

Greenpeace memes for communicating climate change

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Based on a mixed-method research design, this paper offers insights into visual communication strategies developed by Greenpeace in France, Belgium, and Canada. The aim is to understand the role of memes for providing environmental information to French speaking publics on Instagram.

Numerous studies have examined the role of new media in creating and disseminating messages about the environment and climate change (Anderson, 2015; Fløttum, 2010; Holmes & Richardson, 2020; Wamsler et al., 2020). Some investigations address Greenpeace communication practices (Catellani, 2018; Davis et al., 2016; Doyle, 2007). Nevertheless, more research is needed for understanding the NGOs' communication about climate change via more recent multimodal platforms, for instance Instagram, YouTube, TikTok. This paper extends previous research by focusing specifically on Greenpeace's memes spread on Instagram in French-speaking countries.

With the invention and the continuous updating of Instagram, visual modes of media content have become more and more popular. Since visual messages are often clear without any explanation, Instagram has become the means for sharing and creating entertaining content, for example memes. Memes can be defined as the propagation of content such as *jokes*, rumors, videos, or websites from one person to others via the Internet (Shifman, 2013). A common attribute of memes is their tendency to «mock and deride, often through the utilization of *humor*» (Ross & Rivers, 2019). According to the principle of variability, each meme should give birth to a number of different versions (Bertin & Granier, 2020). This process defines the circulation of the meme.

Representing multimodal user-generated content (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), memes are interconnected with previous texts and graphic features involved in the meme. This allows the meme to be recontextualized into a new discursive context. Moreover, memes can be used as a form of protest or activism, as demonstrated by Davis, Glantz, and Novak (2016). Their research was focused on a series of memes by Greenpeace produced to parody the campaign of Shell Oil. Nevertheless, the memes for the analysis were mostly spread on the Arctic Ready website, which does not fully represent memes' characteristics of circulation. After considering some work that has been done in the area, analyzing memes recently published and spread by Greenpeace in French-speaking communities remains relevant. In this context, our questions are the following: what is the role of Greenpeace's memes for communicating climate change on Instagram? More precisely, do memes inform citizens about climate change, its causes, impacts, and possible solutions or do they achieve a *ludic function* and thus participate unconsciously to dedramatization and banalization?

We investigate memes as a part of communication strategy employed by Greenpeace in French-speaking countries. In order to answer the research question, we examined 2862 publications

of Greenpeace France, Greenpeace Belgium, Greenpeace Quebec. In total, 67 memes construct the main corpus of this research. Firstly, we implemented quantitative methods on posts' metadata to identify trending memes and their place in Greenpeace communication campaigns. Secondly, qualitative methods are applied for multimodal analysis (Floch, 2010) of visual and textual components of the memes. This can help us in distinguishing potential meanings of the memes and their role in Greenpeace's communication campaigns.

First results show that climate change memes are circulating actively between three countries. They do not only repost successful publications, but also adapt the forms of the memes according to particular contexts, for example the meme «This is fine». See Figure 1, Figure 2.



Figure 1 This is fine, Greenpeace France's meme



Figure 2 This is fine, Greenpeace Quebec's meme

The other most common and most popular memes are Drake Hotline and Nobody-Me. In France, the meme Drake Hotline got over 15000 likes and 326 comments. This meme is often associated with bad tastes, or bad choices, or even deprecating tendencies on the part of the user. Nobody-Me meme was reproduced 4 times. It is mostly used to mock corporations which do not follow sustainable strategies.

The memes presented in the corpus can be interpreted as part of an informative strategy. They remind the audience about eco-friendly lifestyle and provide some general information about climate change. Finally, memes use *irony* and *humor* in their visual and verbal modes to criticize corporations for greenwashing and politicians for contributing to climate change aggravation.

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