

“Our Transformation: Delivering a Smoke-Free Future”. Corporate Responsibility Narrative in Philip Morris International’s Website

DOI: 10.26379/IL2021001_005

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Abstract

In the last few years, Philip Morris International (PMI), the largest tobacco company in the world, has been threatened by smoking becoming less socially acceptable and the growth of the e-cigarette market due to the fact that people are more aware of the dangerous effects of nicotine on their health. In order to (re)position its brand and prevent reductions in sales, PMI has started to launch alternatives to traditional combustible cigarettes, such as heated tobacco products (HTPs), accompanied by promotional campaigns emphasising the harm reduction potential of its new products. Particularly, the company has developed diversified online communicative strategies to promote a new vision for a smoke-free future by providing less harmful alternatives to those people who are not able to quit smoking. Employing the theoretical framework of multimodal critical discourse analysis, this study aims to detect the most recurrent storytelling strategies present on PMI’s website, focusing on how different modes interrelate to create a persuasive message and convey a new image of corporate identity based on social responsibility. The analysis reveals that PMI strategically employs multimodal corporate storytelling by developing the concept of “consumer well-being first” in order to rehabilitate its tarnished image and boost sales potential.