concern, as BP fails to address the concerns raised by others.

On page 11, the report says, “We engaged with stakeholders on many sustainability-related issues throughout 2015”. Then, BP provides evidence of activities they believe to be sustainable with a short paragraph on each activity they believe highlights a

commitment to sustainability. However, those activities differ from the definition of sustainability previously mentioned earlier on in the report, saying it is acting “in the long-term interest of our stakeholders, our partners, and society” (p. 3, para. 5). The evidence BP provides on page 11 of the report includes communicating with contractors regarding drilling safety, taking part in discussion about climate change, and joining partnerships that will facilitate the reduction of methane emissions from oil and gas operations. While they are a good start, they lead to few, if any, concrete actions. There is no evidence in the report of how those actions have made valuable contributions to sustainability’s cause. The efforts of BP seem to be short-term focussed with little to no following-up. There is also no evidence of BP taking into consideration the specific concerns of stakeholders. There is therefore a lack of consistency throughout the whole report in relation to sustainability. Concrete evidence of sustainable actions undertaken by BP is lacking. This lack of substance makes it hard to fully grasp what BP’s stance is on sustainability or to what extent BP backs up its words with actions.

4.8 References to nature in the report

Analysis of the report shows that in the entire 52 pages, the word nature is only used 11 times. Of those 11 times, the word is used in contexts that have nothing to do with sustainability such as “nature of our business” (p. 2, para. 11), “nature of BP’s operations” (p. 10, para. 1), “nature of the asset class” (p. 19, para. 3), “depending on their nature or location” (p. 21, para. 13). The word “nature” is used in similar context on four more instances. On page 45, the word is used when referring to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which protects some of the areas BP operates in. BP mentions the fact that five of the areas it operates in are protected areas but does not address the eventual damage caused to nature in those areas.

As discussed in Chapter Two, another aspect of sustainability is that there is a conflicting relationship between business interests and the environment. A thriving business, especially in the oil and gas industry, will often come at the expense of the environment if ethically and environmentally conscious measures are not taken. From a sustainability perspective, this is something that organisations need to be very mindful of (Jooh, Pati & Roh, 2011). In its report, BP does not acknowledge this in any way. As an indication of this, 'challenges' and 'risks' that always exist between the agendas of business and the environment are barely mentioned – if they are referred to at all.

On page 24, BP mentions two main types of risks they believe are a threat to BP: strategic and commercial risks, and operational risks. They define strategic and commercial risks as related to “climate change, geopolitical risk and BP’s financial resilience” (p. 24, para. 3). On the other hand, operational risks are defined as risks that threaten the “welfare of [their] workforce, the environment and local communities” (p. 24, para. 7). While it is a good thing for BP to establish what they believe are risks, there is no evidence in the report of BP putting plans into action to manage those risks. The word 'risk' is mentioned in the context of financial risk monitored by an audit committee on page 24 (para. 16). It is used again on page 37, this time it is used in the context of cyber-attacks and the threat posed to BP’s information. None of these contexts are related to accepted notions of sustainability. From this analysis, it can be seen that BP uses the word risks in a very limited way that has more to do with the risk associated with business rather than the environment. It is also to be noted that while the report mentions “risk management” a handful of times, BP does little to define what risk needs to be managed and why.

Throughout the report, the word “challenge” is mentioned 26 times. On page 2, it is mentioned in the context of the challenges faced by BP due to changes in the industry. They refer to “sharply reduced cash flow and earnings affecting the choices [they] can make” (para. 5). They then add that “Given the challenges, [they] have had to scale back

[their] investments, lower [their] costs and reduce staff numbers”. While this is undeniably a challenge for BP to face, it is not one related to sustainability and should not be a key element of the chief executive’s introductory message. On pages 2 and 12, the report mentions the “energy challenge”, with BP addressing the fact that they are willing to meet the growing demand for energy and that this poses a problem in terms of environmental and social impact. This is what the sustainability should primarily focus on, instead of focusing on profit-related challenges.

Another important element of the report is the rhetorical intent BP has put into the images’ descriptions. It seems that the intent is to display BP’s achievements rather than describing what the images’ content is. For instance, on page 20, the description reads “Our Cherry Point refinery in the US employs about 900 people and processes more than 234,000 barrels of crude oil a day”. While this piece of information is in relation to the refinery pictured, it is not relevant when it comes to this section of the report (which is presenting the values BP follows). Similarly, on page 28, the description reads “An operator on the Mad Dog platform in the US, which operates at a water depth of over 1,300 metres”. Therefore, the role of the images is not to support the sustainability reporting but as a rhetorical device to make the reader feel good about BP.

The report is promoted online on the organisation’s social media platforms and published annually. In the sustainability section of BP.com, the organisation claims the following:

The energy we produce serves to power economic growth and lift people out of poverty. In the future, the way heat, light and mobility are delivered will change. We aim to anchor our business in these changing patterns of demand, rather than in the quest for supply. We have a real contribution to make to the world’s ambition of a low carbon future. (BP.com, n.d.)

This section of the website makes it sound like BP acknowledges the complexity of being part of the oil and gas industry in this day and age. When digging deeper, the focus is actually on presenting BP as a responsible organisation who is powerful and one of the leading giants in the industry. Unfortunately, the 2015 Sustainability Report does not acknowledge the need to adapt to the challenges faced when engaging in sustainability.

Similarly, the terms ‘environment’ and ‘society’ are the last two parts in the report (out of 11 different sections), when they should be given top priority in a sustainability report. The environment and society are key components to take into consideration when it comes to being a sustainable business, as reflected in the definition provided by BP’s CEO. However, they are secondary in this report, showcasing a lack of authenticity and transparency, along with a lack of genuine commitment to sustainability.

4.9 References to renewable energies

The topic of renewable energies is poorly addressed and largely absent in BP’s Sustainability Report. Because investing in renewable energies is a clear move towards a sustainable future, BP should understand the importance of addressing this topic at length in the Sustainability Report. As argued in Chapter Two, relying on renewable energies has significant benefits in the short and long terms, meaning it is a step towards preserving natural resources for future generations. However, little attention is given to this topic, with the word ‘renewables’ being mentioned a total of 32 times in the whole report. On page 16, BP acknowledges the importance of investing in renewable energies by saying that “renewables will play an increasingly important role in achieving a lower-carbon world” (para. 5). However, this statement is followed by BP saying it “invests in renewable energy where we can build commercially viable business at scale” (p. 16, para. 6), once again highlighting BP’s business oriented perspective. On page 31, the report states “We operate renewable energy businesses that complement our core businesses”

(p. 31). This statement does not hold any deep meaning, and yet still highlights that BP is not prepared to compromise its core business by investing in renewables.

There is then a stand-alone part of the report titled “Renewable energy” on page 31. This section of the report is only one page long and is broken down into two parts: biofuels and wind energy. While it states what BP’s current activities are in relation to those two types of renewable energy, there is no mention of other types. Perhaps more importantly, there is no mention of any future plans for investment or development in renewable energies. Renewable energies are recognised as a necessary step towards a sustainable energy production. It seems that BP’s investment in renewable energies only accounts for a small percentage of the energy giant’s activities. Terry Macalister from The Guardian argued that “BP pumped billions of pounds into low-carbon technology and green energy over a number of decades but gradually retired the programme to focus almost exclusively on its fossil fuel business” (Macalister, 2015, para. 2). In his opinion, BP is “not making meaningful moves away from fossil fuel”. This is reflected in the report, as it highlights the shortcomings of BP’s approach to sustainability.

4.10 Analysis of the language in the report

Analysing the use of language in the report can be done thanks to discourse analysis, and more specifically multimodal discourse analysis. By identifying key rhetorical elements, it is possible to see patterns in the way BP utilises discourse. BP’s use of propaganda is fairly subtle, yet still easily identifiable thanks to specific elements that highlight BP’s goal to persuade with misleading and biased information.

The words used in the report are vague, which can be considered as nebulous rhetoric or “glittering generalisation”. McClung Lee defines a glittering generality as “the practice of short-cutting discussion by associating an idea with a “virtue word” in order to make us accept and approve the proposal without examining the evidence further” (1945, p.

134). In BP's case, the organisation uses the term 'sustainability report' as a highly valued concept which is likely to generate approval from the public. The organisation relies on the assumptions people will make when they see that BP engages in sustainability reporting. This allows BP to omit actual evidence of engagement in sustainability related activities. That is a deliberate choice on BP's part, as it means they cannot be held accountable and therefore do not have to lie but can still rely on the power of suggestion.

A number of weak statements and ambiguous words can be found throughout the report. For instance, on page 31, it says "We operate renewable energy businesses that complement our core business". While there is nothing negative about this statement, it is void of meaning. Another example of this use of weak statements is on page 40, where BP states that it "works to avoid, minimize and mitigate environmental impacts wherever we do business". Again, this is not holding BP responsible for specific decisions or lack of decisions.

Similarly, BP uses the report to make sweeping generalizations by making oversimplified statements based on limited information and evidence. For instance, on page 16, the report states that "BP is helping to meet the demands of a lower-carbon future through our portfolio choices and by working to reduce the carbon footprint of our products".

On page 2, the report states "The nature of our business means we can play a major role in the global issues of economic development and the environment" (para. 11). With this in mind, BP should be displaying a conscious effort to better the world by being genuinely sustainable rather than simply relying on lip service.

In fact, throughout the entire report, BP makes brief allusions to sustainability without ever going into details. This allows the reader to be fooled into thinking BP takes sustainability as a serious topic, but when probed deeper, there is little substance to BP's claims. This is done in an effort to attract positive public opinion without having to engage

in sustainable activities and a real commitment to sustainability-related issues. It is an intentionally selective process on BP's part.

A recognised feature of propaganda is the use of expert "testimonial". BP also relies on expert testimonial and often quotes or mentions already-established or higher authority entities to build support for either particular claims or BP in general. On page 17 for instance, it says "Technological innovation underpins our efforts for more efficient production and use of fossil fuels, as well as for longer-term alternatives to fossil fuels. We deepen our understanding of future energy, technology and climate change trends through in house research and in partnership with leading academics" (p. 17, para. 12). BP then provides a list of five universities considered research partners. Throughout the report, the terms "expert" or "expertise" are used 9 times. Each of those times, BP is using the term "expert" to legitimise the righteousness of the organisation. It is interesting to note that BP does not necessarily provide any insight from the experts, but rather just mentions them. This reference to experts enables BP to make general statements about issues at the forefront of the general public's interest without having to provide evidence or detailed explanations.

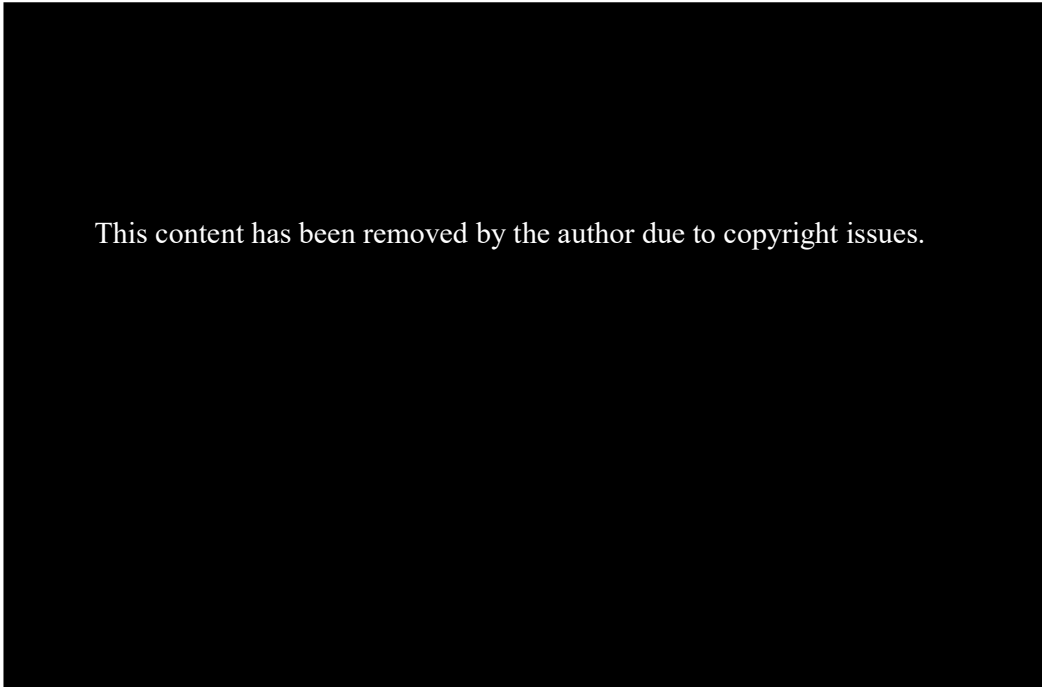
The word 'energy' is used 190 times throughout the report. Frequent use of this word is to be expected due to the fact that BP is an oil and gas company. In that case, the word 'energy' refers to a source of usable power. However, in the case of this report, extensive use of this term enables BP to further the idea that the organisation is a powerful and ever-growing business. In that case, the meaning of the word 'energy' uses the connotation of exertion of power in a vigorous way.

