READING STORIES AND SIGNS ON THE INTERNET: ANALYZING CSR DISCOURSE ON THE BP WEBSITE

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1. Introduction

Our aim in this paper is to present preliminary observations from an exploratory multi-method analysis we conducted of the projection of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), through discourse presented in a multi-modal medium, the corporate website. Central to the analysis was a corpus consisting of web-based CSR reporting by the ten most important corporations, and direct global competitors, in the (petro)chemical industry. The analysis placed special emphasis on BP, the CSR forerunner in this list, which claims to have fully integrated social and environmental concerns in its business operations and its interaction with stakeholders, promoting itself in communication with external stakeholders as 'the oil company with a conscience'. Table 1 provides a list of the corporations we looked at: the first five are the largest petrochemical companies world-wide, while the last five are other relevant corporations active in the oil and/or chemicals business which are already -or are expected to become- major players in the industry in future.[1]

In our analysis we looked at CSR reporting in general, and CSR reporting on environmental policy, and the discourse surrounding sustainability, in particular. We chose CSR reporting on corporate websites as our focus for two reasons.

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[1] Senior manager Shell Netherlands, personal communication, March 2006.

First, from a research perspective, there has been a growing interest in recent years in multi-method, and particularly multi-modal, discourse analysis, which we wanted to explore in our own research agenda. The hypertext medium provides a rich environment to do so, combining text, visuals and hyperlinks, among other modalities, to create discourses. Secondly, corporate performance reporting is increasingly regulated (within Europe in particular) -as is already the case, for instance, with the financial sections of annual general reports (International Accounting Standards 2004). As Hyland (1998) has observed, this means that major corporate players will need to find new ways to differentiate themselves from their competitors within the constraints of a regulated framework.

Table 1 The ten biggest, competing (petro)chemical corporations

rank	Corporation	rank	corporation
1	**ExxonMobil - US**	6	**Agip (Eni) - Italy**
	www.exxonmobil.com		www.agip.eni.it
2	**BP**	7	**Reliance - India**
	www.bp.com		www.ril.com
3	**Chevron**	8	**Huntsman - US**
	www.chevron.com		www.huntsman.com
4	**Shell**	9	**Sasol - South Africa**
	www.shell.com		www.sasol.com
5	**Elf-Total**	10	**Q8 - Kuwait**
	www.total.com		www.q8.com

According to de Groot, Korzilius, Nickerson and Gerritsen (2006), and in relation specifically to annual general reports, this entails that "corporations will be increasingly reliant on the *non-financial* elements in their reporting" in order to set themselves apart from the competition. One of the aspects we examined as part of our analysis, therefore, was whether and how some of the major players in the (petro)chemical business achieve this in their CSR discourse. Our main objective, however, was to examine the projection of CSR from a number of perspectives using two approaches: a rhetorical analysis and a multi-modal genre analysis.

We discuss these approaches below, and present a number of observations gleaned from each as an illustration of their potential usefulness in deconstructing corporate CSR discourse presented in a multi-modal, hypertext environment.

2. Multi-method analysis: approaches and observations

2.1 Rhetorical analysis of CSR reporting

2.1.1 Approach

As a starting point for our rhetorical analysis[2], we first looked at two of the ten corporations in the corpus, ExxonMobil and BP, as these corporations' discursive agendas were clearly divergent, most obviously so in the CSR reporting that addressed environmental issues. To get an initial insight into how key texts in the relevant website sections rhetorically position the world's two largest energy companies in the global environmental debate, we used Stillar's notion of 'concept clusters' (Stillar 1998) as a basis to determine the recurring ideational concepts that were used by each corporation to construct the discourse on environmental issues. Concept clusters effectively provide an extension of the Hallidayan concept of "Ideation" (e.g. Halliday 1994), or a language's resources for creating the *content* of a discourse, involving activities of 'doing' (material processes), 'saying' (verbal processes), 'considering' (mental processes), and 'being' (relational processes).

