Visuality as Greenwashing:  
*The Case of BP and Deepwater Horizon*

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**Abstract**

We use a visual semiotic approach to explore how BP utilized the power of the visual after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster. Through the careful construction and use of images on its corporate website, BP narrated a visual story that helped the company construct a ‘logic of representation’ when its ‘logic of practice’ became problematic and heavily scrutinized. We argue that the BP case has wider applicability in understanding how companies deploy the visual to create a reality that averts the limelight from risky practices, aid their post-disaster image restoration efforts, or even enhance greenwashing practices when decoupling is exposed. The study adds to a growing literature that raises the importance of visual literacy for both management practitioners and researchers of organizations. It also adds to the literature on greenwashing by showcasing the role of visual imagery in shaping green communication.

*Key words:* visuality; visual imagery; greenwashing; visual semiotic methods; BP; website; green communication; environmental disaster

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The destruction and sinking of the BP-licensed ‘Deepwater Horizon’ offshore oil-rig is one of the largest environmental catastrophes the world has ever witnessed. In addition to the loss of human life, at least 200 million gallons of oil were released from the well into the Gulf of Mexico, resulting in the largest ever accidental release of oil into the marine environment (National Commission, 2011). The damage to the economy and to the natural ecosystem of the Gulf and the Gulf Coast of the U.S. was enormous (Muralidharan, Dillistone, & Shin, 2011). Horrific images of the spill dominated mass media for weeks: alongside shocking photographs of the burning platform and dense black smoke choking the calm blue ocean, there were repeated disturbing images of shoals of dead fish, sea turtles mired in oil, oil-soaked pelicans wallowing in the surf, and half-dead birds struggling to find refuge in Barataria Bay, Louisiana.¹

Deepwater Horizon is but one of many environmental disasters involving the oil industry in the last 50 years, so some argue that the resulting outcry does not reflect the extent of the catastrophe. The long list of examples cited in the literature include the 1967 Torrey Canyon sinking off Cornwall, UK, whose effects are still felt²; the 1978 Amoco Cadiz spill off the coast of Brittany, France³; the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound, Alaska, in 1989⁴; the hundreds of oil spills that blight Nigeria’s Niger Delta region every year⁵; and the oil spills that plague several countries in the Former Soviet Union where the Russian oil industry spills more than 30 million barrels of oil every year, with 15 percent of that released directly into the Arctic Ocean.⁶ What is impressive, however, about Deepwater Horizon is exactly its impression. Even

environmental stakeholder groups argue that what made this case ‘unique’ is that it was the most *visual* of disasters, a story of unwitting and witting characters drawn out by the media for years.

In an increasingly visual world (Bell, Warren & Schroeder, 2014), it seems that it is no longer enough for companies to be concerned with image management, but with managing images as well. As Muller (2008) writes, the management of image, enabled by connective technologies, has become a vital task that cuts across traditional and geographical boundaries. In fact, managing the visual seems to enter into “almost every aspect of organizational strategy, operations and communication, reconfiguring basic notions of management practice and introducing new challenges into the study of organization” (Bell et al., 2014: 2) that both scholars and practitioners must address.

Even so, in exploring cases of greenwash, most studies to date have focused on firms’ verbal rhetoric and messaging, leaving the role of visual imagery in shaping green communication and messaging unaddressed (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015), especially as this relates to a post-disaster image restoration strategy. Although some studies have focused on how stakeholders use social media to expose greenwashing, there is scant evidence on how firms react to these pressures (Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014), especially as they “counter-use” social media and imagery for their own benefit.

In this study, we zoom in on corporate websites which, as powerful visual communication tools, can be used not only to strategically enhance a company’s image but even to counter-act greenwashing accusations. Websites, alongside other forms of social media, offer the company immediacy and on-demand access (Elliott & Robinson, 2014; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009), which is particularly important when responding to accusations. Of course, the fact that a firm will use visuality to propagate its strategic goals may be expected; what our study sheds light on are the instances in which stated (textual) corporate practices are contradicted by actual (visual) events, a form of ‘visual
decoupling.’ Using the case of BP as our empirical context, we ask *How does a firm that claims to be green utilize the visual power of its website to deal with an environmental disaster for which it is being accused?*

To explore further BP’s visual tactics, we systematically tracked the corporate website ([www.bp.com](http://www.bp.com)) from 2006 to 2014, focusing particularly on the Environment page, a subordinate page, one level deeper than the home page. Working largely within a visual socio-semiotic framework, but also drawing from current work on visuality and narrative studies, we studied how the company narrative changed via its website *images* to counter-act what Debord (1968) calls a “mega spectacle.” We find that, when the company’s ‘logic of practice’ became problematic and heavily scrutinized, ‘logic of representation’ was employed (Czarniawska, 2001). In this sense, we find that in the face of obvious catastrophe and related accusations, reality is supplanted by image and greenwashing practices are not remedied, but rather perpetuated via more sophisticated forms.

The BP case demonstrates how companies can engage in greenwashing not only by deploying the visual to create a reality that averts the limelight from risky practices but, more importantly, how using visuality can actually enhance rather than stop these practices when decoupling is exposed. Our study adds then to a growing literature which raises the importance of visual literacy for both management practitioners and researchers of organizations.

**Greenwashing as Symbolic Strategic Action**

*Greenwashing as selective disclosure*

Greenwashing, a common type of corporate selective disclosure, has received a lot of attention in the literature (see Bromley & Powell, 2012 and Lyon & Montgomery, 2015 for recent literature reviews). Although there is no consensus as to what constitutes
“greenwashing,” the term “…encompasses a variety of modes of misleading communication intended to positively influence stakeholders’…beliefs about an organization’s actual environmental performance” and to create a false impression of transparency and accountability (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015: 224). Most greenwashing studies focus on information disclosure issues but this complex phenomenon can also encompass “…vague claims, the use of visual imagery, and image advertising” (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015: 225).

Delmas and Burbano (2011: 65) bluntly define greenwashing as “poor environmental performance but *positive communication* about environmental performance,” while Bell and McArthur (2014: 369) refer to strategic practices of organizational reputation management that *deliberately* deceive and manipulate to promote a favorable public image of business (emphasis ours).

Greenwashing is also a form of “decoupling,” the separation of appearance and reality, which many argue is a *symbolic strategy* (Marquis, Toffel & Zhou, 2016), that allows firms to proactively frame communications to their stakeholders in a comprehensive process of sensegiving (Fiss & Zajac, 2006) and impression management (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992). Thus, researchers suggest that corporations strategically vary the types of information they publicly disclose depending on how it reflects on them—they disclose positive environmental actions or performance indicators while concealing negative ones to create a misleadingly positive impression of overall environmental performance (Lyon & Maxwell 2011; Marquis et al., 2016).