4.11 Words geared towards business and profit

When talking about the challenges faced by the oil industry, the report addresses the reduction of staff numbers and says "our aim is to maintain as much activity as possible,

where that can be done competitively” (p. 2, para. 7). This highlights its business perspective as well as a strong emphasis on profit. While it is common business sense for organisations to remain competitive and be profitable, a sustainability report might not be the best medium to discuss and share business concerns.

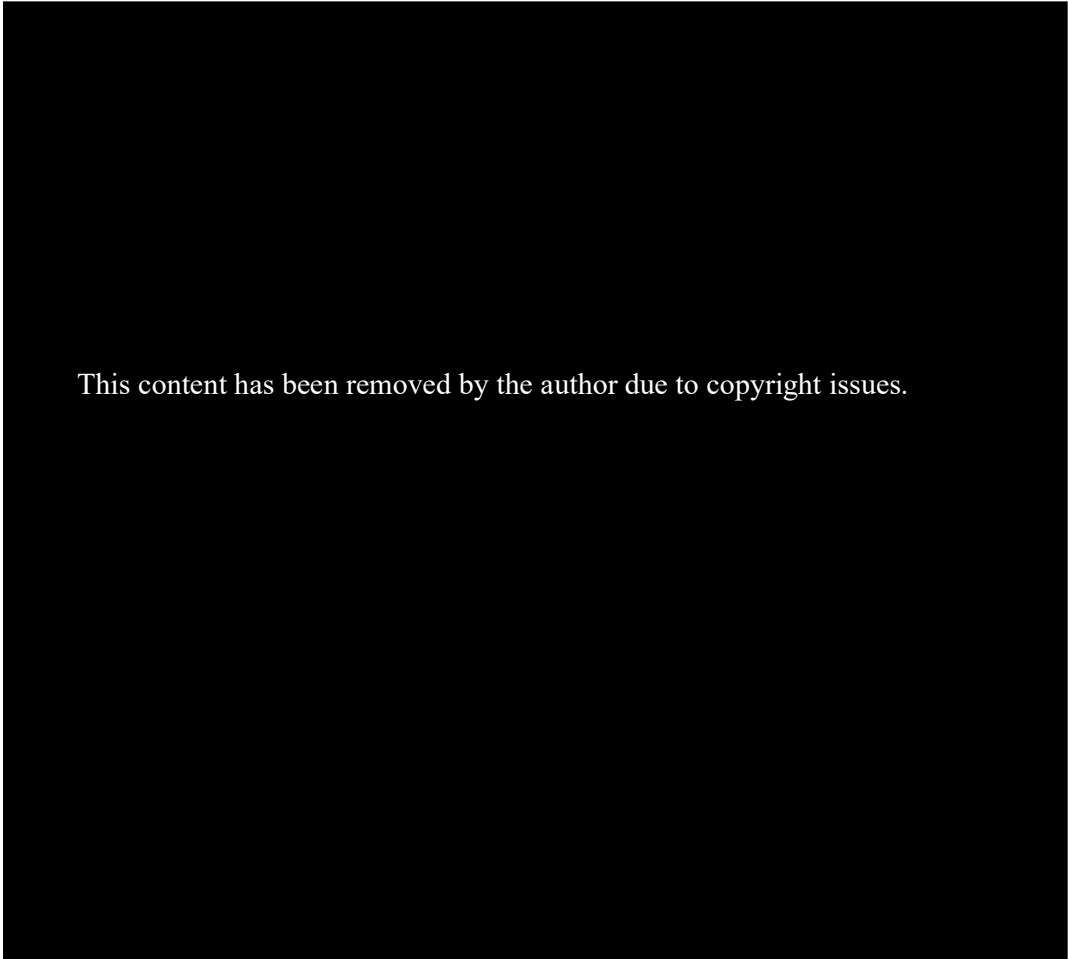
Throughout the entire report, words related to success, business and profit are used. For instance, the word ‘profit’ is used seven times. The word ‘performance’ is used 71 times, ‘business’ is used 131 times, ‘progress’ is used 19 times, and ‘energy’ 190 times. These words are tied to themes of wealth, and highlight BP’s intent to maximize the use of natural resources. The use of those words is in direct contradiction with BP’s definition of sustainability as it puts short-term profit ahead of more altruist and future-oriented goals. BP’s careful choice of words affects the overall tone of the Sustainability Report. Business, progress, jobs, employing training and upskilling are words which are not related to sustainability and would be better suited in a performance report.



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Figure 6 – Screenshot of page 28 of the report

As demonstrated by Figure 6 and Figure 7, many of the images used in this report portray men at work, wearing hard hats and doing manual work. This recurring theme gives a male-orientated and industrious tone to the report. Another choice of images would have given a different tone to the report. For instance, images of natural scenery where BP is present and engaging in sustainable activities would have given the report a less business oriented inflection. Instead, BP uses images of progress and industry and exploitation of nature. It is worth noting that the platform pictured in Figure 6 was named ‘Mad Dog’. The name of the platform is also relevant, with the name ‘Mad Dog’ carrying connotations of manliness. Images such as Figure 7 display the virtues of the industry, showing men at work. This is not what you would expect from a sustainability report, yet it is found multiple times throughout the report.



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Figure 7 – Screenshot of page 35 of the report

Expansion, unconsidered, is fundamentally at odds with sustainability, yet BP uses the sustainability report to talk about its expansion worldwide. On page 29, it announced the following: “We are pursuing further deepwater growth opportunities in Australia and Canada” (p. 29, para. 1). Instead of expanding its business, BP should be looking to improve its already existing assets by making them more sustainable. Unless expanding is somewhat linked to sustainability, BP should address the effort made to improve current activities rather than talk about new business objectives and exploitation of resources. This report is therefore not the right place to discuss expansion if not related to sustainability.

The report also emphasises BP’s investment into training its employees. On page 21, BP asserts “We provide our employees with training and communications on how to apply the code’s principles” (p. 21, para. 3). It goes on to say that “In 2015, we extended this certification process to include our board members, who all certified during the year” (p. 21, para. 4). It is reasonable to expect that this certification process should have been done earlier than 2015. The organisation’s attempt to rectify this gap in training clearly shows that until now, it was not one of BP’s priorities. The report does not provide further evidence of internal training. Because it is a broad statement, is it left to the reader’s interpretation to determine how strict BP is when it comes to how its employees act. There is no specific mention of exactly what degree of training the employees undergo, and instead a vague mention of the employees being trained.

On page 21, BP says: “We provide our employees with training and communications on how to apply the code’s principles. Managers are responsible for helping their teams understand how the code guides the way we work and are expected to have conversations with their teams throughout the year” (para. 3). While this is a positive step towards ensuring a common set of skills and values are held across the board, it seems that BP is

avoiding accountability by placing reporting responsibility for the training process and content onto managers.

Similarly, on page 21, BP admits that “following a survey, we discovered that employees were not aware of the channels available to raise concerns or were reluctant to use them” (p. 21, para. 7). As a response, the organisation says it “delivered more than 100 training sessions to employees, contractors and suppliers” and that “the sessions reinforced the importance of ethical behaviour, explained how to raise concerns and outlined [their] policy of zero tolerance towards retaliation” (para. 8). This provides more insight into what BP’s employees are trained in relation to, but does not define what the training consists of, for how long it lasts, etc. The organisation even mentions “working with Maersk Training to provide additional training opportunities within an immersive simulation environment” (p. 27, para. 4) but does not introduce who Maersk Training are and what role they play.

On page 27 BP says: “We provide training to those employees for whom we believe it is most relevant, for example, depending on the nature or location of their role or in response to specific incidents” (para. 13). Although this is evidence of BP putting a solution in place after identifying an issue, the lasting impact of those training sessions seems minimal. This rhetorical exercise allows the organisation to make appealing statements without being held accountable. While BP claims that it is training its employees, and ensuring consistency across the board, it is not providing any tangible evidence of it being based on sustainability-related topics or awareness.

On page 29, the report states: “In Brazil, where BP has been awarded two licence blocks in deep water, we worked with other exploration companies to carry out an initial marine environmental survey as required by the regulator... Their findings will inform our decisions around oil spill response planning” (para. 8). Again, this highlights a

particularly passive approach, where BP is relying on other companies to carry out essential work.

