

Ego-depletion is in the way: the challenges of controlled communication and the role of the regulatory focus theory in sustainable goals pursuit

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Abstract

Purpose – Via the lens of the ego-depletion phenomenon (Baumeister *et al.*, 1998) and Higgins' (1998) regulatory focus theory, this paper seeks to explain why current controlled communications are failing to achieve coherence between people's free will and their actions pursuing sustainable goals in a society. This paper explains how ego-depletion triggered by controlled communications can lead to confusion and decision fatigue in a society, thus potentially sabotaging people's participation in sustainable behaviour.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors applied Jaakkola's (2020) theory synthesis approach to integrate concepts from previously unconnected disciplines in order to generate novel insights in the area of controlled communication management.

Findings – The authors develop a theoretical framework and present research propositions that can help advance research and the discourse at the intersection of controlled communication and self-regulation theories.

Research limitations/implications – This paper possesses the limitations associated with conceptual papers, e.g. the lack of empirical support of the study's conceptual arguments.

Practical implications – This paper generates novel insights to assist communication practitioners and policymakers to improve vehicles and mechanisms of controlled communication with the public regarding sustainable goals pursuit.

Originality/value – To the best of authors' knowledge, this is one of the first papers that has merged the domains of self-regulation, ego-depletion, and controlled communication in an integrative framework in order to explain the mechanisms of how to enhance the effectiveness of controlled communication associated with sustainable goals pursuit.

Keywords Controlled communication, Communication confusion, Ego-depletion, Regulatory fit, Regulatory focus, Sustainable goals pursuit

Paper type Conceptual paper



Introduction

Recent examples of mixed communications related to important societal occurrences including the **COVID-19** vaccination rollout and communicating Sustainable Development Goals have created a sense of confusion and hesitancy among the public regarding their health and well-being (Kitchen *et al.*, 2021). We argue that several reasons can be proffered to explain communication confusion in the public: (1) information and communication are both heavily politicised; (2) sensationalism dominates contemporary media; (3) information and real communication are often delayed; and (4) there is a lack of clear direction leading to ambivalence and confusion in the broader public.

Media sensationalism is often seen during disastrous environmental episodes as the most common type of editorial material in mass media in which such events are hyped to increase readership and viewership (Walters *et al.*, 2016). Paracha *et al.* (2013) argue that sensationalism brings panic in communities by using sensationalist language such as metaphors, hyperbole, and emotionally charged expressions to attract reader attention (Davis and McLeod, 2003; Tierney *et al.*, 2006). Arguably, this often leads to either an opposite effect or no effect on public behaviour. An onslaught of such public directed information from different sources leaves people feeling vulnerable and insecure about what or whom to trust. This paper focuses on official sources of information, also known as controlled communication and the efforts towards communicating sustainable goals. The sources of controlled communication include governmental institutions and agencies, ministries, non-profit agencies, the public sector, and research organisations (Pasquier, 2012). In the context of unpredictable situations such as the **COVID-19 pandemic**, controlled communications were broadened to include many more representatives of official institutions/authorities from various parts of the world. Naturally, the national and global public tend to compare and contrast controlled communication from multiple sources such as information on policies, decisions, actions and outcomes. This is in contrast with the notion of Kitchen and Schultz (2009) that in the 21st century, most public and private enterprises have a unified and strongly integrated communications across “various promotional venues and delivery systems” (Kitchen and Shultz, 2009, p. 202). However, the frequency of officially produced informational content has increased exponentially since March 2020 due to the pandemic. Accordingly, public and controlled communication authorities are now facing two major challenges 1) to ensure communication consistency across a plethora of communication channels; 2) design effective communications that truly motivate the public in their sustainable goals pursuits.