In addition, we used the notion of "framing" (Goffman 1974: Entman 1993) to examine whether and how the corporations' discourse on environmental issues taps preexisting schemata and directs audience interpretation, and conducted a semiotics-based analysis (e.g. Barthes 1968) to analyze the relationship between symbols (words and phrases) in that discourse and an audience's conceptual knowledge, experience and background, and belief systems.

2.1.2 Observations

The primary ideational concept clusters in the discourse on the environment on the BP and ExxonMobil websites could be sub-classified under *Knowing* (what the corporations know, or acknowledge that they know), *Valuing* (what the corporations value, or want us to believe they value) and *Engaging* (what the

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[2] All our analyses were conducted in April-June 2006. The observations made in this contribution therefore relate to CSR information presented online during this period. We have noted, for example, that Agip has since adapted the design of its homepage and that ExxonMobil's Corporate Citizenship Report is available online, in hypertext format.

corporations are doing to engage with their direct environment, or how they are 'being' socially responsible). How these two giants position themselves discursively with respect to these three categories, and by extension, on the environmental issue, is reflected in Tables 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

Table 2 ExxonMobil versus BP: Knowing

ExxonMobil: "The Outlook for Energy - A view to 2030"
Frame: Text presents itself as an expert report. Conclusion -discussed at length- is that oil will still be the dominant energy source in 2030. No discussion of petroleum depletion (i.e. Hubbard's Peak).

Semiotics: References to the International Energy Agency (IEA), the US Dept. of Energy, and own engineers creates a code suggesting credible, expert discourse.
BP: "Working in partnership"
Frame: Reports of research project(s) that capture pertinent information related to reducing Greenhouse Gases. No discussion of how marginal the gains are for non-oil technologies, such as renewable energy sources.
Semiotics: Text uses words and phrases like "investigate," "find out what motivates," and "providing first-hand evidence" to suggest knowledge generation and learning.

Both websites could be seen to frame their informational content in a way that portrays both corporations as dynamic *knowledge creators*. In its verbalizations, ExxonMobil projects itself as possessing the knowledge to continue supplying traditional petroleum products to consumers for decades to come; BP, however, projects itself as an organization generating knowledge that will allow it to meet the energy needs of consumers while substantially curbing Greenhouse Gas emissions. In addition, both websites frame the activities of the two corporations in a way that positions them both as highly engaged *problem solvers*. On its website, ExxonMobil suggests that the most important energy problems are ones that can be solved by refining and improving current technology and increasing efficiency; conversely, the BP website commits the company to actively developing new, alternative technologies that will expand the energy resources available to consumers.

Table 3 ExxonMobil versus BP: Valuing

ExxonMobil: "Biodiversity Conservation: Working in Protected & Sensitive Areas"   Frame: Contract to protect earth's biodiversity. Problem framed as localized issue addressed from traditional conservationist standpoint, whether in Asia, Africa, Europe, or Americas. No mention of Global Warming threat.   Semiotics: Traditional conservationist ethic evoked by mention of groups like Wildlife Conservation International. Legalistic commitment suggested by reference to Rio Convention and regulation regimes   *BP*: "How we report"   Frame: Dialogue with stakeholders to project <u>transparency</u>. Solution presented is formal corporate process involving vice president of communication's working group and Corporate Reporting Advisory Group (CRAG).   Semiotics: Description of many "voices" that influence what and how BP reports: CSR professionals, NGOs, INGOs, SRIs, and media journalists create an impression of near total transparency.

Table 4 ExxonMobil versus BP: Engaging

ExxonMobil: "What We Are Doing: Cogeneration"   Frame: Problem of inefficiency in far-away refinery network. Company experts solve the problem neatly with cogeneration technology.   Semiotics: Image is evoked of ExxonMobil as industry leader. Terms "waste" and "efficiency" signify new direction. Discussion of pollution from company's fuel products is absent from the narrative.   *BP*: "Carbon Reduction: What BP is Doing"   Frame: Search for alternatives to carbon-based fuels that lead to Greenhouse Gases. Solution presented is variety: from hydrogen to solar power. Little discussion of the relative contribution of alternatives versus oil products to world energy needs.   Semiotics: Text associates BP with dynamic leadership and action, using words and phrases like: "biggest investor in lower carbon fuels," "exploring," "developing," and "world's first."