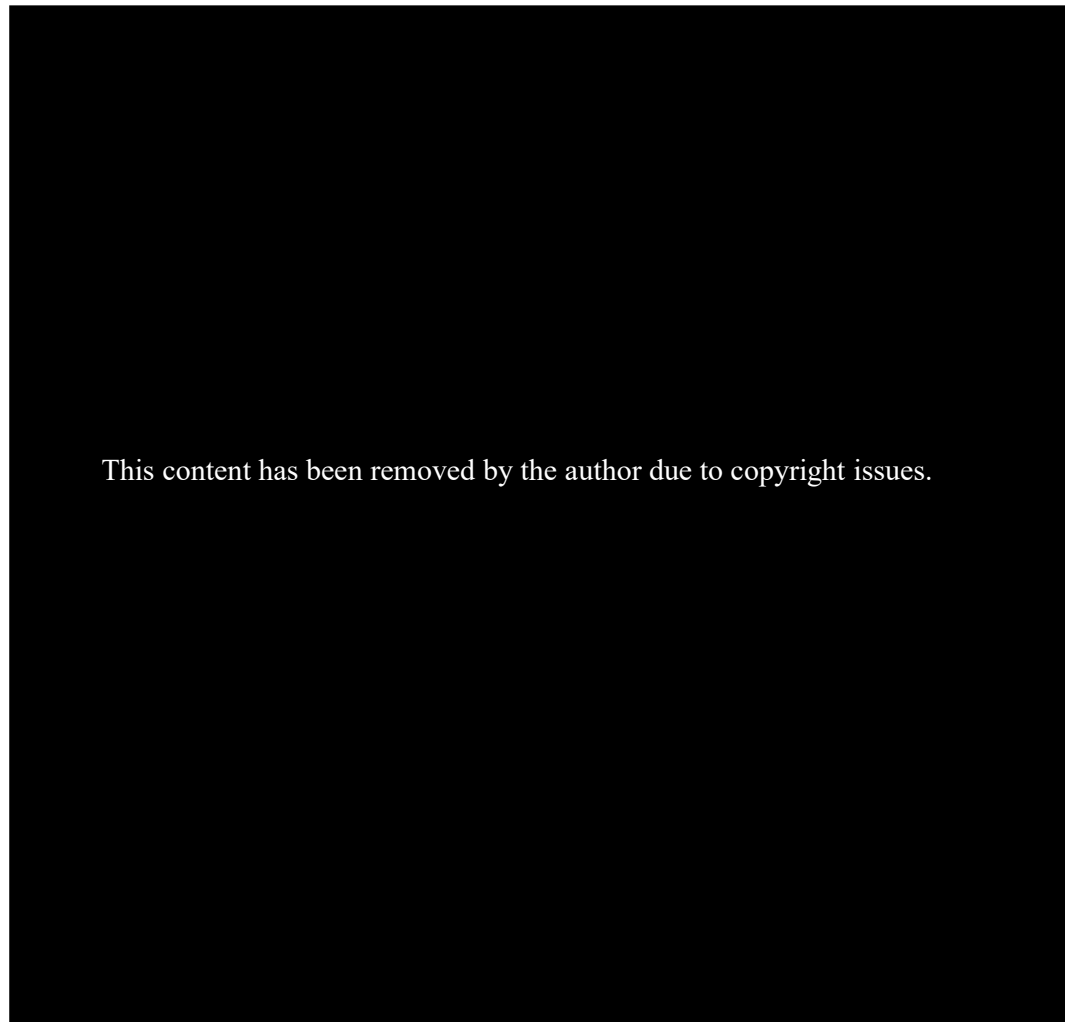



Figure 8 – Screenshot of page 34 of the report

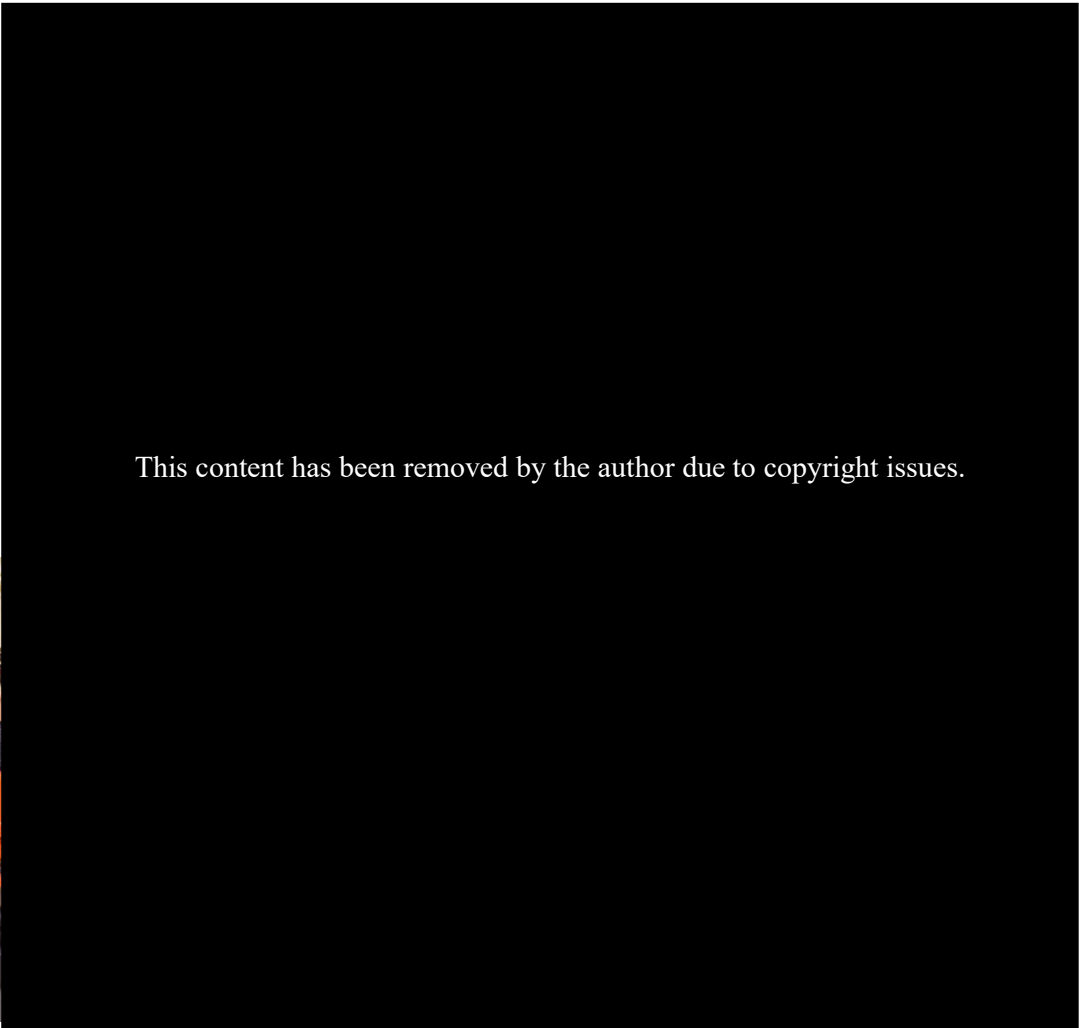
In Figure 8, a team leader can be seen at work. While the text at the top of the image talks about safety and communities, the text on the bottom of the image talks about efficiency and productivity. The two are therefore in contradiction, highlighting a dissonance between the two different types of values. Once again, the focus seems to be on the machinery and men at work, more than on the bigger considerations in relation to sustainability.

Similar to other images in the report, Figure 9 showcases the infrastructure BP uses to conduct fuel extraction. Once again, the image and accompanying text conflict. While the text at the top of the image claims that BP is concerned with the environmental impact of its actions, the bottom text and image focus on the rig itself. BP argues that it is using smaller rigs in order to mitigate negative effect on the environment. However, it also talks about increasing production and access to resources in the same paragraph. This is contradictory and once again an interpretation of sustainability that is not aligned to its stated definition.



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Figure 9 – Screenshot of page 40 of the report



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Figure 10 – Screenshot of page 46 of the report

Figure 10 displays men in conversation around a piece of mining or drilling equipment. Once again, this image displays men only. The text at the top of the image claims that BP is willing to bring changes to societies and communities. The choice of image to go with this text is surprising as it loosely connects with the message of the text. An alternative would have been to use an image focussing on the communities BP refers to for instance. The implication is that BP is providing opportunities to the next generation of energy workers. This is a very narrow interpretation of what sustainability is and has little to do with preserving resources for the next generation.

4.12 Either/or mentality

The report shows evidence of card-stacking, which is another element of propaganda. McClung Lee describes case-making as “frequently the second step in propagandizing. It is the ordering of facts or falsehoods, illustrations or distractions or distortions, logical or illogical statements, in such a sequence that the best or worst possible impression will be made” (1945, p. 134). He argues that card-stacking is the unfair version of case-making, and because it only presents one side of the issues. In the Sustainability Report, BP draws attention to its success and growth rather than towards bigger issues that affect current and future generations. Thus, the Sustainability Report tends to simplify sustainability-related issues so that they are seen as straightforward and easily achievable. On page 15, the report states that “BP believes the carbon pricing by governments is the most comprehensive and economically efficient policy to limit greenhouse gas emissions”. While this portrays a positive outlook, it oversimplifies a complex issue that BP needs to address in more detail.

In addition, BP adopts a similar approach when it comes to the 2010 Gulf of Mexico spill. While it is briefly mentioned in the report (on pages 2, 36 and 41), it is given lesser importance than other topics in the report. By not giving it much physical importance, BP tries to draw attention away from the issue, showcasing only what is likely to cast BP in a favourable light. By using card-stacking, BP is able to construct public opinion by making it seem like there is nothing more to an issue than what BP says about it.

The report states that if the climate is right BP will provide jobs and prosperity. If not, people will be made redundant. BP words this by stating on page 2 that “Given the challenges, we have had to scale back our investments, lower our costs and reduce staff members... Our aim is to maintain as much activity as possible, where that can be done competitively”. This is a particularly surprising statement to have in a sustainability

report, and highlights BP's business centric values. This insinuation reveals a lack of genuine care for the human aspect of the business, due to BP developing a binary/dichotomy dimension to the way it handles business. It also enforces the idea that BP's corporate interest is above all, and that BP will not adapt if it requires compromise. BP will resist change if it is not within corporate interest.

The organisation does not have a long-term focus, and is therefore not being sustainable. The rhetoric used in the Sustainability Report leaves no space for open discussion or ethical considerations. This is reflected in the way BP addresses the complexity of caring for future generations. The focus is on embellishing the success of BP nowadays rather than on questioning the ethical nature of the activities BP engages in currently. In the section called "Resilience-now and in the future" on page 18, BP argues that is it "working to help make sure our business is sustainable – commercially, environmentally, and in a lower-carbon future". This section is then broken down into three sections: A balanced portfolio with flexibility, dynamic investment strategy, and climate change adaptation. These sections do not provide any well-grounded solutions to the issues they raise.

Overall, this report presents one-sided information by heavily playing down certain aspects of the challenges posed by sustainability. In the interest of transparency, BP should address the positives and negatives, giving a more balanced and realistic overview of the business activities, challenges and future.

In Chapter Two, excellence in PR was discussed in terms of dialogue between organisations and their publics. An element of the report is that it does not encourage dialogue or feedback. There is a section on the last page of the report that provides an email address and a website where readers can give feedback to BP. However, it seems that BP is not particularly inclined to listen to what the readers of the report have to say.

A stronger appeal for feedback would have displayed a will to engage in two-way communication with readers. There is also no acknowledgement of feedback from previous years' sustainability reports. If the report displayed a genuine interest in feedback from previous years, the readers would be more inclined to give BP feedback on the issues they believe are most important and on what the Sustainability Report achieves/does not achieve. The fact there are limited feedback mechanisms is therefore highly relevant.

4.13 Lack of evidence of BP behaving sustainably

Another key aspect of the 2015 Sustainability Report is the lack of facts provided to back up the claims made by BP. The organisation's action has been limited to discussion and rhetoric without any implementation. The report fails to address the challenging nature of sustainability, therefore showing an unwillingness to address the complexities involved. A report of high quality would address the progress made towards specific goals, as well as what the challenges were encountered. The oil industry is a potentially hazardous business but in its sustainability report BP makes it seem as though everything is going smoothly as though there have been no major, or even minor, issues throughout the year. In the interest of being transparent, it is crucial to report on everything that happened throughout the year, whether it will reflect positively or negatively on the organisation.

On page 18, the report says that "BP is working to help make sure our business is sustainable – commercially, environmentally, and in a lower-carbon future" (para. 1). There is then very little evidence provided to justify how that will be achieved. No sustainability goals are set, which means there is no tracking possible, and therefore no progress towards any specific goals. By doing this, BP makes sure that there is no risk of being held accountable. It seems then, that BP is relying on lip service annually in the sustainability report.

On page 40, there is more evidence of BP using misleading terminology to imply that BP is doing more than it really is: “BP works to avoid, minimize and mitigate environmental impacts wherever we do business” (p. 40). ‘Avoid’, ‘minimise’ and ‘mitigate’ are all nebulous terms that allow for no real accountability. These are empty words without a strong meaning that could hold BP accountable. Those words were carefully chosen by BP as they allow for meaningless generalities.

On the introductory page following the cover page, the report states: “Through our work, we provide customers with fuel for transportation, energy for heat and light, lubricants to keep engines moving and the petrochemicals products used to make everyday items as diverse as paints, clothes and packaging”. Here, the organisation could have talked about its intention to improve today’s world and discuss ethical values. Instead, BP simply listed the products and services all oil and gas companies provide. There is no mention of sustainability. Here, BP assumes that the report’s readers attach more value to production than they will to evidence of sustainable activities. This is linked to Social Judgement Theory, with BP making assumptions regarding the reader’s attitudes towards BP’s activities.

The report states that “We engaged with stakeholders on many sustainability-related issues throughout 2015”. This implies that BP encourages a two-way dialogue or debate with stakeholders to then action specific strategic actions. However, the actions listed below that heading demonstrate poor engagement and a superficial effort to present a transparent account of the organisation’s actions. Once again, this is another element of propaganda, where BP only shares one side of the story in the hope that no one will inquire beyond the report to evaluate BP’s sustainability.

