FROM COMPLIANCE TO ENGAGEMENT: RETHINKING SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

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ABSTRACT

Advances in information and communication technologies are driving digitalization worldwide and expanding the understanding of globalization. In this context, European countries have launched the Digital Decade initiative to ensure that all aspects of technology and innovation benefit people by 2030. Meanwhile, growing environmental challenges and increasing regulatory obligations, such as sustainability reporting, are reshaping business practices. As a result, sustainability communication is emerging as a tool for entrepreneurial positioning and wider societal engagement. This study investigates how small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Latvia employ sustainability communication. It examines the extent to which such communication contributes to community-based approaches to environmental protection.

The research identifies a significant gap between sustainability communication as a compliance-driven reporting practice and its potential to catalyze community involvement. It highlights a limited understanding among SMEs of how communication can serve as a mechanism for promoting community engagement in environmental initiatives. To bridge this, disconnect, the study examines pathways for SMEs to enhance local ecological engagement.

Employing a mixed-methods design, the research is based on a survey of 200 SMEs in Latvia and four semi-structured interviews with SMEs representatives. The findings enrich the broader sustainability discourse by identifying challenges and opportunities for more inclusive communication practices and offer practical insights into aligning corporate sustainability communication with community engagement at the local level.

Keywords: sustainability communication, community engagement, small and medium-sized enterprises, community communication, stakeholder governance

INTRODUCTION

The digital environment continues to evolve, and today it no longer belongs solely to the field of information and communication technologies but influences every sphere of life. As a horizontal discipline, it enables globalization and deepens the understanding of this concept. The unrestricted flow of information carriers intensifies the implementation of globalization processes across all sectors. However, digitalization also represents a continuous process of improvement, in which constant efforts are made to optimize operations and reduce the ecological footprint. Over the past two decades, this aspect has gained central importance in connection with the rapidly growing international significance of the concept of "sustainability", fostering collective initiatives to review existing systems of existence and to develop new operational