Finally, both websites frame their informational content in ways that indicate the axiological center of gravity for these two massive organizations. ExxonMobil communicates the value it places on biodiversity but limits its concerns to the specific locales in which it operates -not the larger ecosphere into which its

petroleum products are released. BP informs the audience of the value it places on transparency, and it does so by detailing the company's ongoing dialogue with an array of stakeholder groups, including experts, activists, and journalists.

In sum, the ExxonMobil website projects the image of a company wedded to a very traditional conservationist ethic supporting a very limited environmental agenda, while the BP website conveys the image of an organization committed to new sustainable business practices aimed at meeting the global energy challenges of a new century.

2.2 CSR reporting: multi-modal genre analysis

2.2.1 Approach

For the second part of our analysis we were specifically interested in two aspects: 1) how BP projects its corporate policy on the environment, specifically related to sustainability, and how this compared to CSR discourse on this topic created by its main competitors (see Table 1), and 2) how the hypertext medium, and the hyperlink in particular, is exploited to do so. Our approach was informed by previous "macro" works on multimodality by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) and Lemke (2002), and by the application of such theories by Bargiela-Chiappini (2005) and Garzone (2002: 2004: 2005) in analyses of corporate website discourse. More specifically, we were inspired by De Groot et al (2006), who investigated the interaction between text and visuals in the managerial forewords of annual general reports. In their study, De Groot et al. provide an approach to analyzing "genre substance", or the "typified content" of a text, as manifested in verbalizations and visuals, in terms of "recurrent themes". The researchers regard genre substance as crucial in giving meaning to a particular genre, and as such, as "crucial to the realization and interpretation of that genre". Following earlier conceptualizations, they define "themes" as "being made up of clusters of words that may have incoherent meanings or connotations outside the scope of a particular text, but that are conceptually related within the boundaries of that text. As such, they can be viewed as keywords that constitute a thematic unit through which the direct and indirect message conveyed in the text is revealed" (De Groot *et al*. 2006). They contend that this approach to the "(cognitive) mapping of themes" in text can also be applied to an analysis of the relationship between visual expressions, and of the combined meaning of verbalizations and visuals "within the social context in which a text occurs" (De Groot et al. 2006).

A second source that directly informed our approach was Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen's recent proposal (2005) to extend genre theory to accommodate web-mediated documents, and to account for the fact that a web user effectively engages in two modes when processing information from a website, "the reading mode" and "the navigating (or linking) mode" (2005: 127). According to Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen the user continually shifts between these two modes, reading the information as he or she would a traditional paper-based text, but then also navigating that information and exploiting the characteristics of the hypertext medium to do so, such that "the communicative purpose is realized by hyperlinks which tie together the text chunks into a web structure" (2005: 132). To characterize the generic properties of *web-mediated* documents or "genres on the web", they suggest that genre analysis should ideally involve analysis in both modes, where, in the reading mode, the *text* "must be characterized in terms of its communicative purpose, moves, and rhetorical strategies", while in the navigating mode, the *medium* "must be characterized in terms of its communicative purpose, links, and rhetorical strategies" (Askehave - Ellerup Nielsen 2005: 128). As a number of scholars have noted, the hyperlink can be regarded as a separate resource or modality, next to verbalizations, visuals, etc., that contributes to the construction of hypertextual discourse. It is more than a connector that provides a pathway through the information structure (e.g. Fortin 2002: Burbules 2002: Carter 2003); it can also have a semantic function, suggesting, invoking and potentially forcing associations between webpages, webpage elements or other modalities that make up the information structure.

For our analysis, we looked at the hyperlinks that led to CSR-relevant nodes (or website sections) in terms of their *position* in the overall hypertext (i.e the website), relative to nodes with other types of (corporate) information. In this way, our overall multi-modal analysis (verbalizations, visuals and hyperlinks) followed Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen's suggestion to involve both web user modes in genre analysis: the analysis of the projection of CSR policy through verbal and visual *themes* represented the *reading mode* perspective, while the analysis of where CSR reporting was presented in the overall hypertext structure, relative to other (corporate) information, took into account the *navigating mode*.