Amid a scenario of excessive information, ambivalence and imminent confusion, the general public is becoming increasingly desensitised to the potential seriousness underlying such official communications, regardless of its content. This is due to high levels of fatigue experienced by the public, causing a state of what is termed in social psychology as the state of ego depletion (Baumeister *et al.*, 1998). The term “ego depletion” describes the condition when the self’s resources have been used up and is temporarily operating at a reduced power (Baumeister and Vohs, 2007; Vohs *et al.*, 2012). The mechanism that lies beneath ego-depletion is when people exercise self-control for a considerable time and on various fronts, their ability to exhibit self-control on related or unrelated activities and the associated decision-making in connection to such activities becomes impaired (Baumeister *et al.*, 1998; Baumeister and Vohs, 2007). This condition of ego depletion is different from physical fatigue in that people may not be consciously aware that they are low on mental energy and may act impulsively instead of thinking logically about consequences of their decisions (Tierney, 2011), eventually compromising self-regulation or self-control.

The process of self-regulation bears a similarity with the body’s muscles and a steady practice of self-regulation helps people gradually improve their ability to resist the debilitating effect of resource depletion (Baumeister *et al.*, 1998; Baumeister and Vohs, 2007).

However, regardless of how rational or irrational a person is, continuous ego-depletion may lead to decision fatigue, subsequently leading to poor decision-making in the long run (Tierney, 2011). Specifically, the phenomenon of decision fatigue sheds light on why people exhibit self-destructive behaviours such as lashing out at work colleagues or family, spending on expensive apparel or buying unhealthy food in excess (Tierney, 2011). In the context of sought environmentally positive change in society, such decision fatigue can result in people not taking required steps or even being fully conscious regarding their actions, e.g. not giving consideration to environmental and climate change, purchasing extravagantly, and/or withdrawing from participation in the democratic process. In this vein, Baumeister *et al.* (2007) emphasise the strength model of self-regulation on personality and its long-term impact to encourage decision-making towards desired positive outcomes by arguing that increased self-regulatory strength can reduce human vulnerability to ego depletion.

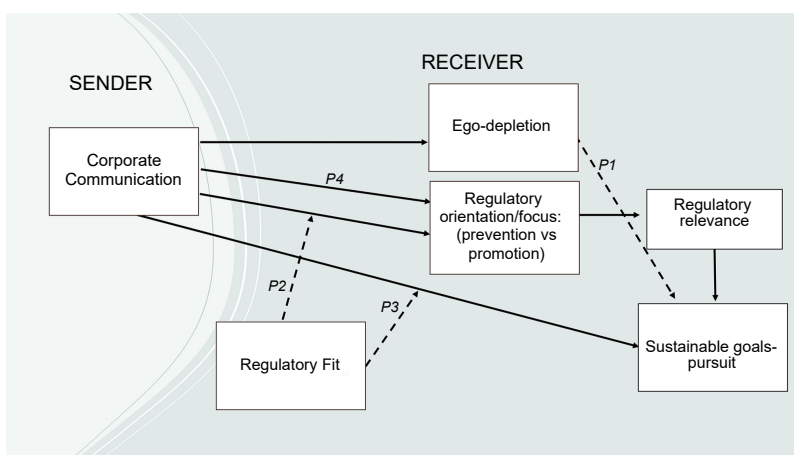
In a seminal paper “Beyond pleasure and pain,” Higgins (1998) postulated that researchers and practitioners need to move away from the notion that people usually tend to approach pleasure and avoid pain. He proposes that a deeper understanding of the true nature of one’s approach-avoidance motivation and regulatory focus must be better understood to be able to distinguish between self-regulation with a promotion focus (accomplishments and aspirations) from self-regulation with a prevention focus (safety and responsibilities). According to regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1987, 1997, 1998; Higgins *et al.*, 1985), an individual’s self-regulation varies in relation to personal gains and aspirations. These mechanisms are referred to as promotion and prevention focus (Higgins, 1987, 1997, 1998). Prevention focus is associated with thoughts and needs that orient an individual to emphasise the prevention of risks and faults mainly due to one’s reservations related to their perceived inability to perform certain duties and responsibilities. Promotion focus takes the opposite direction and is associated with the human orientation toward achieving gains, both individual and societal. Previous research shows that the distinctive features of these different regulatory orientations (approach and avoidance, prevention and promotion) exert differential effects on individual’s affective, cognitive, and motivational processes (Crowe and Higgins, 1997; Higgins *et al.*, 1985). By combining the above communications and self-regulation concepts, our resultant research framework (see Figure 1: Research framework and the study propositions) is akin to Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory paradigm, where attention is drawn to the important interactions and reciprocal influences between personal, behavioural and environmental factors in the process of self-regulation behaviour.