*The propensity to greenwash*

Previous research has shown that firm size (Kim & Lyon, 2011), a firm’s rate of growth (Kim & Lyon, 2015), a firm’s visibility (Delmas & Montes Sancho, 2010), the regulatory environment (Delmas & Burbano, 2011), stakeholder pressures (Marquis, et al., 2016), and connections to industry groups (Delmas & Montes Sancho, 2010) are all
linked to corporate selective disclosure and greenwash (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015). In addition to these factors, organizational visibility— which may be a consequence of poor environmental performance or an organization’s proximity to an issue (Marquis et al., 2016: 485)— also makes a firm more likely to selectively disclose information, as a result of increased attention and pressure from a variety of stakeholders (King, 2008; Lyon & Montgomery, 2013). Interestingly, firms with weak environmental records are more ‘visible’ because their environmental impacts attract stakeholder attention (Bansal & Clelland, 2004). Oil companies with weaker environmental records, for example, attracted more media attention when oil spills occurred, “perhaps because their low performance made them more visible and thus their negative events more newsworthy” (Marquis et al., 2016: 486). As Reid and Toffel (2009) also note, firms in environmentally sensitive industries such as oil, were more likely to disclose to the Carbon Disclosure Project in response to shareholder resolutions. Patten (1992) found that after the Exxon Valdez oil spill, major oil firms other than Exxon doubled, on average, the amount of space in their annual reports devoted to environmental issues. Of course, such scrutiny could also dissuade companies from selective disclosure because “getting caught at it” can significantly damage their reputations (Lyon & Maxwell, 2011). It is possible that firms increase their disclosure after an accident or a negative event in an effort to improve their reputation (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013). The question however remains what this disclosure entails, how selective it is, and the extent to which it is linked to decoupling.

More sophisticated forms of greenwashing

As organizations face greater scrutiny regarding their environmental practices and performance, as well as more informed or aware stakeholders, conventional forms of greenwashing (such as selective information disclosure) may not suffice in managing or manipulating stakeholder expectations. This is especially the case after an
environmental disaster, such as Deepwater Horizon, when all eyes focus on the corporate culprit.

Thus, perhaps contrary to stakeholder expectations, it is likely that firms will resort to more sophisticated forms of greenwashing *after* a disaster, rather than take action to ensure that such a catastrophe is never repeated. In fact, as Bowen and Aragon-Correa (2014) and Bowen (2014) argue “less sophisticated forms of greenwashing may be declining due to a combination of increased stakeholder vigilance and the flattening of information symmetries through new data and monitoring technologies, while the broader symbolic dimensions of corporate environmentalism are becoming even more pervasive” (Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014: 107). Bowen and Aragon-Correa (2014: 108) argue that despite stakeholders’ use of “inventive ways”—using social media, for example, to expose sophisticated greenwashing efforts by firms—it is unlikely they will stop greenwashing. Rather, “it is more likely that firms’ tactics will change and that both activists and scholars will have to approach the contested terrains of evaluating environmental performance and firms’ green commitments in a more sophisticated way.”

Misleading narratives and discourse, used to greenwash a firm’s environmental record and mislead stakeholders, are examples of such tactics. One such case may be BP’s “beyond petroleum” campaign (Matejek & Gössling, 2014). Misleading visual imagery may be yet another tactic (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015: 238). Cervellon (2013) has shown, for example, that consumers interpret the use of biodiversity symbols in the logos of luxury brands as a relationship between these brands and sustainability, while Cliath (2007) has discussed the link that consumers make between the look of a product’s label and its social and environmental attributes.

In our study, we focus on how visual imagery can be used as a firm-level greenwashing tactic, connected broadly to a firm’s symbolic strategic actions to
selectively disclose its environmental performance. In this context, we connect our study to the visuality literature as well.

**The Visual Organization**

Bell, Warren and Schroeder (2014) argue that the “visual” is an integral part of all aspects of a firm’s strategy, operations and communication. Organizations communicate with their stakeholders via an array of visual resources, including products and other artefacts, architecture, workplace design, printed literature, and their websites (Kunter & Bell, 2006). As such, the “management of image” has developed into a vital task for firms and “visual competence” (Muller, 2008) has become of paramount importance. Increasingly, companies are using sophisticated visual approaches to present or brand themselves (Schroeder, 2012), to distract attention from reporting facts (McKinstrey, 1996), to salvage their image during a crisis (De Cock, Baker & Volkmann, 2011), or even to recreate the past (Foster et al., 2011), thus transforming reality via “processes of globalization and digitization” (Muller, 2008: 101).

Meyer (1991) has argued that visually oriented research has the potential to enable a more sophisticated understanding of organizations, given that organizations often rely on the visual to strategically communicate, persuade or manipulate opinions. He and other researchers have noted that organizations are fully aware that visual and verbal forms of information are encoded and processed differently by audiences. For example, Crilly, Hansen, and Zollo (2016: 705) argue that “…firms cover the same points of content in their reports, but firms that practice what they preach use more complex styles of language than do firms that decouple their action from their statements…moreover [they] theorize that generalist stakeholders and stakeholders with conflicts of interest are unable to detect these linguistic nuances, whereas specialist stakeholders can.” Organizations, then, may manipulate the visual in order to convey
specific beliefs, alter consumers’ cognitive ability, influence memorability, affect decision-making, gain trust, enhance legitimacy (for a synopsis see Meyer et al., 2013), and may do so as a form of greenwashing, as discussed above.

In this study, we limit our use of the term “visual” to “images that already exist” (Bell et al., 2014: 6), treating first of all the BP webpage itself as an “image” in the way it is structured and presented, and then focusing more explicitly on the colors, symbols, photographs and text on this page. Combined, these images form a “representation” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), which we believe can be analyzed and interpreted as a form of grammar or language. Much like words woven together in a text, images—symbols, colors, and photographs—form a visual narrative that acts as an interpretive device (Gabriel, 2004), guiding stakeholders’ meaning-making, or potentially “myth-making” (Barthes, 2000; De Cock, Baker & Volkmann, 2011). It is this visual narrative that our study deconstructs through a visual socio-semiotic approach using the BP corporate website as our “research site” both before and after the Deepwater Horizon event. Through our analysis we seek, in short, to understand how an image narrates and how this narration can become a strategic tool in managing or even manipulating stakeholder impressions of a firm’s environmental record.