2.2.2 Observations on text and visual themes

Overall, we noted that the websites' CSR reporting on environmental issues varied across the ten corporations we looked at. It ranged from minimalist one-liners from Q8 (there is no evidence of reporting on any CSR domain anywhere else on the website) and Huntsman (whose CSR policy -and reporting- relates almost exclusively to improving community health and well-being), in both cases as part of their mission statement, to the multi-layered sophistication of 'the Big Five': ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell, Elf-Total, and of course, BP (see Table 1). Between these extremes, we noted the academic, comparatively longwinded approach favoured by the Agip corporation in Italy, where the need for *knowledge* is stressed and provided in relatively long texts that seem to have been taken from paper-based reports without adaptation to the hypertext medium. Finally, we observed the frequent use of pdf documentation -containing surprisingly scant information- within the circularly hyperlinked information structures favoured by Reliance (India) and Sasol (South Africa).

For our analysis of "text themes" (De Groot et al. 2006), we looked at the websites of the ten corporations and noted the recurrent *key words* and *phrases* that were used in the corporations' reporting on environmental policy. [3] This analysis revealed three main clusters or themes: a *sustainability* cluster, most notable on the BP and Shell websites (but also partly evident, although to a much lesser extent, in Agip's reporting), an *environmental* cluster, evident on the Elf-Total website in particular (and to a lesser extent on the websites of BP, Chevron and Shell), and an *efficiency* cluster, heavily featured on ExxonMobil's site (and partly evident, but to a lesser extent, in CSR reporting by BP, Chevron and Elf-Total, although not necessarily in the website sections on "Environment"). In comparison, CSR reporting on environmental policy was minimal on the corporate websites of Sasol and Reliance (general statements; no specifics) and as already mentioned above, on the websites of Q8 and Huntsman. It should be noted, however, that Huntsman is involved in a substantial number of initiatives in other CSR domains than the environment, aimed at e.g. improving cancer

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[3] Two of our team conducted this analysis independently, and subsequently compared notes. There was a high degree of agreement with regard to the key words and phrases identified by both (concurrence in more than 90% of cases) which suggests that the analysis was sufficiently reliable.

healthcare and education. Table 5 provides an overview of the clusters of key words and phrases that suggest the three text themes.

Table 5 Text themes: keywords and phrases

The main clusters
Sustainability theme
- Sustainability
- Alternative energy
- Energy conservation
- Renewables
- Sustainable energy
- Holistic approach (economic, environmental, social sustainability)
- Stewardship
Environmental theme
- Clean energy/ environment
- Carbon reduction
- Reducing emissions
- Environmental protection
- Environmental stewardship
- Bio-diversity
Efficiency theme
- Efficient use of energy
- Saving energy
- Co-generation
- Improving performance
- Non-renewables

The text themes were also reflected in recurring verbalizations used as slogans, hyperlink labels or (sub)headings embedded within the corporate environmental discourse, and within the discourse of the Big Five in particular (see Table 1): BP's "live without oil" and "beyond petroleum" suggested sustainability (i.e. renewable, alternative, cleaner energy, etc.), as did Shell's mantra "Sustainable development and business strategy". The Environmental theme was reflected in Elf-Total's references to "Environmental stewardship" and Chevron's references to "The Chevron way", a people-oriented corporate code of conduct outlining its commitment to CSR and to addressing environmental concerns. Exxon-Mobil's emphasis on the importance of energy efficiency rather than alternative energy in

meeting global energy needs in the future was embodied in "Taking on the world's toughest energy challenges" and "Efficient Energy", both of which were repeated in the website's nodes on "Corporate Citizenship".

With respect to the visuals presented in the nodes on environmental policy, these could generally be seen to be related, that is, relevant, to the three text themes. The sustainability theme clearly resonated in visuals on the BP website, for instance (for examples, see Table 6), while the environmental theme was reflected in, for example, Chevron's and Elf-Total's visuals (for examples, see Table 7).