Our paper is structured as follows – we first outline the methodology employed to derive the theory synthesis that is a foundation for the conceptual framework and research propositions. We then provide implications for communication and self-regulation theories as well as offers mechanisms for policymaker to monitor the negative impacts of ego-depletion in a society. The paper concludes suggestions for future research.

Research purpose and methodology

Research purpose

In this study, conceptualisations of regulatory orientations are linked to controlled communication, which can also be developed and implemented via an early stage integrated modality (Kitchen and Tourky, 2022; Kitchen and Schultz, 2001). In addition, self-regulation theories can explain why controlled communications may fail to motivate people to achieving apparently desirable societal outcomes, including participating in civic leadership-based activities and citizen inclusion initiatives for a sustainable future. Hence, a better understanding of ego-depletion and regulatory focus mechanisms and their connection to effective controlled communication can facilitate decision-makers in designing



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Figure 1.
Research framework
and the study
propositions

more customised communications. In line with Higgins (1998), we argue that understanding and incorporating the mechanisms of prevention and promotion in controlled communication campaigns can make an important difference in individual adoption and implementation of sustainable goals. The purpose of the study is to explain why controlled communication has not been as effective in eliciting the desired intensity of engagement and **action from people in the context of sustainable behaviour**. Through this purpose, we seek to advance the research at the intersection of controlled communication and self-regulation theories.

Method

The choice of an appropriate methodology is key when designing conceptual papers. Given that conceptual papers should be grounded in a clear and justified research design (Jaakkola, 2020), we adopt the research design of theory synthesis to structure and develop theoretical arguments in this study. Theory synthesis design has been recommended for studying more mature research areas such as self-regulation domain, which is historically rooted to the works of Freud (1923) and James (1892). According to Jaakkola (2020), theory synthesis assists in achieving “a conceptual integration across multiple theories in literature streams” (p. 21). In other words, the advantage of theory synthesis is in its ability to connect previously unconnected disciplines to generate novel insights. To achieve this, theoretical framing needs to be constructed based on the conscious choice of theories and concepts, which can be further applied to various contexts via researcher observations. Theory synthesis involves summarising of concepts and integration of the knowledge to gain a more nuanced perspective of a given phenomenon or context (MacInnis, 2011). In line with Lemon and Verhoef (2016), we present propositions based on the integration of our key theoretical concepts and offer a niche perspective in the context of sustainable behaviour. In this study we have integrated the domains of self-regulation, ego depletion and controlled communication in order to generate novel theoretical insights to the context of sustainable behaviour. By integrating the self-regulation and controlled communication theories, we seek to advance conceptual understanding of why ego depletion becomes a barrier in people’s engagement in sustainable behaviour thereby impeding sustainable development goals.

Theory synthesis and a theoretical framework of the study

Controlled communications and its development in the 21st century

Viewed as an organised process, controlled communication covers all official information, including written or oral and involving either an individual (interpersonal communication), specific group (group communication), or an undefined body of recipients (mass communication) (Pasquier, 2012). Controlled communication campaigns aimed at influencing consumers can be categorised into four types: paid (advertising), earned (WOM, social media buzz, or publicity), owned media (seller-generated content, websites, etc.) and shared/social communication (Lovett and Staelin, 2016; Macnamara *et al.*, 2016). Thus, the majority of communication activities conducted by government organisations are planned, organised and financed by these entities (Pesquera, 2012). Previous research pointed out the importance of specifically investigating controlled communication in order to improve its efficiency (see Anisimova *et al.*, 2019, for an example).

