

The Semantic Construction of Sustainability in English-Language Online News: A Cross-National Perspective

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Abstract

Sustainability as a concept has received substantial academic and professional attention over the past years. By adopting a corpus linguistics approach, this contribution adds to this existing body of research as it examines how sustainability is discursively represented in English-language online news worldwide with implications for sustainable governance and management. Drawing on the News on the Web (NOW) corpus, we conducted a corpus-driven analysis of 'sustainability + noun' collocations to identify various patterns in which sustainability is framed across functional domains. For this research, we focused specifically on semantic groups which reflect business strategy, action, frameworks, and commitment in order to highlight the media coverage of sustainability in organisational and societal contexts. We performed frequency analysis and collocational patterns analysis of the most common 'sustainability + noun' collocations (e.g. sustainability goals, sustainability initiatives, sustainability rules), which we also examined in terms of their distribution across 20 national contexts represented in the corpus. Our cross-national comparison (i.e. online news from Europe, North America, Asia, and Africa) indicates some regional variation in the frequency of collocational patterns, which points to the differences in media focus on sustainability and potentially organisational priorities regarding sustainability and sustainable practices. The findings demonstrate how corpus-driven analysis of online media discourse can deepen the understanding of sustainability as a socially and organisationally constructed concept, with implications for governance and management.

Keywords: sustainability discourse, corpus linguistics, collocational analysis, English language, online news, cross-national comparison