Table 6 Visuals contributing to the sustainability theme (BP)

Source: BP.com ("Facing the Issues")

Windmills evoke connotations with sustainable, alternative (wind) energy

Source: BP.com ("BP and Development")

Local community members (Algeria) interacting with a sustainable, alternative energy producer: sun panels

Source: BP.com ("Facing the Issues")

BP scientists at work: pioneering sustainable transport.

Table 7 Visuals contributing to the environmental theme (Chevron and Elf-Total)

Source: Chevron.com
("Environment")

Preserving bio-diversity: examples of (local) wildlife

Source: Total.com
("Environment")

Preserving the environment by promoting biodiversity and managing rivers and oceans

Interestingly, ExxonMobil's site featured a multi-modal visual incorporating visual and textual information that reflected the corporation's drive for efficient energy, not by 'showing' or evoking efficiency, but by reflecting the corporation's anti-renewable stance, a viewpoint which contrasts with -and implicitly voices criticism of- the perspective of corporations investing in cleaner, but relatively inefficient, renewable energy sources, including Chevron, Shell, and most obviously BP (see Figure 1). The message in this visual supports and reinforces ExxonMobil's overall rhetorical stance, as expressed in verbalizations on the ExxonMobil site, as well as in pdf-based information accessible from the site, for example:

"Wind and solar are growing at phenomenal rates, but EIA agrees that these sources will only meet about 1% of energy needs by 2030. Ethanol and other biofuels will continue to contribute to growing transportation fuel needs. These alternatives will not eliminate our dependence on global markets. Technology, cost and scale disadvantages remain a challenge to expanding use." ("Renewable Energy": paragraph 1)

and:

"all types of energy will be important, but most experts agree that -mainly due to performance, convenience and cost - oil, gas and coal will remain the world's dominant energy sources for some decades to come. Alternatives like hydro, nuclear and biomass face growth constraints such as land and site availability. Wind and solar will grow rapidly, but even with doubledigit growth rates their

low starting base is unlikely to result in more than a one percent share of global energy supply by 2020." (Energy's Growing Challenges: 1).
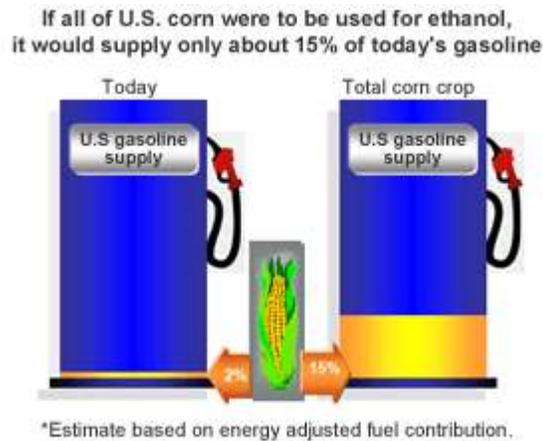

Figure 1. Visual on ExxonMobil's site ("Responding to world energy needs": paragraph 3)

In contrast, the BP website profiled the corporation as a proponent of alternative, cleaner energy sources; this stance was achieved rhetorically by emphasizing that alternative energy can make substantial contributions to reducing carbon emissions in the future on the one hand, while providing a promising source of new business -and thus income- for BP on the other. This is reflected, for example, in the following text from the BP site:

"We foresee a huge market for cleaner power in the future. About 40% of the world's CO_2 emissions from fossil fuels come from power generation, yet up to 40% of the power plants that the world is expected to need by 2020 have not yet been built. As pressure mounts for action on climate change, we believe national and regional governments and local utility companies will increasingly look to build plants that use alternative, low-carbon, technologies. By 2020 we estimate that the power sector will be nearly a $2 trillion business. Basing even a small part of this to alternative energy technologies would create a substantial global market opportunity." ("Alternative Energy": paragraph 5).