4.14 BP's core values – a contradiction to sustainability

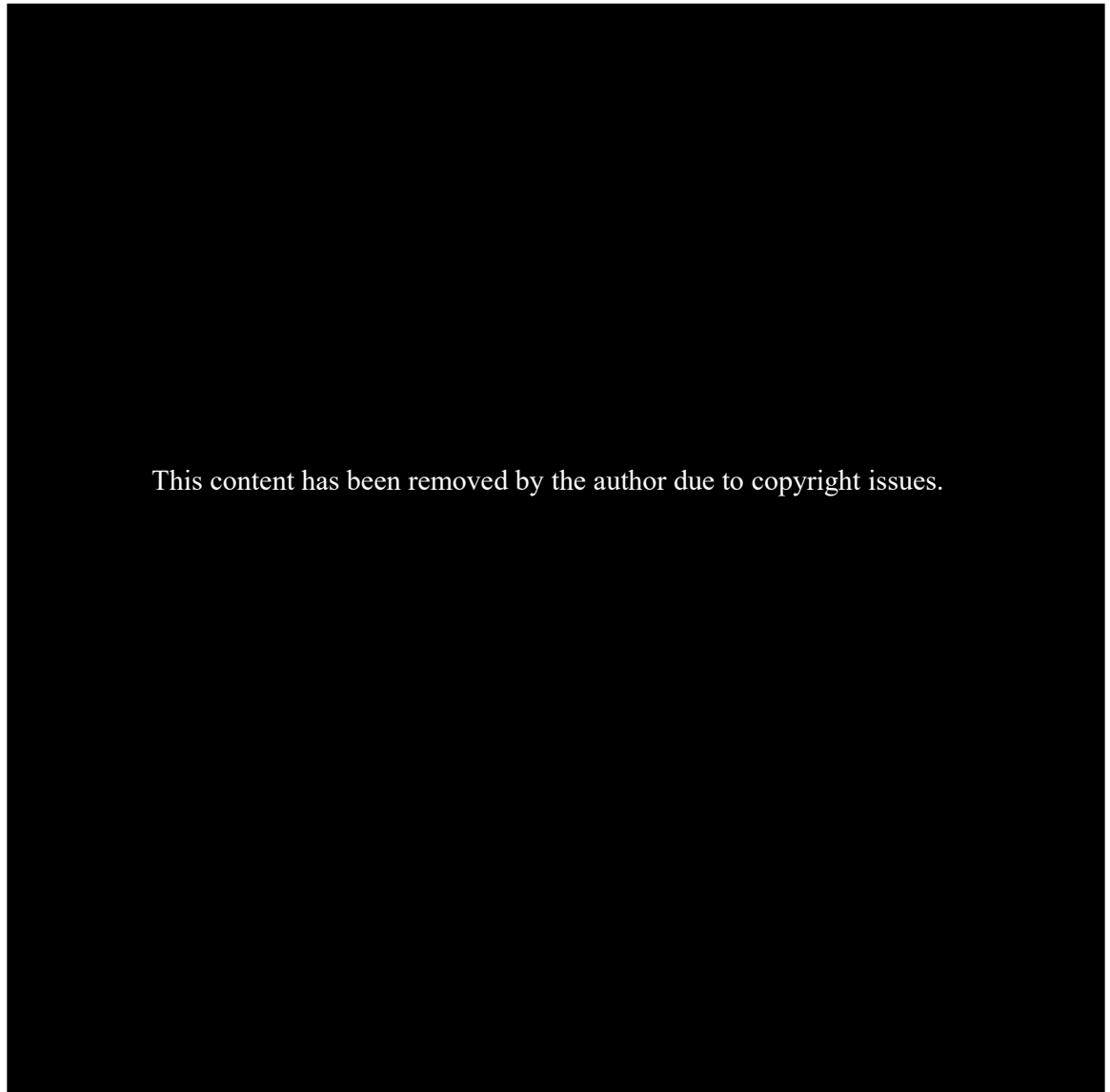


Figure 11 – Screenshot of page 20 of the report

On page 20, BP provides the five core values, asserting that “our values express our shared understanding of what we believe, how we aim to behave and what we aspire to be as an organisation”. Those values consist of: safety, respect, excellence, courage and one team. Again, those values are fairly vague and are open to interpretation. This is linked to the use of glittering generalities.

The values that BP cultivates have nothing to do with sustainability, which is also reflected in the images used in the report. While the five words used as values are important words in the business world, they should not be the core values of a business that is genuinely invested in sustainability. They could still be included in the core values, but crucial terms like ‘community’ would be a better alternative to ‘one team’ for instance. BP’s choice of values reveals a lack of genuine motives, and fails to show how BP is intending to make its core business and values sustainable.

When it comes to explaining how important those values are to BP, the organisation states the following:

Enduring values: We operate in many countries with a range of political systems, regulatory frameworks and business cultures. One of our responsibilities as a global business is to act consistently with regard to values and ethical conduct, so people know exactly what they can expect of BP, regardless of where they are in the world. That’s why we put such emphasis on employee adherence to our code of conduct as well as our core values of safety, respect, excellence, courage and one team. (p. 3, para. 3).

This displays BP’s effort to try and build a consistent brand image. However, BP should not be concerned with brand image and marketing in this report. There is also a lack of evidence showing that those values are put into place. Any organisation could make this general statement but what is empirical, especially in a sustainability report, is specific evidence of those values being put into use. The five core values listed by Bob Dudley in the report are not ones that tie in with the notion of sustainability particularly well. Once again, this is linked to glittering generalities and propaganda, with BP claiming it has core values implemented within the business’ practices but without providing proof. It seems that BP’s commitment to being ethical does not go beyond more than just words.

Referring to the BP code of conduct, the report makes the following statement: “Our code of conduct covers operating safely, responsibly and reliably; respecting and valuing our people; how we work with our partners and suppliers; protecting BP’s assets; and working with governments and communities, including our commitment to human rights” (p. 21, para. 1). These values should be reflected in the sustainability report, with evidence of actions in accordance with the code of conduct. However, the report does not provide any evidence of how BP puts those values into action.

In relation to risk management, BP states in the report “We identify certain risks as being a high priority for oversight by board. For 2016, this includes financial resilience, geopolitical risk, security, ethical misconduct, legal and regulatory non-compliance, trading non-compliance, cybersecurity and incidents associated with the drilling of wells, operating facilities and the transportation of hydrocarbons” (p. 24, para. 14). Here, BP describes risk as anything that could have a negative impact on the organisation itself, but does not address potential risks to communities and the environment. Once again, BP is self-centred and focused on how the organisation performs. This is not a perspective based on sustainability, it is purely business and profit orientated. It also does not elaborate enough on what it considers risks to be and how risk is managed, even though that is the heading and subject of the report’s section.

Given the activities BP engages in, risk management should be a major consideration. Strong ethical values would help prevent some of the risks associated with the oil and gas industry. Once again, the values listed seem to be focused on a business perspective rather than on a long-term perspective that would consider caring for society in the present and future.

4.15 Who BP considers to be its stakeholders

As discussed in Chapter Three, Social Judgement Theory enables us to understand how BP can choose its audience. So far, the analysis of the report has been focussed on the discourse and images as presented by BP. Another way of determining BP's intent is to look at audiences. In the case of the 2015 Sustainability Report, BP is addressing readers who have BP on their latitude of acceptance already.

It is hard to fully grasp who is the actual audience for this document. The main reason for this is that BP is not addressing anyone in particular in this report. The tone is kept fairly general, and does not address the concerns of any particular audience. There is no evidence in the report of to whom BP is really directing this report. However, the general tone of the report suggests a wide and unspecified audience likely to be favourable to BP's activities.

There is no mention in the report of local communities and how they could potentially be affected by BP's activities and decisions. BP only addresses those who already have a positive attitude to BP's activities. Rather than trying to convince those who are suspicious about BP's motives, BP simply addresses the stakeholders who already trust the organisation. This shows a lack of care from BP when it comes to doing good, providing evidence and changing the fuel industry for the better. It also reflects which stakeholders BP values as a priority.

BP explains that it determines what the key issues are depending on what stakeholders deem most important on page 11: "This means we consider materiality that is, how important issues are to our stakeholders and how they could impact BP's ability to deliver its strategy". This poses the question of why the organisation ignores bigger ethical issues related to sustainability. It is most likely because BP is addressing stakeholders who are on the latitude of acceptance as described in Social Judgement Theory.

While we cannot clearly establish who BP's stakeholders are in the case of the sustainability report, we can assume that the stakeholders are not environmentalists, local people, activists, communities or anyone who is on the latitude of rejection. The report enables us to gather that it is most likely aimed at groups like government, lobbyists, investors and competitors. It can be argued that the target is made obvious by the fact that BP addresses the issues from a business oriented perspective and therefore targets stakeholders that care about how much money BP is making rather than how ethical BP is. This is emphasized by the report's strong focus on growth and development. Throughout the report, the word 'growth' is used 13 times and the word 'development' 31 times. Both those terms foster the idea of expansion, evolution, and success. This sort of language will appeal to stakeholders who have a financial interest in BP. Thanks to the data analysis we know this is a persuasive PR document but there seems to be a lack of evidence to determine whether BP is trying to convince its stakeholders or simply publish a report to appear forthcoming.

4.16 Weak statement supporting the carbon tax

When organisations like BP create pollution, they create a societal cost. Simply put, the carbon tax aims to counter-balance that cost. By saying that it supports the carbon tax, BP acknowledges that the organisation's activities have a negative impact on the environment as a whole. While it is a great idea in theory, there is little evidence of the long-term benefits from BP's contributions to the carbon tax. However, BP certainly benefits from saying that it supports the carbon tax and making generalisations.

Importantly, BP did not initiate the move to implement a carbon tax, which is therefore dishonest and unethical as it is trying to take credit for something it has been pressured into adopting. While paying the carbon tax is a good first step towards sustainable change, it does not involve investing in renewable energies, reducing the organisation's negative

impact on the environment, or directly investigating change. While the carbon tax is supposed to encourage carbon emitting organisations to lower their emissions, it seems that BP would rather pay those taxes than adapt to today's sustainability challenges. The report should present and discuss alternatives to CO₂ emitting activities.

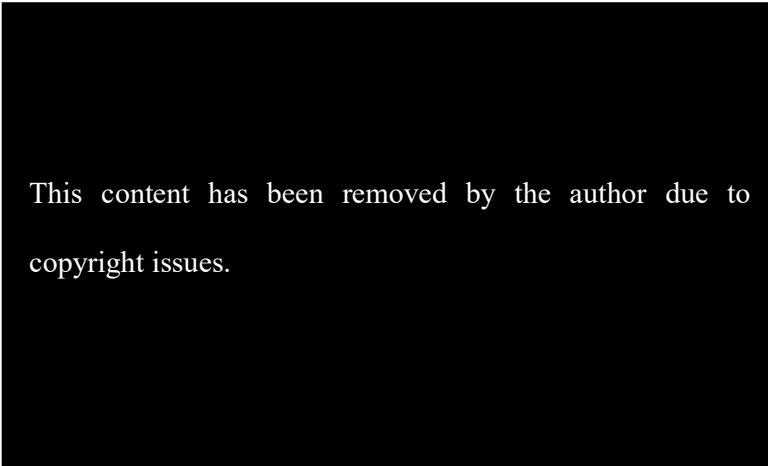
BP also minimises its role in the production of CO₂ emissions by saying that “around 80-90% of CO₂ emissions from oil and gas products are from their use by consumers, with the remainder generated during their extraction and development” on page 14. This suggests that BP is not responsible for the CO₂ emissions facilitated by BP's activities. However, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, being a sustainable organisation involves going beyond what is admissible for an organisation and instead making a long-lasting ethical change for the better. In this report, BP fails to provide insight into how the organisation is planning on helping reduce CO₂ emissions from a consumer's perspective. Trying to appeal to people's social responsibility is problematic, as people do not necessarily want to have to worry about whether or not their behaviour is sustainable. The carbon tax is meant to bypass this issue by introducing a financial aspect to it. That is another example of BP shifting the blame and decision-making process onto its consumers.

By saying that it supports the carbon tax on page 15, BP conveys the idea that it is an active contributor to making our future carbon emission free. BP then adds that “Businesses and households ultimately pay for more carbon-intensive goods and services. They are motivated to use less energy, choose more energy-efficient products and favour lower-carbon energy products” (p. 15). This is a great idea in theory but also a particularly passive approach for BP to take as it is reliant on others to change their behaviour rather than actively (or even proactively) changing the industry for the better. There is no distinct evidence provided and this reflects BP's passive approach and preference for empty rhetoric.