Although communication scholars have stressed the importance of targeted official communication for more effectiveness (see Kitchen and Schultz, 2009; Kitchen and Tourky, 2022), controlled/official communication continues to talk at people rather than with/to them. As Peppers and Rogers (2001) argue, the old paradigm, a system of mass production and mass communication media, is gradually being replaced by a new paradigm, an apparent one-to-one communication system. The change needs to incorporate high levels of customisation towards individual tastes in media.

The problem with controlled government communication is that it has not been effective, nor might it ever be effective in reaching audiences and achieving desired outcomes (Kitchen and Schultz, 2001). Often in democracies, such governmental communication is discounted by governmental agencies undermining their own messages by failing to address core societal issues, for example, the ongoing environmental and human created issues such as pollution, global warming, poverty, unsustainable production practices and societal inequalities. For example, previous studies suggest that resource constraints can be barriers in the process of adequately embracing sustainability practices (Nishant *et al.*, 2016). However, the limitations between big and powerful businesses, governments and politicians are often not taken to task. For example, Australian government produced communication repeatedly defended their coal mining industry, e.g. BHB, Peabody etc. In stressing that the mining sector makes a significant contribution to the Australian economy. Although coal mining remains a lucrative sector and a contributor to the Australian economy, this industry is also responsible for many negative social and environmental impacts, including air and water pollution, destruction of biodiversity, health-related issues and problems with community cohesion in mining areas (De Valck *et al.*, 2021). Conversely, it is also argued that global energy demand is likely to be met more effectively by the partially unproven process of developing cheaper renewables (Cunningham *et al.*, 2019). Another example is food-producing companies, as they create nutritionally poor products, augment environmental waste and rubbish and stimulate obesity. The resultant tensions between conflicting agendas could and does lead to increased distrust and subsequently ego depletion and disengagement in further initiatives related to a given issue, for example, energy conservation or pollution. This implies that controlled communication has been losing efficiency and effectiveness over time and as a direct consequence, the resultant erosion of consumer and voter confidence (see Kitchen and Sheth, 2016).

Globally, there are various instances of when world leaders failed to act in consonance with their governmental rhetoric and media statements. For example, in line with the urgency for containing environmental pollution, politicians and so-called world leaders continue to travel to climate change conferences and summits via a major form of pollution which adds to global warming. In the latest **COVID-19-related** context, media reported that politicians were fined for not wearing masks in breach of **COVID-19** health orders (Hunter, 2021).

This tension between the content of controlled communication and its dismissal by the very authorities producing them causes further confusion and ego depletion experienced by the public. The description of current communication landscape that is in line with our argument can be seen in [Kitchen and Sheth \(2016\)](#):

Given the accelerative trend of globalisation, instantaneous communication via the internet, and the turning of governments to market-driven policies, many consumers consider marketing and advertising (the latter is a proxy for all forms of consumer-focused communication or promotion) as being inextricably intertwined and indicates that persuasive communication has become more of an intrusive nuisance than anything else (p. 1914).

As illustrated, for consumers and the public to be able to exercise self-control and bring about desired responses in relation to achieving sustained environmental change, stimuli underlying various controlled communications and the actual communication itself must be visible, clear, consistent and in accord with something more than cheap rhetoric.

It is argued here that one way that governments, policymakers and corporations can help to motivate people more appropriately is by having a clearer understanding of people's regulatory focus orientation ([Higgins, 1998](#)). The effectiveness of controlled communication would depend on whether people exhibit strong tendencies of being in the promotion state or prevention state ([Higgins, 1999](#)). Additionally, linking ego-depletion mechanisms and communications can help design customised communications based on a regulation orientation processes of the public (prevention or promotion). The latter can assist in achieving what is referred to as a regulatory fit ([Avnet and Higgins, 2003](#); [Higgins, 2005](#)) between individual's perceptions and the desired behaviour change and ultimately perceived value from such a fit ([Higgins, 2000](#)). Based on the discussion above, the first proposition is stated as follows:

P1. Ineffective controlled communication can cause an ego-depletion effect, which in turn can hinder an individual's motivation to engage in sustainable goal pursuit in a society

