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STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING

ABSTRACT

Sustainability reporting has emerged as an essential tool for enhancing organizational transparency and accountability, responding to stakeholders' growing demand for Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) information. However, the usefulness and credibility of such reporting are perceived differently by distinct stakeholder groups, reflecting various interests, experiences, and expectations.

This study aims to explore stakeholders' perceptions of sustainability reporting, examining its relevance, impact, and challenges through the theoretical lenses of Legitimacy Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Institutional Theory and Social Identity Theory. To this end, a qualitative approach will be adopted within an interpretive paradigm, focusing on the subjective meanings individuals assign to their experiences. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with stakeholders who are directly involved in sustainability reporting, selected via convenience and judgment sampling to ensure a diversity of perspectives.

The data analysis will employ thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of patterns and emerging categories regarding how stakeholders interpret sustainability reporting. In addition, the study will investigate how the subjectivity of these perceptions may be influenced by stakeholders' engagement with disclosed information and the mechanisms used to legitimize corporate practices. Challenges such as transparency, credibility, materiality, and the impact of greenwashing on stakeholder trust will also be addressed.

This research will contribute to the literature by offering a deeper understanding of how different stakeholders interpret sustainability reporting. Moreover, it will provide valuable insights for companies and regulators on how to enhance reporting practices, promoting more coherent communication that aligns more closely with market expectations.

Keywords: Accounting, Sustainability reporting, stakeholders' perceptions, transparency, credibility, accountability, ESG reporting, legitimacy, corporate reporting