Although we do not study the company’s intentions here, we do see BP’s story as strategically constructed in the sense that the use of visual imagery is always in line with a firm’s larger communication strategy. As Meyer and her colleagues (2013: 514) write, visuals are part of a larger toolset which is used purposefully with “the intent to persuade.” While the strategic approach to the study of visuals has been primarily a concern of marketing and consumer studies (e.g. Lurie & Mason, 2007; Mandel & Johnson, 2002), some studies in management have also shown how visual information is used deliberately by companies to impact decision-making. Writing about another grave catastrophe, Union Carbide’s Bhopal disaster, Matilal and Hopfl (2009), for
example, investigated the rhetorical ways in which this tragedy was represented and the impact of the photographic image when set against the statement of account. According to these authors, the photographic image was used strategically as an attempt “to restore the body to the text” (p. 953) and to communicate in a different way than text: “it is more empathic, it draws the viewer into a different stance…and has the power to engage the emotions and move the reader” (Matilal & Hopfl, 2009: 954). Similarly, De Cock and colleagues (2011: 157), who studied corporate image-work during the latest financial crisis, argued that images are used to “sustain and reproduce faith/trust” in the corporate world. These authors, quoting Ranciere (2004), suggest that images offer “a trace of the true,” when “torn from their obviousness in order to become a ‘phantasmagoric’ figure” (p. 158). As such, they say, images work towards forming a Benjiminian “dreamworld” or a Barthian “mythology,” thus suppressing (actual) historical meaning. Images function in two ways: (1) consciously, allowing the creators to project an image of themselves to their stakeholders, which, in turn, empowers the creators as it lets them manage their own image; (2) subconsciously, by making these same players audience to their own narrative. The latter creates a self-belief which even influences economic calculations and perpetuates the construction of a “myth” (Barthes, 2000).

Of course, visuals are to be understood in terms of their incorporated meaning—they are, in other words, part of a system of symbols that is culturally embedded and requires sense-making on behalf of the intended audience (Scott, 1992). In fact, visuals’ ambiguity may be precisely what drives their persuasive appeal. As McQuarrie and Phillips (2005) argue, not only does this openness and ambiguity make visuals persuasive, it also makes it difficult to hold the producers of images accountable for a conveyed message (in Meyer et al., 2013). They suggest that this is the reason images
are used strategically and purposefully— to transport messages that cannot be verbalized, sometimes even for legal reasons.

Following the authors above, we deconstruct and seek to understand—not necessarily ‘find’— the meaning of BP’s strategic story while highlighting its ‘logic of representation’ (Czarniawska, 2001). Czarniawska (2001) explains that this type of logic—unlike Bourdieu’s logic of practice and logic of theory—is rhetorically accomplished. It uses stylized narrative knowledge through a legitimate repertoire of plots and hero-like characters and employs formal rationality as its main organizing device, delineating purpose, means and effects. We acknowledge that many stories can be told through the website, perhaps equal in number to the interpretations of those stories. However, given BP’s previous history of “green advertising” (discussed below), we explore how a particular story may be privileged through the use of specific visual imagery on the company’s website.

Background of the Study

About BP

BP is one of the largest oil companies in the world (Du & Vieira, 2012). Originally known as the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, it acquired the name ‘BP’ (British Persian) during World War I when Germany nationalized the company (Cherry & Sneirson, 2011). In 1954 the company officially became ‘The British Petroleum Company,’ a brand name which was in use until 1998 when its then-CEO, Lord John Browne, launched the “Beyond Petroleum” campaign and the acronym ‘BP’ was permanently adopted as the company’s name. The “Beyond Petroleum” tagline deliberately played on the BP acronym and came alongside a new logo, a yellow and green sunflower symbol representing the Greek sun-god Helios, with which all of BP gasoline stations were rebranded to reflect the company’s newly stated dedication to environmental
stewardship (Barrage, Chyn & Hastings, 2014). In fact, Browne, one of the first major oil company executives to acknowledge the existence of global climate change, spent 120 million dollars in 2000 alone to rebrand the company as “green” and strategically pushed to distance BP from its “tarnished image” (Schwartz, 2004) and “its big oil ways of the past” (Muralidharan et al., 2011). The company began marketing itself as “an energy company that cared about finding renewable sources of power” (Cherry & Sneirson, 2011: 1000). The campaign which ran from 2000 to 2008 placed a new focus on “reputation,” “dialogue” and “awakening of a force for good” (Rogan, Grattob & Ghoshal, 2004: 434-436). Many believe that the 200 million dollars pumped into the campaign was money well spent as it seemed to cushion the impact of several disasters, such as the 2005 explosion of a Texas City refinery that killed 15 workers; the 2006 leak of BP’s Alaskan pipeline near Prudhoe Bay; and the 2008 rupture of the Atlantis Oil Platform in the Gulf of Mexico—events which signified that BP was perhaps “meeting the letter of compliance but certainly not following the spirit of compliance” (Cherry & Sneirson, 2011: 996). It is worth noting that in 2008 BP earned a position on Fortune’s “10 Most Accountable Big Companies” list (CNN Money, Nov. 14, 2008), signaling a complete reversal from its previous “laggard” classification (Rice, 1993).

Yet, in April 2010 the world witnessed one of the largest environmental disasters in human history when a blast on Transocean’s offshore oil-rig ‘Deepwater Horizon,’ a platform licensed to BP, set off a series of explosions that eventually led to the sinking of the oil drilling rig. The explosion killed eleven workers and spewed at least 200 million gallons of oil from the well into the Gulf of Mexico, resulting in the world’s largest ever accidental release of oil into marine waters (National Commission, 2011).

The blowout and subsequent sinking of Deepwater Horizon in the Gulf led to a demolition of BP’s public image. For 87 days, the world watched in anticipation as
efforts were made to cap the gushing of oil into the Gulf. And even though the well was declared sealed on September 19, 2010, scientists were still recording the Spill’s toxic effects, with fish and animals dying in record numbers four years later (Sahagun, 2014).

In November 2012, BP formally pled guilty to charges of environmental crimes and agreed to pay 4.5 billion dollars to settle its criminal case with the United States government (Johnson, 2012). The settlement, which included among others a payment of 2.4 billion to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and 350 million to the National Academy of Arts and Sciences, is the largest criminal resolution in United States history (US Department of Justice, 2012). As of February 2013, criminal and civil settlements and payments to a trust fund had cost the company $42.2 billion.