Throughout the report, BP refers to already established entities. In terms of propaganda this is a bandwagon effect. Mentioning groups who are known to have made sustainable commitments allows BP to suggest they are following the same path without providing evidence of sustainable activities. BP is counting on the reader to make favourable assumptions. This is a recurring strategy throughout the whole report.

On page 3, BP states “In 2015 we joined with other oil and gas companies – through the Oil and Gas Climate initiative and other activities – to support effective action”. Later on, BP says it “joined seven other oil and gas companies in calling for a price on carbon and signed up to the Carbon Pricing Leadership Coalition” (p. 6). On page 11, BP makes the following statement: “We joined the Climate and Clean Air Coalition’s Oil and Gas Methane Partnership as part of our efforts to collaborate with governments, non-governmental organisations and our peers on a common approach to reducing methane emissions from oil and gas operations”.

BP also associates itself with other organisations which are well-known. However, this is not proof of any tangible commitment on BP’s part. On page 11, BP claims “The Tangguh Independent Advisory Panel (TIAP) provides guidance to BP on the non-commercial aspects of our operations in Tangguh, Indonesia” (p. 11). On page 14, it says “we are active participants in the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative (OGCI), a voluntary, CEO-led industry initiative that aims to catalyse meaningful action on climate change through best practice sharing and collaboration” (p. 14). Lastly, BP says it “continues to support the UK government’s review of gender diversity on boards, undertaken by Lord Davies in 2011” (p. 23).



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Figure 12 – Screenshot of page 16 of the report

Another recurring aspect of BP's strategy is how the organisation is reactionary, often acting as a result of legal obligations. Some of those actions make BP sound sustainable, but in reality, those actions do not hold much value if they are forced upon the organisation. For instance, when mentioning the Gulf of Mexico 2010 oil spill on page 2, BP talks about how the organisation has "reached agreements in principle to settle all federal and state claims arising from the incident. This includes \$7.1 billion to address claims for natural resource damages, as part of our commitment to restore the economy and environment of the region" (p. 2, para. 10). While this makes it seem like BP making up for its responsibilities, in reality, those actions are enforced by legal requirements. Similarly, on page 36, it is mentioned that "Two independent monitors – an ethics monitor and a process safety monitor – were appointed under the terms of the criminal plea agreement BP reached with the US government in 2012" (p. 36, para. 11).

The report also fails to address the environmental impact of the carbon tax to date. For instance, BP could have reported on how much CO₂ emissions have been lowered by, or on how much it believes it will reduce CO₂ emissions in the next year until the next

sustainability report, for instance. It should be the purpose of a sustainability report to assess progress made towards a specific goal and report on it yearly.

Part of the carbon tax's goal is to encourage consumers to reduce their usage of CO₂ producing sources of energy. While BP claims to be fully in favour of this, one must wonder how genuine that claim is. Due to the nature of BP's business, it seems surprising for BP to want people to consume less and therefore rely on its products and services less. Furthermore, BP's current investment in renewable and greener alternatives is limited, meaning the organisation still needs people to rely on options that produce high levels of CO₂.

4.17 Expected terminology in sustainability reporting

When it comes to sustainability reporting, there are a set of expectations in terms of what should be found in a report. This is mostly due to the fact that there are guidelines, such as the GRI guidelines, that give guidance as to what should be addressed. There are also expectations that come from common sense when the public expects an organisation to behave ethically and report on its activities in a transparent manner. Those expectations include the use of words such as nature, animal welfare, ecosystem and pollution.

In BP's 2015 Sustainability Report, the word 'nature' is used 12 times, the words 'ecosystem', 'conservation' and 'dialogue' are used three times, and the word 'wildlife' is only used six times overall. The word 'pollution' is only used once throughout the whole report, which is striking in a report that is meant to assess the current activities of an organisation involved in the oil and gas industry. Similarly, the word 'conservation' is only used three times, with one of those times being the mention of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Phrases such as 'animal welfare' and 'waste management' are not used at all.

One would expect to see a stronger discussion about nature and the environment in a sustainability report. Because of the nature of BP's activities, the impact of the organisation's current activities on future generations is evident. This means that BP should make a conscious effort to address all the aspects of its activities that are related to sustainability. While the ethics of oil and gas extraction are questionable, BP could offset this by displaying a will to do the best it can to lessen its negative impact on the environment and communities. There is however no proof of such behaviour in the 2015 Sustainability Report.

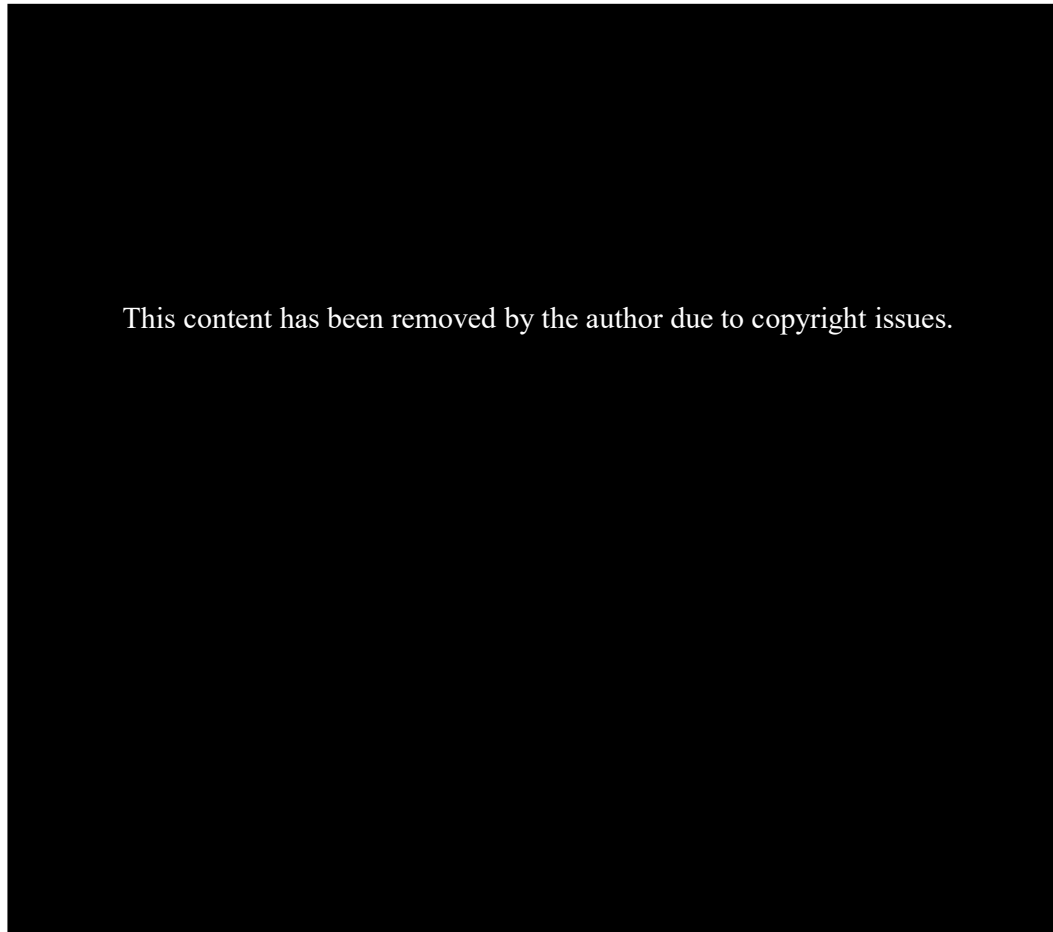


Figure 13 – Screenshot from page 8 of the report

BP is not entirely transparent and key terms and figures remain unexplained in the 2015 Sustainability Report. This leaves space for ambiguity. It is as if BP is hoping the superficial report is sufficient and will not warrant further investigation from the reader. While the figures are not utterly complex, the reader could gain a better understanding of what those numbers imply if provided with clear context and explanation of their significance. It gives readers the impression that BP is being transparent but most likely relies on the fact that the numbers will not be carefully examined by most readers. While the table in Figure 13 presents crucial information in relation to sustainability, the different parameters are not explained.

Interestingly enough, the data available in Figure 13 is from years 2011 to 2015. While it is only an assumption, it seems convenient that the table does not display what happened in 2010, the year during which the Gulf of Mexico oil spill occurred. The year of 2010 would have been a particularly bad year for BP, which would have been highlighted with statistical evidence. A search on BP's website revealed that BP systematically excludes the oil spill related figures from its graphs, saying that 2010 data does not include data associated with the Deepwater Horizon incident response (including when using their HSE charting tool).

4.18 Addressing the ongoing issues from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill

Considering the extent to which the 2010 oil spill impacted the environment, economy and communities of the Gulf of Mexico, one would expect BP to provide regular updates when it comes to the progress being made in the affected areas. The important topic is glossed over, in the hope that the readers will not ask questions and hold BP accountable. BP's mention of the 2010 oil spill in the 2015 Sustainability Report feels compulsory because the organisation knows it is expected to do so. This would explain why the Gulf of Mexico is only mentioned very briefly and partially. BP does not provide an in-depth

update in the 2015 Sustainability Report. This approach is consistent with BP's attitude towards the spill in the past on all platforms, including the BP website. It is challenging to get an idea of BP's current activities in relation to the Gulf of Mexico. This highlights the fact that BP is potentially not putting effort into rehabilitating the affected areas.

While BP could understandably not want its main website to focus on the 2010 oil spill, the 2015 Sustainability Report would arguably have been the right platform to address sustainability related challenges and show that the organisation is making up for past mistakes and investing in future generations. However, BP does not use the 2015 Sustainability Report for that purpose and rather focuses on emphasizing the status of BP in the oil and gas industry.

On page 36, BP briefly addresses the Gulf of Mexico spill: "Two independent monitors – an ethics monitor and a process safety monitor – were appointed under the terms of the criminal plea agreement BP reached with the US government in 2012. Under the terms of the agreement, we are taking additional actions, enforceable by the court, to further enhance ethics and compliance across BP and the safety of its drilling operations in the Gulf of Mexico" (p. 36, para. 9). This is a decision BP should have made without being forced by the US government. The ethical value of this decision can then be questioned as it was not made by BP.

On page 2 BP says that "Shortly after marking the fifth anniversary of the tragic accident on the Deepwater Horizon in the Gulf of Mexico, we reached agreements in principle to settle all deferral and state claims arising from the incident. This includes \$7.1 billion to address claims for natural resource damages, as part of our commitment to restore the economy and environment of the region. While this provides some closure and certainty in legal terms, we will always regret the accident and remember those who died" (para.

10). There is no update on an environmental level, rather just purely from a legal perspective.

Overall, the entire report only addresses the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill in a short paragraph. For a crisis with incredibly lasting consequences to this day on the environment and communities, this is less than one would expect from a sustainability report. BP made the conscious decision to not seize an opportunity to reflect on past mistakes and display lessons learnt.

4.19 Conclusion

This research applied multimodal discourse analysis to analyse BP's 2015 Sustainability Report in depth. Multimodal discourse analysis provided detailed insight into the report and how its content reflects BP's current PR strategy in relation to sustainability. BP also uses elements of propaganda, selects particular audiences and addresses themes that are likely to showcase the organisation in a positive light.

Because of the controversial nature of BP's activities, one would think that a sustainability report would aim to help the brand build a positive image. In order to achieve this BP should try and combat criticism by using extensive evidence of sustainability in the report. However, BP's approach to its sustainability report seems to have different motivations. It does not use its 2015 Sustainability Report to genuinely reflect on its activities from a sustainability related perspective. Instead, the analysis has revealed evidence of BP not complying with expectations of a sustainability report and a lack of transparency on BP's part. This raises concerns about the intent Behind BP's decision to engage in sustainability reporting. Chapter Five will discuss these concerns.

5. Chapter Five: A cynical attempt at sustainability reporting

5.1 Introduction

The goal of this research was to determine how genuine BP's use of sustainability is. An analysis of the 2015 Sustainability Report provided insight into BP's approach to sustainability, and an in-depth understanding of the organisation's level of commitment to sustainability.