The role of regulatory fit and individual regulatory focus in message processing and individual decision-making

[Higgins \(1987\)](#) suggests that people exhibit strong tendencies to pursue their goals based on an eager (promotion) strategy or a vigilant (prevention) strategy. This logic forms the basis of the regulatory focus theory (RFT) ([Higgins, 1987](#)), which is explained as one's disposition to achieve prevention or promotion goals. Promotion focused individuals seek to actively pursue goals that can bring them closer to their ideal selves and help them realise positive outcomes of their goal persuasion efforts. These individuals are more likely to be responsive to those advanced and even radical environmental innovations, implementations and changes that are strategically significant. Moreover, these individuals are also likely to challenge the status quo of existing environmental processes and activities. Alternatively, prevention focused individuals are more caution oriented and concerned with negative outcomes of their goal persuasion efforts ([Crowe and Higgins, 1997](#); [Bryant and Dunford, 2008](#)). These prevention-oriented individuals are likely to appreciate incremental improvements in relation to the environment, for example, further intensifying the performance of something that already exists ([Dias Angelo et al., 2012](#)).

While regulatory focus is seen to be intricately connected to an individual's internal stimuli, there is also evidence that it can be affected by external stimuli and cues ([Higgins, 1999](#)). These external stimuli can involve relationships and socialisation-based cues ([Tenenbaum and Campbell, 2002](#)), external communication-based cues ([Higgins, 1987](#)), and lifestyle habit cues ([Hersch, 1996](#)). The tendencies of regulatory focus, whether prevention or promotion, and individual goal pursuance find stability or balance in the mechanisms of regulatory fit.

Regarding the impacts of communication and messages on regulatory focus and regulatory fit, the current literature has displayed connections in various contexts. In a study on health-related messages and their impact on well-being related physical activities, McKay-Nesbitt *et al.*, 2013 showed that health-related messages were instrumental in triggering positive and negative feelings. When individuals experienced positive feelings from positive communication, they expressed an eager and positive disposition towards physical activities. Alternatively, fear and anxiety inducing messages triggered negative emotions and impeded eagerness for physical activities. Furthermore, the actions were more congruent with goal pursuit when there was a regulatory fit between the regulatory focus orientation of individuals and controlled communication received by them. In another context related to organisational management, Fransen and ter Hoeven, 2013 argued that in line with regulatory focus theory, an outcome-based fit between the managerial communication and employees led to positive and favourable action outcomes, thereby highlighting the importance of regulatory fit for the derived outcomes. Regulatory fit is also imperative as it enhances perceptions of one's self-efficacy and empowers recipients of communication to take positive action without fear and anxiety (Rogers, 1983; Keller, 2006). Similar connections were also observed in studies on advertising and brand promotions in that consumer actions and decision-making were more positive when the fit between regulatory focus and communicated message frame was congruent (Kim, 2006; Florack and Scarabis, 2006). In more recent works, online messaging and communication tactics in the financial industry has showed varying consumer behavioural engagement based on prevention-oriented and promotion-oriented actions towards individual's financial well-being (Eberhardt *et al.*, 2021). The emphasis on the regulatory fit between regulatory orientation and communication and its imminent impact on decision-making in society has provided new insights, also from the current context of the **COVID-19 pandemic**. Cai and Leung (2020) identified that during the pandemic crisis, when promotion-focused communication had a regulatory fit with the "how" and "why" construal-mindsets of consumers, it led to better perception of self-efficacy and more effective persuasion. Thus, the second proposition is formulated as follows:

- P2. The relationship between controlled communication and regulatory orientation is moderated by the regulatory fit, such that the moderating effect becomes more positive as regulatory fit increases

Alignment between individual regulatory orientation and sustainable goals pursuit