Some claim that BP recovered from the Deepwater Horizon disaster faster than anticipated (Robertson & Schwartz, 2014). The company’s reputation, which seemed to freefall in 2010 has been re-established and, four years onward, the company was no longer on the defensive (Krauss, 2014): in March 2014, for example, the US federal government allowed the company after a period of exile to bid for oil and gas leases in the Gulf of Mexico, prompting BP to announce in April 2014 that the active shoreline cleanup had ended (to which the Coast Guard replied that the operation was far from over). Later in the spring of 2014, the company obtained a large number of oil and gas leases awarded by the federal government in the Gulf (Reed, 2014). What’s more, the chairman and president of BP America, John Minge, felt comfortable to highlight the coast’s record tourist numbers, emphasizing in a 2014 Op-Ed article the 27 billion dollars spent by BP and dismissing skeptical environmentalists by claiming that “they are using the spill to raise money for their own causes” (Minge, 2014). In addition, BP’s image recovery seemed so certain, that by 2014, the 2012 process that the company set up to settle hundreds of thousands of economic damage claims was halted (Robertson & Schwartz, 2014).
Of course, others still argue that BP has a long way to go before it fully “recovers” from the effects of Deepwater Horizon (Tilcsik & Clearfield, 2015). In fact, in 2015, the US District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana found the company “grossly negligent” in the run-up to the 2010 disaster, a decision which could quadruple the penalties it would have to pay under the Clean Water Act to more than 18 billion dollars (versus the initial estimate of 4.6 billion). The judge of the case apportioned two thirds of the blame for the spill to “reckless BP” while the other two defendants in the more than three thousand lawsuits filed in the spill’s wake, Transocean and Halliburton, were found to be “negligent.” BP condemned the decision, as anticipated, but its share price fell 6 percent upon announcement of the court ruling (Backman, 2014).

About this Study
In this paper we draw on previous work which looked at the various dimensions of the BP disaster, including the role of BP’s green advertising in its subsequent financial recovery (Barrage et al., 2014); the lessons learned from “corporate brand exuberance” when a company cannot deliver what it promises (Balmer, 2010; Balmer et al., 2011); the role of social media in BP’s image restoration (Muralidharan et al., 2011) as well as BP’s initial image restoration strategies after the oil spill (Harlow, Brantley, & Harlow, 2010); and the ways in which the law can more effectively address greenwashing cases such as BP, including fraudulent claims of corporate social responsibility (Cherry & Sneirson, 2011). Despite the diverse perspectives taken in these studies, all authors seem to agree that the 200 million dollars that BP spent on green advertising cushioned the impact of the spill, a finding which, in turn, raises serious questions about the incentive for companies to greenwash.

At the same time, however, that we join these authors in looking closely at BP and its recovery after a grave disaster, we shift attention to a seemingly neglected aspect of the company’s image restoration campaign, the power of the visual. Previous studies
have focused largely on the *discourse* used by BP to manage and recover from the disaster (e.g. Matejek & Gössling 2014; Muralidharan et al., 2011) and to gain legitimacy (e.g. Breeze, 2012; Du & Vieira, 2012). Yet, as discussed above, working with the “visual” is an important business strategy (Bell et al., 2014). As Meyer et al. (2013: 511) write, visuals “create, transform, or stabilize particular ‘versions’ of reality” and companies are becoming more attuned to this. Even if language remains a ‘dominant sign system of society,’ visuals, like words, “materialize, organize, communicate, store and pass on knowledge” (Meyer et al., 2013: 493).

Furthermore, we acknowledge that the internet plays a vital role in corporate image restoration in the aftermath of disaster (Muralidharan et al., 2011) and that corporate websites offer an important platform for corporate self-presentation, as well as continuous stakeholder communication (Pollach, 2003). Thus, to explore the strategic use of visuals by corporations after a crisis, we choose to focus specifically on the images placed on the company’s webpage. In this manner, we accentuate the interplay between visuality and strategy or, perhaps more accurately, visuality *as* strategy.

**Methods**

In studying visual images on a website, we faced several challenges; to overcome them, we used a variety of interpretive methods to collect, order, and analyze our data. Our first challenge was the surprisingly little research on website analysis in organization studies (Coupland & Brown, 2004; Elliott & Robinson, 2011; Pollach, 2003 are notable exceptions). Second, we had to work with several unique features of websites vis-a-vis other features of corporate identity and other more traditional marketing and advertising tools: as part of wider social media, websites are multi-modal and engage with an organization’s diverse stakeholders; they are open to multiple interpretations, so only partly controlled by the organization; and they are non-linear, thus each visitor’s
journey on a website is quite unique (Elliott & Robinson, 2014: 275). In addition, there were several challenges in working with visual data: for one, there was an issue of figuring out a systematic way to choose which images to analyze; then we had to accurately describe what we saw, how we saw it and why we saw it that way. We acknowledge, for example, that photographs are partial, constructed and subject to manipulation (Goldstein, 2007), as much as our interpretation of them (Harper, 2005); hence, a great degree of reflexivity was required alongside a detailed awareness of the process we followed. Of course these challenges are not uncommon to researchers conducting empirical work in visuality (Warren, 2008).

To deal with these challenges we used a multi-methodological analytical approach, working largely within a visual socio-semiotic framework, but also drawing on current work in visuality and narrative studies. First, we rely on Elliott and Robinson’s (2014) work on the construction of corporate websites to deconstruct BP’s Corporate Web Identity (CWI), but choose to focus specifically on the images—the visual representations—used. We treat the website as a tool through which the company tries to (1) replace feelings engendered by the Deepwater Horizon disaster and (2) transmit organizational values and strategy.

Second, to explore how meaning is constructed through this deliberate but symbolic use of images, we employ a visual socio-semiotic approach. Scollon and Scollon (2003: 217) describe visual semiotics as the “study of the ways in which visual images produce social meaning.” Specifically, to look at the BP website in a systematic manner, we rely on Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006: 1) visual semiotic method which “concentrates on the ‘grammar’ (of visual design)...the way in which (various) elements are combined into meaningful wholes.” Just as grammars of language describe how words combine in clauses, sentences and texts, so visual ‘grammar’ describes the way in which depicted elements—people, places and things—combine in visual
‘statements’ of greater or lesser complexity and extension. As such, we assume that the choices made by BP are deliberate, mediated, contextual and strategic and look for the organizational messages that the chosen images contain.

Third, like other researchers on visuality (eg. Bell et al., 2014; De Cock et al., 2011), we believe that images tell their own story. In this light, we treat BP’s website as a form of visual narrative and ask whether the story told through the visual images is constructed to divert attention away from goals that the company possibly cannot achieve. Despite then the possibility of “multiple journeys” while navigating a website, we argue that the images used are not as “scattered” as they may initially seem, but work synergistically to form “one understanding of the focal organization” (Price at al., 2008: 174). In this context, we use the word “narrative” in the sense of an interpretive system that helps organize experience (Bruner, 1990) and rely particularly on Jewitt and Oyama’s (2001) use of narrative within the social semiotic approach to “interrogate” our visual text and to “bring out hidden meanings.”