This analysis revealed a lot about BP's intentions by exposing the nature of the organisation's efforts as well as its motivations. The organisational values that BP considers most important are revealed in the report, and translate into the use of the Sustainability Report as a PR tactic. It is important to keep in mind that nothing in the report is accidental as it is a highly deliberate rhetorical tool.

Chapter Five discusses what the analysis in Chapter Four revealed, summarises the data by drawing conclusions and discusses the wider implications of BP's approach to sustainability. Section 5.1 introduces the Chapter. Section 5.2 will first assess how sincere BP's commitment to sustainability communication is. Then, it will highlight how the 2015 Sustainability Report is a persuasive document. Section 5.3 will highlight the disparity between what BP does and should do. In Section 5.4 the challenges faced by BP's PR practitioners will be discussed to gain an understanding of the motivations behind BP's strategic decisions. Section 5.5 will show that BP has limited interest in behaving sustainably. In Section 5.6 BP's sustainability effort will be compared to Coca Cola's approach to sustainability in its most recent sustainability report. Finally, Section 5.7 will conclude with the claim that BP lacks genuine engagement with sustainability.

5.2 How sincere is BP's sustainability communication?

The analysis in Section 4.15 shows that BP is using the report to assert its position as one of the leaders in the oil and gas industry. To do so, BP focusses strongly on notions of growth and development in order to appeal to stakeholders who already have BP on their latitude of acceptance. As explained using Social Judgement Theory, these stakeholders value BP's profitability more than they value BP's sustainability efforts. The organisation is not trying to convince a broader range of stakeholders that BP engages in sustainable activities. Instead, it addresses its 2015 Sustainability Report to already existing partisans who do not question BP's actions and reporting. This is reflected in the use of words such as 'progress', 'expansion', 'business' and 'resources'. If BP was addressing stakeholders who are suspicious of BP's motives, the report would include a stronger emphasis on how BP is attempting to care for future generations (for example). In fact, BP is relying on already acquired success and reaffirming its importance in the fuel industry rather than trying to convince people that the organisation is trying to innovate when it comes to being a sustainable business.

Section 4.7 reveals that on top of not displaying concern for future generations, BP fails to provide a description of who the currently affected communities are and how they are being helped. Affected communities would most likely have BP on their latitude of rejection, and would therefore be actively opposed to BP's activities. This is why BP does not address their concerns. This is also reflected in the way BP addresses the ongoing issues from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, as argued in Section 4.18. The consequences of the oil spill are glossed over and no in-depth update is provided in the Sustainability Report.

A noticeable element of the 2015 Sustainability Report is the lack of dialogue and two-way symmetrical communication. There is no clear evidence of BP engaging or

encouraging debate about sustainability As argued in Section 1.5, two-way symmetrical communication is regarded as a more ethical and sustainable way of communicating with the public. From a PR perspective, two-way dialogic communication is what organisations should ideally strive for. The findings in Section 4.12 show that BP's Sustainability Report lacks opportunity for feedback and therefore does not encourage two-way communication with readers. The organisation presents the reader with the idea that there is no room for negotiation unless it has the potential to benefit BP. Arguably, if BP did promote an open discussion it could have a negative impact on the organisation's performance by making the public more aware of the issues at stake.

There is a fundamental discrepancy between the nature of BP's business and the values of sustainability. This is a fundamental problem for BP and is potentially why BP does not bother with genuinely engaging in sustainability. The oil and gas industry engages in activities that are detrimental to natural resources in the long-run. BP for instance, engages in oil and gas exploration, production and refining. The Sustainability Report shows that BP's rhetoric focuses primarily on those activities, and less on renewable energy alternatives. Section 4.9 demonstrates that the topic of renewable energies is poorly addressed and largely absent in BP's Sustainability Report. The data analysis revealed the organisation states that it invests in renewable energy only when it can be viable for the business. In that case, claiming to be engaging in sustainable activities seems misleading.

The shortcomings of the 2015 Sustainability Report show that simply writing a report and calling it a "sustainability report" is not enough for an organisation to appear and become genuinely sustainable. All claims need to be backed up with evidence, which BP has not done thus far. Section 4.13 revealed that BP's actions are limited to rhetoric without any implementation. Little to no evidence is provided to demonstrate what the organisation has done thus far to meet the sustainability challenge. The organisation claims to be

addressing issues such as climate change and carbon emissions but does not provide evidence of how it is doing so. This highlights a lack of taking action.

5.3 The disparity between what BP should do and its business model

The issue with the 2015 Sustainability Report lies in the disparity between what BP should ethically do for the environment and its business model. Ethically, BP should engage in sustainability and report on whether or not there is room for improvement in its performance. The findings indicate that the nature of BP's activities (oil and gas processing) can be deemed unsustainable, in essence making addressing issues related to ethics and sustainability difficult if not impossible. This is reflected by the organisation's values – its stated values, which are analysed in Section 4.14 are safety, respect, excellence, courage and one team. This is a fundamental challenge BP has not addressed to this point despite its importance.

As discussed in Section 2.3.2 many organisations are turning their attention to the direction of valuable sustainability reporting. If BP's 2015 Sustainability Report is any indication, it is likely that sustainability may need to be regulated more closely for it to have a real impact on the way organisations act and report on their actions. It seems that doing it on a voluntary basis can be motivated by self-interest and only lead to lip service. In BP's case, the focus is on publishing a sustainability report to be able to claim engagement with sustainability.

As discussed in Section 2.4.4, sustainability reporting should be motivated by a will to care for future generations. In the long-run, BP is likely to suffer from the shortcomings of the disingenuous use of sustainability. For instance, in event of another crisis, trust and loyalty levels amongst stakeholders are likely to be particularly low. While BP may not suffer from the disparity between what it should do and what it does currently, the sustainability challenge is not one that will go away any time soon. The organisation is

therefore likely to have to address it in a genuine way sooner rather than later. For that reason, and because organisations should aim to be as ethical as possible, there are things BP ought to do as one of the world's leading organisations in the oil and gas industry.

While BP publishes sustainability reports and has a section dedicated to sustainability on its website, there is no genuine commitment to sustainability on BP's part. The yearly sustainability reports seem to be BP's only attempt at sustainability. However, it seems that the report is only a partial attempt at sustainability, with no evidence of BP engaging in sustainability related activities and events. BP shows evidence of trying to appear 'green' very sparingly, with little reference to the environment and sustainability. The use of green infographics analysed in Section 4.5 almost becomes inconsistent with the rhetoric used in the rest of the report.

5.4 The challenges facing BP's PR practitioners

As discussed in Chapter Two, BP has been discussed widely and negatively in popular media. To offset what has been said in the media for years, BP used the 2015 Sustainability Report to counteract any criticism. This poses the question of whether the Sustainability Report is a tool for BP to be able to say it has a report when questioned about the organisation's commitment to sustainability.

To assess the extent to which BP used the sustainability as a PR tactic, this research used Social Judgement Theory. In Section 4.15 the analysis assessed who BP considers its publics to be. The analysis found that the stakeholders that BP was addressing in its report were most likely groups like government, lobbyists, investors and competitors. These are stakeholders who do not attach much importance to BP's approach to sustainability. Instead of being interested in sustainability these publics are more interested in progress and profit. They financially invest in BP, and, business-wise, are more important than the stakeholders who expect proof of genuine engagement in sustainability. It seems that BP

benefits from the stakeholders who do not consider that BP should be paying particular attention to sustainability and everything it involves. In that case, there is no need for BP to use words geared towards sustainability, but rather words linked to business, profit and progress. These are the words that will resonate with the stakeholders BP is targeting. Section 4.11 showed that BP uses this specific terminology, which is in direct contradiction with BP's definition of sustainability.

The above analysis shows that dilemma that BP's practitioners face. They have to satisfy both management and the public by engaging in two-way symmetrical communication, encouraging executives to make the right decisions that will benefit the organisation in the long run, if not in the short run. The challenge here is to choose between being entirely ethical and serving the best interests of the public, or to have an approach based on profit that could potentially be detrimental to society.

Many public relations practitioners prefer not to work for an organisation that is engaged in actions they consider to be unethical. The role of a PR person is to decide what is the best possible strategy for an organisation to build long-lasting relationships with its publics. In BP's case, the organisation seems to be interested in building a long-lasting relationship with only one type of public: the one who already includes BP within its latitude of acceptance such as employees, shareholders, governments and business people. BP only addresses these publics and ignores the others. It is unlikely that BP will manage to convince people who have the organisation in their latitude of rejection due to the nature of the organisation's activities. Section 4.15 showed that those audiences who care about how much money BP is making rather than how ethical BP is, are not BP's prime target. This is emphasized by the report's strong focus on growth and development with the frequent use of words such as 'materiality' and 'strategy'.

While BP may know that focusing on genuine sustainable activities would be the just and ethical thing to do, Social Judgement Theory reveals that BP is not actually directing this report at those who are interested in genuine issues of sustainability. For this group, such as environmentalists, BP's attempts at sustainability persuasion fall within their latitude of rejection. The analysis shows that BP has given up on the environmental public and they recognise that they will never be persuaded.

5.5 Limited interest in behaving sustainably

The analysis in Chapter Four shows that the 2015 Sustainability Report barely addresses the issue of sustainability. Section 4.17 established that BP's Sustainability Report does not contain the expected terminology of a sustainability report. The word 'pollution' for instance, is only used once, even though it is a key feature of the sustainability challenge. Phrases such as 'animal welfare' and 'waste management' are not used at all. The word 'nature' is mentioned 12 times but more as an axiom than to genuinely address the link between BP, nature and sustainability. The way BP addresses sustainability is therefore superficial and does not acknowledge the challenging nature of being a business that engages in sustainability. When it comes to sustainability reporting, there are a set of expectations in terms of what should be found in a report. One would expect to see a stronger emphasis on nature and the environment in a sustainability report. While this reflects badly on the organisation in the context of this research, BP does not get held responsible for it otherwise. This is most likely one of the reasons why the organisation has not changed its approach to sustainability in recent years.

Section 4.3 showed that the broad definition of sustainability BP provides as a benchmark in its report is aligned with the commonly accepted definition of sustainability. On page 3 of the report BP defines sustainable success as "acting in the long-term interests of [their] shareholders, [their] partners and society" (2016, p. 3). However, the data analysis

highlights a lack of commitment to preserving resources for the future. For instance, there is evidence of card-stacking, as revealed in Section 4.12, where BP only presents one side of the consequences of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. This indicates that in the report, BP's corporate interest is therefore placed above sustainability. The 2015 Sustainability Report then seems to be a strategic piece of communication which does not comply with BP's provided definition of sustainability.

5.6 Comparison with Coca-Cola's 2015 sustainability report

While the oil and gas industry has specific challenges and issues, all organisations deal with sustainability to a certain extent. This is why comparing BP's approach to large organisations such as Coca-Cola for instance, is valuable.

Like BP, Coca Cola follows the GRI standards (as mentioned here: <http://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/gri-index>), and seems to have made a more genuine effort to provide a well-balanced account of the company's sustainable engagement. Because BP and Coca Cola follow the same guidelines when it comes to sustainability reporting, one would expect the reports to be fairly similar when addressing sustainability, despite the fact that the two companies come from different industries.

The main difference between BP and Coca-Cola's 2015 sustainability reports is that Coca-Cola presents its sustainability goals in a clear manner, and then reports on the progress the company has made towards reaching those goals. This not only makes the organisation accountable, but also proves that it is committing to its claims by providing evidence. For instance, Coca-Cola's report has sections titled "Our Approach", "Our Progress" and "What's Next?". On the other hand, BP's report is divided according to themes but with no particular structure. There is no enunciation of the goals or proposed actions made towards reaching them.

Another major difference between the two approaches is the language used in the reports. In Coca-Cola's report, the word 'sustainability' is used 73 times, which is 32 more times than in BP's report, despite the two reports being of similar length (69 and 54 pages respectively). The infographics are also much more focused on communities in Coca-Cola's report, with images of communities and families. They all display ethnically diverse people and give a sense of a much more invested document.