Again, as was observed in 2.1.2., the CRS discourse on environmental policy on the BP and ExxonMobil websites, in both its verbal and visual expressions -and in the combination of the two- can be seen to position the two corporations in clearly different camps. They differ with respect to the positions they take up on the issue of producing efficient energy, and with regard to the perspectives they hold on the relative contribution alternative energy can make to fulfilling global energy needs in the future.

2.2.3 Observations on hyperlinks

For our analysis of how the website medium, and specifically the hyperlink modality, is exploited to make CSR reporting accessible to stakeholder groups, we looked at the *position* of this type of information within the overall hypertext structure of each of the corporate websites. First, we determined at which level of the hypertext hierarchy nodes with CSR information were presented, relative to the top navigational page or homepage, and second, we counted how many 'clicks' it took from the homepage to get to nodes with CSR information on environmental policy in particular. At the corporate end, this gave us an indication of the comparative *degree of prominence* the ten corporations assign CSR information, relative to other (corporate) information. At the user end, it provided an indication of the *relative accessibility* to the website user of information on environmental policy -regarded as a CSR issue which can play a crucial role in (re)shaping stakeholders' opinions of the degree to which (petro)chemical corporations, readily perceived as environmental offenders, can be seen to be developing a corporate conscience that reflects concern for the way their activities impact on the environment.

The three corporate websites that gave the highest relative prominence to CSR information in general were the BP, Chevron and Elf-Total sites (see Table 8). All three provided a generic link to CSR reporting on the homepage, either in the main menu at the top of the page or in the main menu in the left-most column of the page. In addition, the websites fore-grounded specific CSR topics on the homepage by providing (single-click) short-cuts to lower-level nodes in the hierarchy; these short-cuts were presented in the form of clickable, banner-like boxes, often combining visual and verbal information. Examples included the Chevron website's invitation at the top of its homepage to click and read about Chevron's new technologies: "Next. Chevron Technology: read our new

magazine", or the BP website's invitation at the top of its homepage to click to information on how to "become a CO2 neutral driver".

Corporate websites that assigned relatively less, that is, 'medium' prominence to CSR were the Agip and Huntsman sites (see Table 8). Although these websites did provide a generic link to CSR information in the main menu on the homepage, their homepages did not include the type of 'teasers' or short-cuts to CSR information that the homepages of BP, Chevron and Elf-Total did. Finally, the Reliance and Sasol sites seemed to assign relatively low prominence to CSR reporting; there was no hyperlink to CSR information on the homepage and links to CSR nodes only became available in the second or third layer of the hypertext hierarchy (see Table 8).

Table 8 Hyperlinks: prominence and accessibility of CSR information

Focus	Corporations (number of clicks)
CSR prominence in hypertext	
-High	BP, Chevron, ElfTotal
-Medium	Agip, Huntsman
-Low	Reliance, Sasol
(back-grounded link to CSR)	Shell
(CSR link led off-site)	ExxonMobil
(no CSR information)	Q8
Accessibility of environment info	
-Short path (1-2 clicks)	BP(1), Chevron (1), ElfTotal (2), Agip(2)
-Long path (3-5 clicks)	Shell (3), Reliance (4), Sasol (5), ExxonMobil (5: node on another site)

For different reasons, Shell, ExxonMobil and Q8 formed somewhat exceptional cases. Although Shell did include a link to CSR information on its homepage, the link was visually back-grounded: it was presented as only one link among many. The Shell homepage did not offer a main menu of links at the top of the page or in the left-hand column as the other nine websites did; instead, short introductory texts and hyperlink menus were presented in four themed columns in the main body of the page (i.e. "Shell for motorists", "Shell for businesses", "News and features", and "The Shell Group"). The generic hyperlink to CSR information was presented in the right-most column of the four (Under 'The Shell

Group'), and was fourth in a menu of five links. As a result, it was relatively hard to spot at first glance. However, it should be noted that the link led to a stand-alone website with extensive information, dedicated entirely to Shell's CSR activities.