Data Collection
We began by tracking first the BP homepage (www.bp.com) since we considered this the “beginning” of the BP story and the common entry point of all viewers in making meaning of BP’s actions (Pablo & Hardy, 2009). We tracked the BP website systematically from March 2006 onwards, zooming in on any changes that were made to the homepage on a bi-weekly basis and cataloguing those points. Then, since we were mostly interested in BP’s environmental commitments and record, we zoomed in on the “Environment” page, which is a subordinate page, one level deeper than the home page (that is, it is immediately linked to a clickable item on the home page) (Pablo & Hardy, 2009: 826). This page was renamed “Environment and Society” in 2009 and “Sustainability” in 2010. These pages formed our main database for comparative analysis. Of course there were significant stretches of time during which no notable
changes were made. Data collection intensified in the months following the Deepwater Horizon disaster to tracking website changes on a daily basis with the help of a research assistant (April-October 2010). Again these changes focused only on the homepage and on the Environment/Sustainability section for the sake of consistency and data manageability. Any other links associated with these pages were noted as background information where necessary but not analyzed.

*Data Analysis*

For our data analysis we focused both on the structure and images of the website but also on the resulting narrative, as noted above. Guided by previous research (e.g. Elliott & Robinson, 2011; 2014; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), we began by tracing changes in the website on three socio-semiotic dimensions, which we considered to be the “grammar” of visual design: structure of the website; colors and symbols used; and photographs. Photographs were categorized into three broad themes, as these were deduced from tracking the website in the 8-year period: showing people, nature, and technology/science. For the purposes of this research, we did not analyze each photograph collected but, more broadly, the category in which it belonged by referring to representative examples within each category; in other words, we inferred meaning from pictures of nature by looking at a few key examples, such as a picture of a daisy or a green field.

Second, to analyze the resulting story of the website we synthesized the interpretations from the first step of the analysis (1) to see if an overall pattern could be discerned across the different features associated with the website changes over the years and (2) to see if a dominant “plot” emerged before and after the disaster. Clearly the interpretation made entails our own view as researchers-users (Czarniawska, 1997) and we discuss this in the subsequent section. At the same time, following a rich tradition in narrative studies, we looked for certain “key” elements in the story
constructed, as this emanated from the “visual grammar” of step 1. These were: main protagonists, plot focus based on a “predicament,” and emotions created (Czarniawska, 1997; 2001; Gabriel, 2004). A similar approach was followed by De Cock et al. (2011) studying the evocative images used by financial institutions during the global financial crisis of 2008.

A Note on Reflexivity

Before continuing, we should say that our study actually has its own story: we began following the company website in 2005, exploring whether the company’s powerful green imagery was part of “greenwashing.” Despite several problems that should have “warned” us at the time about BP’s practices, we were prompted to believe that these were “minor” accidents, adequately addressed by BP and had prepared an article to this effect. When the Deepwater Horizon explosion happened, our conclusions became irrelevant overnight. Recovering from the shock that any researcher would undergo after years of hard work, but also from the fact that we had clearly misread the greenwashing signs despite our self-identity as “devoted environmentalists,” we fervently followed the coverage of the event in the mass media, as well as BP’s reactions in the months following the oil spill. In 2010 we reframed the project vis-à-vis the disaster and continued to systematically track the website until 2014.

The BP Website ‘Before’ and ‘After’—A Visual Semiotic Analysis

Following the website from 2006 to 2014, we were able to witness not just changes specific to BP, but also broader changes in website design. It is evident, for example, that after 2010 the website was significantly embellished with the addition of animations, webcasts, access to blogs, downloads, and links to a series of social media tools. These changes are consistent with broader changes in website design during the last decade but also reflect technological changes such as download speeds and mobile
connectivity to the internet, which changed what companies are able include on websites (without negatively affecting the navigation experience, due to crashes, for example). They also reflect the image culture of the era (or “image-driven society” as Gabriel, 2011 calls it), which demanded this development on behalf of companies.

To show how and possibly why BP took advantage of these sociotechnical shifts, we turn to a visual semiotic analysis of the dominant website structures we found between 2006 and 2014. According to Elliott and Robinson (2011), these structures are not merely a reflection of changing times but rather a deliberate choice in how information is presented. We located two main structures, interestingly corresponding to the years 2006-2009 and to 2010-2014. A brief alternative structure, featuring characteristics from both of these, appeared briefly between 2009 and 2010. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 199) refer to the structures we found as “triptychs” since they are typically composed of three parts. The 2006-2009 or pre-disaster website has a so-called “vertical triptych” structure. According to the authors, this type features the “given” for the company on the far left, what is considered “new” on the far right, and a center which bridges these two parts, acting as “mediator.” The 2010-2014 or post-disaster website can be considered a “horizontal triptych” which features what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) consider the “ideal” on the top part, the “real” on the bottom, and a connecting “mediator” in the center, typically used to overcome or mitigate any contradictions between ideal and real. The structure of the website between October 2009 and November 2010 was a mixed structure, often characteristic of transition periods (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006).

Figure 1 shows a representative snapshot of the BP website before the oil spill. This snapshot from 2006, features, like most pages from this time period, a photograph with a nature theme in the center of the page alongside a ‘catchy’ slogan of environmental commitment. We see an abundance of text, both to the left and the right
of the featured daisy, as well as below. This text highlights four key areas: BP’s role in climate change and conservation to the left and its products and operations to the right. These categories remain the same, with insignificant changes, throughout 2006-2009. Other nature images on the site included bright skies, meadows and dandelions. Based on the aforementioned discussion on website structures, we would expect the two areas to be reversed; in other words, we would expect to see products and operations on the left, signifying that they are the “given” rather than the “new.” Our interpretation of this seemingly unlikely setup is that BP (with its professional website designers) opted to position its products and operations as something “new,” highlighting its commitment to cleaner energy products and devotion to compliance issues. “Climate change” and “conservation” which are placed on the left, appear then as “given” and add to the image of BP as an environmentally friendly company with a “given” devotion to conservation, biodiversity, clean water, and reduced gas emissions. This setup seems consistent with BP’s broader “green” campaign (described above) and echoes the then-CEO’s stated commitments (Balmer et al., 2011).

Insert Figure 1 here

Figure 2 is an example of what we called the “transition” structure, featured between October 2009 and November 2010. This is a mixed triptych, characterized mainly by a turn towards brighter colors and more visuals, as well as repeated use of the word “energy.” Text remains abundant but in smaller font, inviting users to “click” for more information.

