Web Site Design and Environmental Imagery: An Investigation using Firms in the Marcellus Shale Drilling Industry

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a critical analysis of the web sites of energy companies that are drilling in the Marcellus shale reserves of the northeastern United States. Specific attention is placed on website content about environmental issues. The purpose in taking on this critical analysis is to learn more about the relationship between companies in environmentally sensitive industries and their relevant publics (Neu et al. 1998). The results confirm that investors are the primary audience for web content and traditional economic valuation is the major theme. Concerning environmental content, the drilling companies selected for the study created elaborate images and textual metaphors to deflect attention away from the risks inherent in the sample companies’ operations. The analysis did indicate that important individual-firm differences do exist. Therefore, large-sample generalizations that are common in empirically based CSR research may be difficult to apply to specific environmental activities, such as natural gas drilling in the Marcellus shale.

Keywords

Web sites, Environmental reporting, Legitimacy theory