People differ in the way they react to positive and negative information (Higgins, 1997). Those with an optimistic orientation are more focused on goal pursuits that can support positive outcomes, whereas people with a negative or maintaining a status quo orientation focus on goal pursuits that support avoidance of negative outcomes (Fransen and ter Hoeven, 2013). The extent to which individual regulatory focus matches with the message structure or framework and the quality of the regulatory fit, affects the behaviour, attitudes, and actions of message recipients (Avnet and Higgins, 2003; McKay-Nesbitt *et al.*, 2013). In a study on negative messaging in organisations and its impact on employees, Fransen and ter Hoeven (2013) found that negative messages framed in positive and promotion-related terms (realising desirable outcomes) were received in a positive manner by promotion-focused employees further leading to positive actions. Conversely, negative messages framed in prevention-related terms (preventing undesirable outcomes) were received negatively by prevention-focused employees. The study stresses that a strategic understanding of the message recipient match and subsequent treatment of communication and messages to suit the regulatory focus of the public can impact regulatory fit immensely. When regulatory fit is high, people experience a genuine feeling about their goal pursuit activity and related decisions (Cesario *et al.*, 2008). The experiments of Koenig *et al.* (2009) underline that "regulatory fit is induced by manipulating something integral to, or within the actual persuasion situation" (Cesario *et al.*, 2008,

p. 450). High regulatory fit is therefore a critical tool to increase the impact of persuasion on individuals to achieve desired outcomes (Avnet and Higgins, 2003; Cesario *et al.*, 2008). We argue that in order for controlled communications to engage people in their long-term commitment toward achieving positive environmental change, policymakers and communications practitioners need to give regulatory orientation consideration when devising environmental communication campaigns and policies which leads to the third study proposition which is formulated as follows:

- P3. Effective controlled communication can enhance the regulatory fit between an individual's regulatory focus and engagement in sustainable goals pursuit.

Regulatory relevance and regulatory fit with corporate communications

Furthering the discussion of regulatory focus and regulatory fit is the concept of regulatory relevance. Regulatory relevance means that message recipients experience a natural fit when controlled communication is created with the public behavioural consequences in mind and when they bear a high regulatory fit with the recipient's own regulatory focus and goal pursuit (Aaker and Lee, 2006; Zhao and Pechman, 2007). Zhao and Pechman (2007) showed that the efficacy of communication can be contingent on the cooperation between regulatory focus of recipients, the regulatory focus of messages and the message frame function. These experiments on the effectiveness of anti-smoking campaigns showed that the strategic design of the advertising campaigns was essential to ensure action and impact. For example, the prevention-focused communication could be more effective in collectivist cultures (e.g. China, Japan, the Philippines), whereas promotion-focused communication could be designed to cater to individualistic cultures (e.g. the United States, Canada, Britain) (Zhao and Pechman, 2007). The above study also proposes that if the message recipients are heterogenous with respect to regulatory focus, then

it may be useful to develop both prevention- and promotion-focused messages or to select media vehicles that match a message's regulatory focus. Second, it is important to determine whether the audience comprehends the message and perhaps to adjust the message frame to facilitate comprehension (pg. 685).

Similarly, Ludolph and Schulz (2015) through their experiments in health communication establish that the cooperation effects of regulatory fit and the strategic framing of messages and communication are crucial in increasing the effectiveness of communication. This implies that a high level of customisation can be achieved by paying attention to the regulatory fit underlying a given message or a communication, eventually leading to successful campaigns and high positive impacts on the target population. Kees *et al.* (2010) emphasise that the influence of regulatory focus and regulatory fit on the messages can help enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of a given communication. As Avnet and Higgins (2003) argue, people tend to pursue their goals in a manner that sustains their regulatory orientation and if such an authentic fit can be established via efficient controlled communications, then the chance of the public's engagement in long-term sustainability goals will be higher. Given the high costs of promotions, communication and media planning, these precautions are crucial and can impede "the challenges faced by policymakers to increase the effectiveness of their communications" (p. 32). Our final and fourth proposition is stated as follows:

- P4. Regulatory relevance between controlled communication and individual's regulatory orientation leads to increased engagement in sustainable goals pursuit.