Insert Figure 2 here

Figure 3 from March 2014 shows a representative snapshot of the BP website from the post-disaster era. First, we note the change in structure which is now a horizontal triptych. The multiplicity of images (15 in our example) is striking, especially when compared with earlier webpage snapshots. As a horizontal triptych, the
“ideal” part of the post-2010 webpage shows, typically, close-ups of Science-related images, alongside a caption with bright green text that reads “Our strategy and sustainability.” Smaller text reads “Meeting the energy challenge” and this leads to a link on what BP does in this area. Interestingly, the description of what BP is doing comes with a footnote: “The information on this page forms part of the information reviewed and reported on by Ernst & Young as part of BP’s 2013 sustainability reporting.” Legitimacy seems to be gained here by external expert validation. The ensuing photographs used as “connectors” also show scientists or engineers hard at work. As the “mediator” part of the webpage, the photographs bridge the company “ideal” (exemplified by the caption “to be a world class operator, a responsible corporate citizen…”) with the “real.” The “real” section on the bottom of the page features press releases and PDF downloads, the BP annual report, the first quarter 2014 results, BP’s statistical review of world energy for 2014 and BP’s sustainability review 2013. This bottom part also includes the “HSE Charting tool” which “filters and analyzes information on the group’s health, safety and environmental performance” and is found on the bottom left. This tool allows viewers to gather data for the past decade and view them in a variety of chart formats.7

Insert Figure 3 here

When looking at the website from 2010 onwards, we are struck by the prominence of the image and the devaluation of text. In the example given, the main photograph is a close-up of a uniformed engineer peering through a pipeline. Close-ups, according to Elliott and Robinson (2011: 163) convey a feeling of “being right there” while their central position suggests that their meaning is significant to the overall narrative. The five shots in Figure 3 which do not depict BP staff, show a graph, a link to on-line reports, an oil platform, hydraulic fracturing and children gazing with interest at an exhibit. Again, typical of the post-2010 website, these images show a connection
to Science, while the photograph with children may indicate BP’s commitment to sustainability efforts, as if to say ‘we care about generations to come.’

Summarizing, we see that in earlier years, text is a key feature of the site, with the company relying on a technocratic and rationalistic discourse to persuade, whereas post-disaster, power is transferred to the image, potentially to counter-balance the images of the Deepwater Horizon disaster. This finding seems to be consistent with De Cock et al. (2011: 160) who find that, as uncertainty built in the financial industry during the latest economic crisis, institutions increased the number of advertisements and imagery they used, reaching “a crescendo as global stocks experienced their largest decline on record” in October 2008.

The BP Website ‘Before’ and ‘After’—A Visual Narrative

A narrative is an interpretive system that helps organize experience: episodes, actions, accounts of actions (Gabriel, 2004). It is not necessarily a linguistic or just a linguistic form of interpretation, but an organized way of telling a story, including a story via images. Below we analyze what we see as the “building blocks” of BP’s visual narrative: colors, symbols and photographs. According to Ball and Smith (1992: 26), these form both “the manifest and the latent content of a narrative,” as they are meant to “depict what is actual” and to add believability to a message, even if their influence or interpretation is not conscious.

Colors and Symbols

Color is an essential feature of the seen world: “Objects are classified, and described using their color as a significant identificatory principle” (Ball & Smith, 1992: 58). One of the first things we notice about the BP website throughout the years is the dominance of color green. The tabs are in green, the text and the main captions are in green, and as shown in Figure 3, the whole bottom part featuring additional information such as
connections to social media, downloads, press releases and contacts is a block of vibrant green.

Of course, the association of the color green to the natural environment has a long history (Sassoon, 1990: 176). To be “green” is to be socially responsible and to be “part of the world of nature” (Sassoon, 1990: 176). Yet an additional interpretation of the color green is, according to Ball and Smith (1992: 58), “naive and raw,” for example, “a green individual.” BP may want to be regarded as “green” both in the environmental sense but also in the sense of “this site does not lie.”

Another prominent and unchanging feature of the site is the sun or helios, BP’s logo. This logo along with the green-lettered “bp” written on top of it are found on the upper left side of the webpage, which according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) is significant for languages like English which read left to right, since the viewer mentally classifies this information as “the most salient element” of a composition and a “given” (p. 204), as previously noted.

Symbols are also “meant to evoke emotion” (Jones, 1996: 2). Helios or the primordial sun is a powerful organizational archetype, important in stories of cosmogony and an indisputable force of life (Kostera, 2012). Symbolic meanings of the sun are: the sun is the center of our universe, an energy source without which human beings cannot survive; without sun (without BP), we have night, darkness, stillness and all the things that darkness is associated with—the unknown, evil, death; and finally, the sun is an alternative form of energy toward which environmentalists think we should move. In short, the sun is life.

Photographs

Gabriel (2011) noted that in today’s image-driven society, photographs possess considerable emotional and rhetorical power, so in many ways they “tell more than a thousand words.” So, when we see the photograph under the Environment tab in Figure
1, for example—a bright daisy—we may be more likely to read the accompanying caption in a particular way: “Our goal is no damage to the environment; our challenge is to achieve this while continuing to deliver energy products that support growth and social development around the world.” The fact that this caption was on the site despite the 2005 Texas City refinery explosion and the 2006 Alaskan oil spill, is perhaps indicative of the intent to use photographs in a strategic manner to aid a particular interpretation of the “no damage” promise. To fully appreciate the scale of the Alaskan disaster, we remind the reader that initial estimates of the five-day leak in Prudhoe Bay, Alaska indicated that up to 267,000 US gallons (6,400 barrels) were spilled over 1.9 acres (7,700 m²), making it the largest oil spill on Alaska's north slope to that date (BBC News, March 11, 2006). Later on, BP pled guilty to negligent discharge of oil (it knowingly neglected corroding pipelines, a misdemeanor under the federal Clean Water Act) and was fined 20 million dollars in 2007. In 2011 it paid an additional 25 million dollars as civil penalty (Muralidharan et al., 2011).