Coca-Cola is not known to be a particularly ethical company and has faced various controversies throughout the years, yet its report gives the impression that the organisation is genuinely trying to engage in sustainable activities. In relation to the notion of feedback, it can be noted that when accessing the "sustainability" part of the Coca Cola website, the internaut gets asked if they would be able to give one minute of their time to give feedback. This is a more engaging way to generate two-way dialogue with the report's readers and allows for yearly adaptations. The Coca-Cola report gives the sense that feedback is regularly received and that it addresses the concerns of a broad range of stakeholders.

This is a prime example of how sustainability reporting can benefit an organisation when used effectively. As discussed in Section 2.4.2 organisations who engage in genuine sustainability efforts are likely to gain loyal and trusty stakeholders. It is not by a lack of effort that BP fails to do so, but rather by not genuinely prioritising sustainability and using the 2015 Sustainability Report as a performance review. As demonstrated in Section 4.3, the report does not meet the expectations of sustainability reporting. The data showed poor use of words such as 'nature', 'environment' and 'communities', words which would usually be key terms in a sustainability report.

Unlike Coca-Cola, which has embraced sustainability with some level of authenticity by providing a more transparent account of its activities, BP seems to have eluded genuine sustainability engagement and reporting.

5.7 Lack of genuine engagement with sustainability

The 2015 Sustainability Report lacks a clear list of sustainability commitments, which means the reader is unable to fully grasp what BP stands for when it comes to sustainability issues and challenges. Section 4.4 highlights a lack of compliance with the GRI reporting guidelines on BP's part. While overall, BP's Sustainability Report addresses the issues raised by the guidelines, the data analysis revealed that some are put aside while others are manipulated in BP's favour. For instance, it seems that BP uses the carbon tax as a way of making the organisation appear to be involved in working towards a sustainable future.

The analysis shows that no deadlines or timeframes are provided in the Sustainability Report. There is therefore no sense of accountability. If BP was providing set deadlines by which sustainable goals have to be reached, the organisation would then be expected to report on those goals being met or not. If defined at all, BP's approach and progress are not made evident. This means there is no real mention of what BP actually does to be sustainable. One can assume that if BP was engaging in sustainable behaviour, the Sustainability Report would acknowledge those activities. From a strictly strategic perspective, and knowing it will engaged in publishing a yearly sustainability report, this indicates that BP has to intention of engaging in sustainable activities throughout the year.

BP does not try to appeal to people who are concerned with the environment and does not use rhetoric that indicates that it cares about its publics. Instead of using words that would convey the idea that BP behaves in a way that is not detrimental to the environment, the organisation uses words related to profit and success from a strictly business-orientated

perspective. BP seems to only use the term 'sustainability' due to its significance, hoping people will not read the report carefully and expect BP to provide evidence of engagement in sustainability. BP does try to claim that the organisation is engaging in debate that aims to make today's world a more sustainable one. However, it is unable to provide valid evidence of doing so, as demonstrated in Chapter Four's analysis of the 2015 Sustainability Report. Again, this shows that instead of being a sustainability report, the 2015 Report is more of a manipulative document carefully tailored to make BP seem more responsible and ethical than it is.

BP seems to be using sustainability as part of an effort to demonstrate CSR for PR purposes only. This raises the question of the extent to which BP is using sustainability as part of its CSR rather than for genuine reasons. In reality, BP uses the word 'sustainability' but does not fully commit to its implications. In Chapter Four, the 2015 Sustainability Report was analysed to determine to what extent BP conforms to these sustainability expectations. The findings show that BP does not comply with those expectations, and favours business interests instead.

A sustainability report has the potential to be an effective way to address the concerns of sceptical stakeholders, and to restore trust amongst people who feel strongly about sustainability. In the case of BP however, a lack of genuine communication and interest in sustainability hinders the potential benefits of the Sustainability Report. As shown in Section 4.11, BP uses words geared towards profit such as 'competitively', 'performance', 'business' and 'energy'. This is not the terminology that readers would expect in a sustainability report, words which would address the concerns of sceptical stakeholders.

Trying to change perception and make the crisis an element of the past is particularly difficult for an organisation with recurring crises. BP has had to deal with this particular challenge for many years now. An organisation that continues to make similar mistakes,

that ends up having similar consequences for the stakeholders as in the past, will have very little support from the general public. This is why, instead of trying to absolve itself by shifting blame and creating excuses, BP should have learnt from mistakes made. This would have reduced the likelihood of such a disaster happening again, especially due to negligence on its part.

BP's 2015 Sustainability Report reflects the organisation's lack of engagement with sustainability issues. This approach can reasonably be understood to be BP's general approach to sustainability. BP seems to be directing its CSR efforts towards reputation of the brand rather than a genuine attempt at sustainability reporting. The organisation's goal then, is to use sustainability reporting in order to convince its readers that it behaves in an eco-friendly and sustainable manner.

5.8 Summary

Multimodal discourse analysis was used as a way of examining BP's Sustainability Report. By doing so, it was able to define three elements of BP's strategy. First, the format of the report manipulates the reader's impression of BP. This includes the images, layout and infographics. Together, they contribute towards making the report a persuasive document. Second, rhetoric plays a key role in shaping the effect the report will have on its readers. The use of propaganda tools such as card-stacking and glittering generalities allows BP to present a biased account of its activities. Third, the nature of BP's intentions is reflected in the choice of audience. As illustrated by Social Judgement Theory, BP intended to direct this report towards audiences who are sympathetic towards BP's business objectives.

Overall, this Chapter discussed the data analysis of Chapter Four. It showed that BP has carefully chosen the way it addresses sustainability in its 2015 Sustainability Report. Together, physical aspects of the report, propaganda and the targeting of specific

audiences enable the organisation to reach its PR goals. This is detrimental to the ethical value of the Sustainability Report and not what should be expected of a genuine sustainability report.

6. Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This research has contributed to exposing under-analysed aspects of BP's PR efforts. While the findings are eye-opening, there is room for further research in this field. The aim of this research was to find out how genuine BP's contemporary approach to sustainability is, and in what way the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill has changed the organisation's behaviour. In order to answer this question, I have analysed BP's 2015 Sustainability Report, which was the latest report published at the time of this research. The report is a demonstration of BP's approach to sustainability. It is significant to remember that this report is a carefully crafted PR document published with the intent of achieving a particular PR goal.

6.2 Overview of research findings

Overall, the research found that BP's approach to sustainability is not genuine. Instead it focuses on how BP is using sustainability as a PR tactic. The 2015 Sustainability Report is a persuasive document aiming to present BP in a favourable light without providing extensive evidence of sustainability engagement.

The 2010 oil spill does not seem to have changed the way the organisation operates, even in the Gulf of Mexico. BP's oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico have increased from five to ten between 2011 and 2013. In the 2014, BP was the highest bidder for 24 out of 31 blocks in Gulf of Mexico lease sales. This purchasing power shows that despite the impact of crises, BP is still financially secure enough to avoid suffering financially. To this day, BP still has a massive annual revenue with 2010 having made no long-term dent in the organisation's revenue. Overall it seems that the 2010 oil spill has not changed BP's behaviour and approach to sustainability for the better. BP is still not doing what it ought to do and the intent behind the organisation's decisions remains of business-oriented

interest. From a sustainability perspective, BP is not attempting to consider the impact of its activities on future generations.

While BP's profit was affected for a short while, the organisation is now doing well and it looks as though its financial success will not stop anytime soon due to high demand. This gives the sense that BP cannot engage in sustainability in a genuine way as there are currently no consequences. This is possibly why, ultimately, BP has not fully committed to sustainability. However, BP knows it is under scrutiny, which is most likely why the organisation publishes yearly sustainability reports.

The 2015 Sustainability Report is consistent with BP's approach to sustainability in recent years as well as during the 2010 oil spill crisis response. This effectively reflects what BP values most (profit, business, expansion) when analysed within a multimodal framework. While it is common for organisations to talk about their prowess in terms of profit and business, the sustainability report is not the right place to do so. The 2015 Sustainability Report almost feels like a performance report in which BP is trying to demonstrate power and business-focused efficiency. The whole report gives this sense of achievement. It is more an exercise in highlighting successes than addressing endeavours in sustainability.

The 2015 Sustainability Report gives the sense that BP uses sustainability for two main purposes. First, as a term to use in order to benefit from positive attention due to its popularity, and second, as a way to make the business generate profit constantly and for as long as possible, meaning following sustainable growth. This is reflected in the way BP approaches sustainability in the 2015 Sustainability Report. While the organisation uses key terms related to sustainability, there is no substance to the claims BP makes about engaging in sustainable practices. It is interested in the sustainability of the business itself, and not in caring for future generations.

Throughout the years, BP has made it obvious that the main drive for all of its decisions is based on the goal of making as much profit as possible. BP's values and actions are consistent, but not BP's words and actions. Even if the organisation does not always claim to be sustainable, it still tries to lead people to think it is, to an extent at least. BP has simply decided that being genuinely sustainable is simply not possible, and in fact conflicts with the organisation's business goals.

One must wonder if the sustainable nature of an organisation is measured by how much effort the organisation invests and displays, or by its claims. A key question that arises from this analysis is what extent do people judge how sustainable an organisation is by listening to what the organisation says it does and cares about, as opposed to an organisation's actions? This is likely to vary depending on the organisation's reputation. Unfortunately, as discussed in Chapter Two, BP's reputation still suffers from not having managed the 2010 oil spill crisis in the best possible manner and failing to integrate sustainability into its core values. This impacts how readers perceive the sustainability report, which ultimately impacts the organisation's reputation. However, it seems that not all the public value whether sustainability is integrated into BP's key core values. To this day, BP has not been held accountable for its lack of genuine commitment to sustainability values.

6.3 Is BP doing what it ought to do?

In BP's case, the 2015 Sustainability Report is a highly rhetorical document used as a PR tool, with the intent of making one-sided statements to its readers. Because the report is meant to help BP achieve their goal rather than just inform, the 2015 Sustainability Report seems to be more of a strategic propaganda tool than a genuine report.

The analysis of the 2015 Sustainability Report shows that BP is potentially prepared to be mindful of the environment, but only as long as it is not detrimental to the

organisation's profit and success. The environment is therefore not a priority on BP's agenda. BP does not seem to acknowledge the value of nature and the scarcity of natural resources. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, the Sustainability Report does not use and address a number of terms related to sustainability that one would expect to find in a sustainability report. The report shows that BP has a business oriented approach to sustainability and that business advancements are put forward while sustainability related activities are put aside. In fact, BP talks about its status in the fuel industry, technological advancements and business operations without addressing their impact from a sustainability perspective.

The findings show that the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill has not changed the organisation's behaviour from a public relations perspective. While it is difficult to know whether BP is now more prepared when it comes to crisis management, the organisation does not seem to be heading towards a more careful approach. The findings in Chapter Four reveal that the lack of ethical values displayed back in 2010 are still an issue nowadays. The organisation lacks genuine care when it comes to sustainability issues, and uses sustainability reporting as a PR tactic to achieve economically orientated goals. BP is also still not taking responsibility for the role it played and still plays in the Gulf of Mexico.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the definition of ethics can be defined as what BP "ought to have done and does" (McBeath & Webb, 2002) as an organisation with worldwide influence. It seems that BP is setting a bad example and giving the impression that it is acceptable for other organisations in the industry to not engage in sustainability. While BP is on the right path by publishing sustainability reports, it is clearly misusing them when considered from an ethical and sustainability point of view. The 2015 Sustainability Report showed a lack of ethics on BP's part. As revealed by the data analysis, TARES test and Five Pillars of Ethics in Public Communication, ethics do not play a role in BP's

current communication, and that is reflected in the rhetorical devices used in the report. The organisation is being unethical on many levels and has attempted to conceal it, at least to a certain extent. However, lip service can only fool the public to a certain extent, past which the true nature of BP's motives is revealed thanks to analysis.

As discussed in section 3.2.3, The TARES test enables us to cast judgement on BP's lack of ethics. It consists of five principles: truthfulness (of the message), authenticity (of the persuader), respect (for the persuadee), equity (of the persuasive appeal), and social responsibility (for the common good) (Baker & Martinson, 2001). It appears that the 2015 Sustainability Report does not follow those principles.