Discussion, conclusions, implications and suggestions for future research

The issue of failed or failing controlled communication is not new and has been brought to the attention of decision-makers and communication practitioners many times (see Drucker, 1954; Kitchen and Sheth, 2016). In this paper, we adopt and defend the public's perspective as the locus and explain why controlled communication, regardless of the best (or worst) intentions of its

planners or as construed by senders, may not have been effective as desired. Through the theory synthesis approach (Jaakkola, 2020), our study develops a research framework and presents research propositions to generate novel theoretical insights. The framework is inspired by Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory paradigm, where there are important interactions and reciprocal influences between factors: in this instance, individual regulatory fit, behavioural factors, i.e. promotion or prevention-oriented action and finally, environmental factors that impact sustainable goals pursuit. Furthermore, our paper blends the seminal theories of self-regulation on ego-depletion (Baumeister *et al.* 1998); regulatory focus and regulatory fit (Higgins, 1998, 2000) with communication studies (Kitchen and Schultz, 2009; Kitchen and Sheth, 2016) to explain why controlled communication has not been motivating the public in embracing the sustainable goals pursuit. It is argued that due to ego-depletion (Baumeister *et al.*, 1998), individuals cannot effectively process the continuous onslaught of communication from various agencies targeting the public. This inevitably leads to increased desensitisation, apathy, and lack of action on the part of the public in relation to realisation of sustainable goals.

Our paper possesses the limitations associated with conceptual papers, e.g. the lack of empirical support of our conceptual arguments. In anticipation, our future research will seek to empirically test or explore the research propositions. In addition, this paper generates practical insights to assist communication practitioners and policymakers to improve the channels and mechanisms of controlled communication with the public regarding sustainable goals pursuit. Our key argument is that people experience ego-depletion when confronted with polymorphic communication on climate change and associated regulations that ask them to exercise self-control over a long period of time. We argue that the authorities and communication practitioners are failing to motivate the public by not having a deeper understanding of the public's self-regulatory mechanisms and not applying relevant mechanisms of promotion (those publics that are concerned with gains) and prevention (those publics that want no losses) to their target segments. **There are examples of ineffective and incongruous corporate communication in the context of climate change. One example is extensive bushfires across Australia in summer 2019–2020, leaving massive destruction that burned thousands of homes, and killed people and animals (Cunningham *et al.*, 2019). The media that covered this event largely used emotionally loaded sensationalism to strengthen the spread of information.** Whilst it is important to respond to these crises, the media tends to cover these disasters in a sensationalist manner, which further exhausts people in their everyday life (Milka and Warfield, 2017). As underlined by Walters *et al.* (2016), one of the most harmful impacts of sensational and wrongful reporting is on the tourism and tourism-related economies. Sensationalism can instill fear and confusion among people, which can ultimately lead to their ego-depletion and hamper their trust or motivation regarding connecting with social, political, and geographical boundaries. We argue that instead the media should serve as a mitigation tool to create promotion of ecological awareness and educate the public about the importance of taking responsibility for environments every day. In a long-term perspective such customised communication can assist the receiver in terms of the educational content about the sustainable goals pursuit as well as encourage the receiver as take sustainable actions in a non-intrusive way (Rickard and Anisimova, 2013).

This paper encourages research on the psychological mechanisms underlying the development of messages and relevant to the constructs of communication theory and practice. This is believed to address communication-based challenges and can be relevant to managers, policymakers and administrative or regulatory bodies. More specifically, it is argued that controlled communication tends to provoke a sense of helplessness in people and could produce a counter-productive effect on people's involvement to secure a sustainable future. This loss of motivation needs to be countered through a better understanding of the mechanisms of ego depletion. Motivating people in an authentic way requires a deep

understanding of the motivation mechanisms that appeal to the public, through promotion and/or prevention based motivational communication. In our integrative framework, we have combined the theoretical perspectives of controlled communication, ego depletion and regulatory focus theory to explain why current controlled communication may be failing to achieve desired impacts in terms of public action. We argue that strategic communication that is built upon better understanding of consumer behaviour can help motivate mindful consumption nationally, internationally and globally, thereby promoting shared self-regulation behaviours and values on a global level via the optimal use of natural resources.

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