Do “the facts become irrelevant” then, as Bruner (1990: 44) says, when we are bombarded with certain images? BP’s use of the visual became highly pronounced post-disaster, where text was even further demoted to the image. Vibrant colors (e.g. the prominence of red and bright blue protective uniforms) and close-up shots make photos eye-catching. In addition, the photographs in Figure 3, featuring uniformed men at work, either in the lab or in the field, with prominent safety gear (helmets, ear muffs, protective goggles, breathing masks) worn for the handling of ominous-looking machinery and equipment, add to the impression that this company takes all precautions and nothing is left to chance. Another interpretation may be that although these hard working engineers took all precautions before the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, ‘accidents’ do happen because ‘we are all human after all.’
Summarizing, we see that when BP was faced with a great urgency to convince about its environmental commitments, it resorted to imagery, perhaps a more sophisticated greenwashing tactic (Bowen, 2014). The website provided a forum for an alternative story to the one featured on mass media, while the power of the visual—color, symbols and photographs, as well as a particular website structure—was utilized to tell this story: ‘We are and always have been a green company that deeply cares about sustainability, even though we were found guilty of an unfortunate accident.’

‘Logic of Representation’: The Power of Visuality as Strategy

Our findings suggest that BP capitalized on the power of representation, deploying the visual at a time when the company became alienated and greatly scrutinized by the public while its visibility increased tremendously following Deepwater Horizon. A careful management of the image helped to present reality in ways that could benefit the company. The choice of images after the Deepwater Horizon disaster and their strategic placement on the website constructed a narrative aimed at dispersing an alternative understanding of BP: a company which, although responsible for a catastrophic accident, remained ‘green’ and committed to its ideology, was close to its stakeholders, and kept utilizing the power of science to ensure that such a disaster would never happen again. In summary, BP created a visual story that could be considered a symbolic strategy in itself.

Czarniawaska’s “logic of representation” is useful in delineating the power of this visual strategy. Czarniawska (2001) differentiates between Bourdieu’s (1990) ‘logic of practice’—the concrete, pragmatic logic practitioners use—and the ‘logic of theory’—the abstract logic used by those studying practice—by adding what she calls ‘logic of representation.’ Her suggestion is that this type of logic can help to “rewrite the contract between managerial practice and managerial theory” (p. 253).
Organizations will use this logic to gain legitimacy, especially when presentation of the logic of practice does not guarantee acceptance by the outside public. Logic of representation is abstract, “rhetorically accomplished” and uses “stylized narrative knowledge” and “formal rationality” as a main organizing device, she says (p. 256).

We propose that BP’s use of a strategic visual story is a manifestation of the ‘logic of representation,’ used in order to achieve legitimacy in the absence of a legitimate practice—a more sophisticated greenwashing tactic in the face of intense scrutiny and heightened visibility. When BP’s negligent practices (and their accompanying logic) were exposed, the company was delegitimized overnight, making the construction of a new type of logic urgent. Of course, Czarniawska (2001) continues her aforementioned argument to say that oftentimes practitioners also worry that “once the construction of the logic of representation is exposed, it will not function properly as a political tool” (p. 264). To connect then to our introductory remarks, we reiterate that this is precisely why visual literacy is crucial.

Photographs are never “unambiguous records of reality” (Ball & Smith, 1992: 18)—yet, they are often interpreted as such. As Sontag (1979: 117) wrote, “to take a good photograph…one must already see it”. Photographs create myths so that they can be “reconciled with society” (Barthes, 1980: 28). But exactly because of this, they can also be dangerous, as Barthes (1980: 28) argued, since we endow photographs with many functions (which, for the photographer, are “alibis”): “to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause, to signify, to provoke desire.” By using specific photographs on the post-disaster corporate website—e.g., images of scientists—BP created another reality on its website that could shift the focus away from the horrific images of the oil spill. The new constructed reality could be seen as part of a strategic practice of reputation management that allowed BP to manipulate stakeholders in order to regain legitimacy, not unlike the reactions of financial institutions during the latest financial crisis, as
located by De Cock et al. (2011). While there were previous cracks in BP’s purported “green” image (the Texas refinery incident and the Alaskan oil spill), attention from these was diverted until the ‘real’ images became too powerful. Then, through a clear delineation of “purpose, means and effects,” as described above, and by using its “narrative knowledge with gusto” in the formation of a visual narrative (Czarniawska, 2001: 256), BP used the logic of representation as a part of its strategy to regain legitimacy—decoupling “appearance” from reality/materiality or what we call a type of “visual decoupling.”

A Twist on ‘Authenticity’

Arguably, taking advantage of the opportunities and tools provided by social technologies, firms such as BP use images in such a way as to convince stakeholders of their authenticity, attempting to dispel doubts that such images are part of an “…artificially constructed world…typical of corporate communication” (Bell & McArthur, 2014: 365, quoting Schroeder, 2012: 129). In other words, they capitalize on the “…perceived objective realism of the image, [which can be]…naively understood…as providing an unmediated window on the truth.” In the context of corporate environmental sustainability, then, the visual representation of a firm’s environmental efforts or performance can enhance the authenticity of corporate claims, “in a manner not enabled by written and spoken words alone” and dispel greenwashing accusations (Bell & McArthur, 2014: 366; Pink, 2001) but, arguably, in the process provide firms with an even more powerful greenwashing tactic.

Clearly, where corporate claims are perceived as “authentic” by stakeholders they will go a long way in enhancing the legitimacy of a company such as BP. What we find in our study is that when a firm’s “authenticity” is contested by a catastrophe, the
firm does not respond by retracting greenwashing practices, but, perhaps paradoxically, by *enhancing* these practices via more sophisticated methods.

**Future Work and Conclusions**

We are not claiming that clever manipulation of the image on the website is *solely* responsible for the seeming recovery of BP’s corporate image. But, it is possible that by using visuals, the company aided the formation of a new reality in the face of gross disaster, which in our “spectacular society” became believable. While the company consistently put forth a green image through its logo, symbols and colors, a new narrative created through the change in website structure and the use of imagery, may have aided in diverting attention from the horrifying images of the spill. Although in the aftermath of the explosion BP’s share price fell by half, a few years later it seemed to remain a “giant”—a “shrunken giant” as a recent *Economist* article called it, but a giant nonetheless, back to drilling in the Gulf and boasting profits (*The Economist*, February 8, 2014).

Previous studies on BP’s recovery from the Deepwater Horizon spill have also argued that “greenwashing works.” Barrage and colleagues (2014) have shown, for example, that, although consumers punished BP temporarily after the spill, that punishment was significantly reduced by pre-spill exposure to BP advertisements during the “Beyond Petroleum” campaign years. These authors claim that BP’s campaign essentially functioned as an “insurance policy” against the cost of an environmental disaster. In a similar vein, we have argued that BP’s strategy to present itself as a “green” company is evident in its website design as well, thus potentially increasing its “insurance policy” even further. The various parts of BP’s story seem to fit. What’s more, BP’s use of the visual on its website post-oil spill acted as a way of disrupting that shocking ‘spectacle.’ In this sense, we find that in the face of obvious
catastrophe and related accusations, reality is supplanted by image and greenwashing practices are not remedied. Rather they are perpetuated via more sophisticated forms.