Although ExxonMobil's website offered a generic link to "Corporate Citizenship" in the main menu at the top of its homepage, the link led to an off-site navigational webpage (rather than a subsection of the current website), which only offered links to four other, country-specific, ExxonMobil websites, and no other content. Unfortunately, it was not made clear to the user which of these four sites offered the CSR information referred to in the hyperlink label on the homepage of ExxonMobil.com. Finally, Q8's website offered no CSR information at all.

The number of clicks needed to access a node with environmental policy information, starting from the homepage, was regarded as an indication of the relative ease of access for web users, that is, potentially interested stakeholders. Within the group of seven websites that included environment-related CSR information, we could broadly distinguish two categories of websites, on which accessibility to environment-related information was either high or relatively low. The first category was formed by the BP, Chevron, ElfTotal and Agip websites which provided a short navigational path of one to two clicks (high accessibility), while the second category was formed by the Shell, Exxon-Mobil, Reliance and Sasol websites which provided a relatively long navigational path of three to five clicks (low accessibility: see Table 8). We further noted that whereas the websites in the latter category mostly provided the required information in pdf files, some of which took a long time to download, and in the case of Reliance, contained only brief statements with little specific information, the first category of sites provided relatively detailed environmental policy information on site, in a comparatively user-friendly web page format.

3. Discussion

Although the corporations we looked at operate in the same industry and produce similar products, the CSR information they present on their websites shows that they are also distinct from one another, for instance, with respect to the extent to which they have integrated CSR in their business operations, and with regard to the CSR domains, and the initiatives within those domains, they have

chosen to commit to. The corporations can also be seen to distinguish themselves from one another -some more so than others- in the positions they take up on central issues relevant to the CSR domains they have in common, such as the global concern for minimizing the impact their industry has on the environment. Overall, the corporate websites we examined, with the exception of Q8, could be seen to create rich CSR reporting that does more than convey facts and statistics about environmental, diversity and community initiatives. The corporate rhetoric on CSR was constructed using multiple modalities; visual images could be seen to reinforce semiotic codes, symbols and myths created by verbalizations, and vice versa, and the affordances of hypertext allowed for the foregrounding or backgrounding of information about aspects of CSR policy and initiatives, within the overall information structure. On these points, the websites could be seen to differ, in assigning greater or lesser prominence to CSR content, and in rhetorically positioning the corporations in differing camps -some more clearly so than others- in the global environmental debate. This was the case, for example, for ExxonMobil which promoted itself as a champion of more efficient energy, versus the proponents of alternative -but less efficient- energy, such as Chevron, Shell, and particularly BP.

Of the group of corporations whose CSR discourse we examined, BP stands out as having most publicly committed itself to becoming a socially responsible business in everything it undertakes, and as a corporation that explicitly profiles itself as such in its communications with stakeholder groups. BP's corporate mission is reinforced throughout the discourse on its website, not just in nodes relating to CSR, and is mapped out rhetorically in verbalizations, visuals and the relatively high prominence assigned to CSR information in the hypertext structure. Furthermore, of all the petro-chemical corporations whose sites we looked at, and among the Big Five in particular, BP most obviously promotes itself as responsible where environmental issues are concerned, and as fully committed to the search for cleaner, alternative energy (to oil) and to dramatically minimizing the impact its operations have on the natural environment and public health. As such, it takes up a forthright, and comparatively unique, position in an industry where companies are constantly balancing the pressures of having to make CSR noises to appease stakeholders on the one hand, without going so far as to compromise their bottom line on the other. BP stands out from the competition, in word at least, if not entirely in deed, having gone so far as to re-brand and rename itself "Beyond Petroleum" in 2000, and because it has since sidelined -rhetorically at least- its most important and profitable product oil, while

promoting its greener and cleaner energy initiatives instead. The corporation's change of course was clearly reflected in a 2001 BP advertising campaign, for example, with the tagline: "Solar, natural gas, hydrogen, wind. And oh yes, oil. It's a start" (Driessen 2003). The CSR rhetoric on BP's website is thus consistent with BP's overall corporate communication policy, clearly echoing and reinforcing BP's considerable efforts in recent years to reinvent itself in order to gain favour with its stakeholder groups.

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