The first element is the truthfulness of the message. Because BP has put together a PR document of a manipulative nature, the information provided in the report is true but not unbiased. The different parts of the report were carefully chosen and used to serve a cautiously designed purpose. Not enough information is provided for the readers to make an informed decision on BP's approach to sustainability issues. The message presented by BP is dishonest and biased, and aims to convince readers that the organisation is thriving financially while seriously addressing the challenges of sustainability. The way the organisation's activities are represented is manipulative rather than truthful, as it focuses on the business aspect of BP's activities rather than the socially responsible dimension.

The second element is the authenticity of the persuader. BP's intent is to convince its audience that sustainability is one of its top priorities while solely focussing on trying to put forward financial prowess. BP's motives are not genuine, and not the ones you would expect from an organisation willing to publish annual sustainability reports. The lack of authentic feedback loops in the report shows there is no dialogic communication between the organisation and the reader. This means that the persuader, BP, does not have the

authentic goal of engaging in an equal discussion. It is highly unlikely that BP believes the 2015 Sustainability Report will benefit society or raise awareness regarding the importance of sustainability.

The third element is respect for the persuadee. The concerns of all stakeholders are not taken into consideration. Rather than addressing what truly matters when it comes to sustainability, the report only scratches the surface of sustainability related issues. It therefore does not respect the genuine concerns of stakeholders or address them. The 2015 Sustainability Report also lacks respect for the persuadee. The readers of the report might not be aware of the extent to which BP is manipulating the information and omitting some facts and figures that would shed a negative light on the organisation's practices.

The fourth element is the equity of the appeal. BP's interest is one-sided and put before the external stakeholders' interests. It seems that BP takes advantage of the fact that most readers will not question what they read in the report, and will not look any deeper. In terms of equity, BP and the readers are not on even platforms. The way the information is presented is deceptive and aims to put BP in a favourable light. Readers are not made fully aware of BP's activities, which makes this report a deceptive strategic tool.

The fifth element is the social responsibility for the common good. The sustainability report does not highlight any concerns related to the common good on BP's side. The report does not add any value to society, as it does not address sustainability in a genuine way. By publishing a sustainability report, BP has the potential to contribute to the common good by displaying commitment to sustainability and identifying areas for improvement. However, the organisation's focus is business-centred. Social responsibility is used as a PR tactic to influence public perception, not as a tool for change. The 2015 Sustainability Report does not promote ethical and sustainable behaviour. This means that it is unlikely to improve society as a whole or to encourage

fellow organisations to engage in genuine sustainability reporting. Social responsibility is not the prime goal of BP's activities, as reflected in the report.

It is clear that BP's intentions are therefore not ethical. It seems that BP prioritised its own best interest rather than considering the global interest in a sustainable future. Both frameworks highlight that there is a need for balance between the needs of the organisation and the needs of society.

Overall, BP's Sustainability Report fails to report ethically on the organisation's activities. It crosses numerous ethical boundaries and BP's ethical duties as an organisation are not met.

Similarly, the analysis of the Sustainability Report showed that the document does not follow the Five Pillars of Ethics in Public Communication. Of the five pillars (veracity, non-maleficence, beneficence, confidentiality, fairness), BP does not comply with four. The fifth one, confidentiality, does not apply to the report.

While BP's approach to sustainability technically does not harm anyone directly, it does have a broader impact on society and its future. Failure to engage in genuine sustainability and failure to accurately report and disclose oil and gas related activities does not contribute towards progress for a sustainable future.

In BP's case, the organisation is not taking advantage of the opportunity it has been given to contribute towards societal good. Instead of using sustainability reporting to report on the organisation's performance and induce change, BP takes it as an opportunity to manage its public image.

The message is not truthful, as BP rhetorical efforts could potentially mislead the Sustainability Report's readers. To the untrained eye, an organisation that publishes a

sustainability report is likely to be perceived as one that values sustainability and the commitments it implies.

Lastly, BP's use of sustainability as a PR tactic is in a way unfair to society, as it uses crucial notions such as sustainability and social responsibility to benefit the organisation and not society. It seems that BP published the 2015 Sustainability Report in bad faith, knowing it would not genuinely report on the organisation's engagement with sustainability. Part of being fair is to be socially responsible, and BP is not.

6.4 This is a persuasive document and therefore not an ethical document

The 2015 Sustainability Report is typical of BP's other sustainability reports. The global nature of the brand is one of its main claims, as BP claims to have consistent values across borders. BP's approach to sustainability seems to be consistent across the report but also on BP's different communications. Because the report is consistent with other sustainability related content published by BP, and because the content of the report was carefully crafted every year, the report is reflective of the organisation's overall approach to sustainability.

The 2015 Sustainability Report is a carefully crafted document; indicating that BP has put a lot of thought into constructing the report before publishing it. In Section 4.10 the language used in the report to be carefully scrutinised. Key rhetorical elements such as card stacking, sweeping generalities and glittering generalities are used frequently in the report, demonstrating BP's use of propaganda. This deliberate choice on BP's part to rely on elements of propaganda when discussing sustainability is in an effort to rely on the power of suggestion and be misleading. This revealed that the 2015 Sustainability Report is a persuasive document with rhetorical intent.

Baker and Martinson (2001) argue that ethical persuasion should "rest or serve a deeper, morally based final end" (p. 172). As demonstrated by the data analysis in Chapter Four,

BP does not engage in ethical persuasion and does not have morally based motives. There is a lack of any data to support the claim that BP is engaging in sustainability. This is not a genuine sustainability report, but rather a rhetorical exercise and overlay of words not related to actions. The organisation's goal was to use the 2015 Sustainability Report as a PR tool in order to serve BP's financial interests.

Another element that highlights BP's lack of ethical motivations is the content of the report. Knowing it would be reporting on its sustainability, BP should have made sure to include information about sustainable activities. However, Section 4.13 demonstrates a lack of evidence in the report. The fact that it was not included implies that the organisation does not have any to report on. For instance, BP briefly mentions the goal of reaching a 'lower-carbon future'. However, no specific targets are set, with therefore no possible tracking and reporting on the matter. This is possibly because BP's goal is not to convince people that it fully engages in sustainability but rather to just publish a report under the heading of sustainability.

There is therefore a discrepancy between the expected use of a sustainability report and the way BP has used sustainability reporting. Simply engaging in a discussion about sustainability is a good first step, but insufficient given BP's stature in the oil and gas industry. It seems then, that BP is not genuinely engaging in sustainable behaviour and is therefore not engaging in ethical sustainability reporting.

6.5 Discussion of changing political landscape

In recent years, there has been increased emphasis towards the need to stop relying solely on fossil fuels, changing political pressures, and an increasing need to be vigilant when it comes to claims of corporate social responsibility. The public needs to be increasingly vigilant of climate change on a global level, which is directly impacted by sustainable and non-sustainable behaviour.

President Donald Trump in the United States has repeatedly voiced his interest in the fossil fuel industry, arguing he wants to achieve “America’s energy dominance” and refuting global warming in many instances. Unfortunately, this means there is a high risk of there being even less regulations against oil giants such as BP and Exxon Mobil. President Trump was quoted saying, “We’re going to revoke policies that impose unwanted restrictions... deleting two old regulations for each new one”. While this is related to the United States, it can be argued that the US is a world leader and its actions have global impacts. The relaxed regulation of BP and its attitude towards sustainability illustrates what is happening on a more global level.

It is known that the activities of organisations like BP are highly dependent on what regulations are put in place by the government. A more lenient government then, is likely to allow the organisation to get away with more unsustainable behaviour. Because of BP’s tendency to engage in sustainable activities only when legally required to do so, stricter government regulation could be the solution towards a more sustainable future.

6.6 Future research

This research’s data constituted the 2015 Sustainability Report, as it was the latest available report during most of this research. On 6 April 2017, BP published its 2016 Sustainability Report. An analysis of multiple reports would allow for an overview of the evolution of BP’s approach to sustainability. An important next step in this research would be to analyse the 2016 Sustainability Report to see whether BP has changed its approach to sustainability, and what the future holds when it comes to BP’s sustainability reporting. Changes in the format and content of the report would display an effort on BP’s part to address stakeholders’ concerns. On the other hand, there could be evidence that BP’s approach to sustainability has not changed, which would reflect the organisation’s complacency and lack of self-questioning. As explained earlier in this research, the notion

of sustainability is still at the forefront of the public's attention. This means BP is likely to have to change its business ethic at some point if it wants to survive public scrutiny.

This field could also benefit from research on how readers of sustainability reports perceive the content provided to them, along with engagement-based case studies to fully grasp the effect of sustainability reporting. This would be in relation to Social Judgement Theory and exploring the fact that only some people are susceptible to what organisations report. Lessons could be drawn from whether organisations have the ability to genuinely change people's minds.

A more specific analysis of the ethical standards of the decisions made by BP that led to a corporate crisis back in 2010 would also be beneficial to the PR industry. It would allow for a better understanding of the link between ethics and crisis management.

Another valuable area of research would be to examine sustainability within a broader context using a range of cases. While there are already sustainability reporting guidelines put in place, they seem to encourage using sustainability as a PR tactic rather than ethical and genuine sustainability reporting. There needs to be a deeper understanding of why sustainable behaviour is necessary and should be striven for by everyone, on a personal or organisational level.

6.7 Contribution to knowledge

The findings show that BP has used its 2015 Sustainability Report as a PR tactic. This has implications for environmentalists, BP's shareholders, policy makers and PR practitioners. It shows a need for the PR industry to counsel organisations to align sustainability practice and sustainability reporting and move towards ethical practice. This research will benefit the PR industry, whether in the academic sphere or practitioners.

6.8 Limitations of the study

In terms of limitations, it was sometimes a struggle to access relevant information due to the secretive nature of BP. The organisation's strategic deletion of content makes getting an overview of the evolution of BP's approach throughout the years particularly difficult.

Another limitation was the lack of opportunity to get in contact with BP's PR practitioners. An honest and transparent discussion with them could have allowed for a deeper understanding of BP when engaging in sustainability reporting.

This research was limited to data obtained from one example; therefore, the results are not generalisable. While this study provides an in-depth look at a contemporary sample sustainability report, more research is needed to explore the extent to which sustainability reporting is used as a PR tactic across the PR industry. While multimodal discourse analysis proved to be a particularly suitable methodology for this research, it can sometimes be subjective. This means that the findings can be influenced by the researcher's own context. For this reason, reflexivity at every stage of the analysis is key.

6.9 Summary

While most of the literature regarding the use of sustainability as a PR tool is rather cynical, it could be argued that by showing organisations the importance of sustainability, PR is actually encouraging a positive and long-lasting change. After all, if organisations know they will have to report on their performance in relation to sustainability, it is likely that they will engage in sustainable activities. PR is therefore a vehicle for sustainability engagement to become widespread. While all organisations are different, there is a sense of a growing understanding of the importance of ethical and sustainable behaviour. BP, however, seems to neglect the ethical, or rather non-ethical, aspect of their activities and values. Sustainability reporting should present the organisation in the best possible light when it comes to sustainability. In BP's case, a deeper analysis reveals that the

organisation does not genuinely engage in sustainable actions. This speaks volumes about what BP values and does not value, and ultimately shows a lack of genuine care for sustainability related issues.

Organisations like BP need to take action and back up any claim with evidence of the organisation engaging in activities that fit the sustainable image they are trying to promote. Then and only then, the use of sustainability as a PR tool will have a positive impact on society and benefit all parties involved on a broader level. Failure to do so highlights a lack of ethics and transparency.

When organisations engage in sustainability communications it has the potential to encourage an increase in sustainable behaviours. Implementation of these behaviours is a contributing factor towards a global solution for a more sustainable future. As more of these behaviours are implemented, it fosters a sense of progress and determination. PR practitioners who use sustainability as a tool also have the potential to play an educational role when it comes to keeping sustainability on the agenda. If organisations are constantly seen to be engaging or trying to engage in sustainable behaviour, the idea that organisations ought to be sustainable will eventually spread. It is the responsibility of organisations to ensure that their PR strategies and visions are aligned to meet the challenges of internal and external organisational factors in the context of sustainability.

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Appendix 1 - British Petroleum's 2015 Sustainability Report