We believe that the BP case demonstrates how companies can engage in greenwashing not only by deploying the visual to create a reality that averts the limelight from risky practices but, more importantly, how using visuality can actually enhance rather than stop these practices when decoupling is exposed. Our study adds then to a growing literature which raises the importance of visual literacy for both management practitioners and researchers of organizations. It also contributes to the literature on greenwashing, where most studies have so far focused on firms’ verbal rhetoric and messaging and left the role of visual imagery in shaping green communication and messaging unaddressed (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015)—especially as this relates to post-disaster image restoration efforts.

Visuality remains of course a “contested terrain” since firms may not be able to control visual messages as effectively as they once did. This is partly due to the advent of new media technologies as well as “increased visual literacy wherein stakeholders are able to subject organizational authenticity claims to greater scrutiny” (Bell & McArthur, 2014: 375). In our study we have assumed that BP attempts to restore its post-disaster image via its website in response to stakeholder pressures; nonetheless, we have not documented these pressures. Future work could focus on depicting exactly how such pressures work, but also the direct response to these pressures tracing the dynamic interplay between firms and their stakeholders. Some claim for example that BP’s management of more instantaneous two-way communication social media, such as Flickr, Twitter and Facebook, was not successful since activists bombarded these sites with horrific images of the spill to which BP had a very difficult time reacting.\(^8\)

Yet another study could connect BP’s website communication to its wider communication strategy, particularly at the time of the disaster. We know, for example,
that the company spent 93.4 million dollars between April and July 2010, advertising in local and national US TV stations, newspapers and magazines (Tracy, 2010). In addition, the set-up of a completely different website, www.stateofthegulf.com, which was both self-standing but also a link on BP’s US page forms a separate study under way that focuses on the immediate reaction of the company to the oil spill, even if, interestingly, this was not a link on www.bp.com.9

Future work could also trace users’ response and attitudes to website changes and document the possible multiplicity of interpretations. Although here we used a visual semiotic analysis to present what we see as the dominant visual narrative of the BP site, focusing on audience response through an experiment could highlight heterogeneous perspectives given stakeholder background and/or expertise, similar to the work of Crilly et al., (2016) regarding language use and sustainability claims.

Lastly, in this study we did not study BP’s intentions in its website use for image restoration nor did we study the specifics of its communication strategy post-disaster. Work that can include the perspective of independent communication experts, including website designers, could shed light on the differences between what is part of wider technological evolution in website design and what is perhaps intentional selective disclosure.

Overall, with this study we exemplify that, although much of the greenwashing literature focuses on the potential gap between published information and practical reality (evidenced by material greening practices), which is arguably detrimental to a firm’s credibility, work like ours can shed light on a seemingly neglected greenwashing tactic, the use of corporate websites. As Bell and McArthur (2014) write, the study of corporate websites, which enables the use of ‘richer’ (i.e. more complex and ambiguous) multimedia in social and environmental responsibility disclosures, can help
us understand how visual communication is used by firms to enhance their reputation on CSR and sustainability issues, especially when they are under attack.

In the end, the survival of many organizations depends on how well they satisfy their stakeholders (Kassinis, 2012; Kassinis & Vafeas, 2006; 2009). To do this, organizations must rely less on rationality—even cultural and social rationality—and more on understanding processes of social construction which define both “the breadth of perception and comprehension of stimuli” (Dougherty & Kunda, 1990: 185). BP seems to be fully utilizing knowledge on both the ideational and cognitive aspects of meaning-making through its reliance on a powerful visual narrative and ‘the logic of representation.’ Its symbolic (visual) strategy (Marquis et al., 2016) then, may enable the company to proactively frame its communication strategy with its stakeholders. Having said that, however, we are reminded that “firms cannot exploit merely symbolic corporate environmentalism alone” since it is relational: they need the silent assent not only of activist monitors but also of regulators, consultants, scholars, and other actors in the institutional fields around corporate environmental activities.” Understanding our role then in symbolic corporate environmentalism is “…a challenging [and fascinating] frontier in greenwashing research” (Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014: 109). After all, as Lyon and Montgomery (2015: 243) remind us, greenwash does not need to fool everyone but “…may mislead enough people to preempt or delay collective action from emerging,” especially on issues vital for the world at large.
References


FIGURE 1: BP “Environment” Webpage, March 2006

Environment

Our goal is no damage to the environment; our challenge is to achieve this while continuing to deliver energy products that support growth and social development around the world.

In this section

- Climate change
  - Explaining our approach and the actions we take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
    - The issue
    - Our position
    - Our approach
    - Our actions
    - Emissions trading
    - Product emissions
    - Operating emissions
    - Research partnerships

- Conservation
  - Why conservation and biodiversity matter to BP; how we support the global need for fresh water
    - Biodiversity
    - Working in sensitive areas
    - Fresh water

- Our products
  - BP aims to cleaner energy products including gas, renewables and hydrogen
    - The issue
    - Our approach
    - Gas
    - Renewable energy
    - Petrochemicals
    - Hydrogen
    - Cleaner fuels

- Our operations
  - Management and compliance
    - Energy efficiency
    - Air emissions
    - Discharges to water
    - Spills
    - Waste
    - Green office
    - Land restoration
    - Decommissioning

- More...

HSE chart
- Climate change and safety
Create charts, download data

BP Mappi
- How is BP managing global issues locally
Air quality, water, biodiversity and waste

Case study
- BP and the environment
Making a difference around the world

BP links
- BP Sustainability
Available for PDF format
- BP’s HSE
- BP’s Verifi
- BP and me
- BP and performance
- Feedback
Provide feedback on our website
BP sustainable report 2003

More...
FIGURE 2: BP “Environment and society” Webpage, October 2009
Notes


3 http://www.shipwrecklog.com/log/history/amoco-cadiz/. Another interesting side note: the tanker was owned by Amoco Corporation, which merged with British Petroleum (later BP) in December 1998.

4 http://www.evostc.state.ak.us/%3FFA=facts/QA


7 In all of these charts (greenhouse gas, health and safety, numbers of spills) there is a carefully depicted downward trend. While it is beyond the scope of the paper to analyze these in detail, the triptych analysis indicates that this information is placed in this position by the company to signal both that this information is real and practical, as well as “given” (since it is found on the left). In other words, the truthfulness of all these graphs and charts should not be doubted or contested by the viewer.

8 See, for example, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/bp-deepwater-horizon-crisis-case-study-michael-mcmasters.