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The Boundary Between Transparent Eco-communication and Greenwashing in Advertising: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis Perspective

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Abstract

This study addresses the pressing challenge of distinguishing between genuine ecological sustainability and deceptive greenwashing within contemporary corporate communication. Prompted by increasingly stringent international regulatory frameworks, including the European Union's ECGT (2024) Directive and the US FTC Green Guides (2012), this research explores how brands navigate compliance in both textual and visual dimensions. To achieve this, the study employs a Corpus-assisted Multimodal Discourse Analysis (CAMDA) approach to scrutinize a curated corpus of 50 compliant environmental advertisements. This methodology integrates M.A.K. Halliday's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar, and the Speech Act Theory articulated by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). The empirical findings reveal that effective eco-communication depends on material processes, empirical data, and verifiable behavioral frameworks that meet stringent Felicity Conditions. In contrast, greenwashing often exploits semantic ambiguity, emotional appeals, and unsubstantiated commissive statements. Building upon these insights, the research introduces the Language Strategy Matrix for Transparent Eco-Discourse, a dual-purpose framework designed both as a practical diagnostic toolkit for strategic communicators to ensure regulatory compliance and as a pedagogical model for Business English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula aimed at promoting critical media literacy and ethical copywriting.

Keywords: Greenwashing, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Visual Grammar, Speech Act Theory

1. Introduction

In today's global marketplace, the rise of environmental awareness has dramatically altered consumer behavior, marking a clear pivot toward sustainable development. As ecological preservation becomes a core value in society, businesses are rushing to adopt "green" narratives to resonate with these evolving expectations. However, a troubling trend has emerged: many brands are exploiting eco-consciousness by launching advertising campaigns for products that, in truth, inflict significant damage on the environment. This deceptive marketing practice is known as greenwashing.

Extensive research has laid a robust groundwork for identifying and evaluating the impacts of this phenomenon. Particularly, quantitative studies have demonstrated that greenwashing breeds eco-skepticism and severely erodes consumer trust, satisfaction, and overall brand equity (Ho et al., 2024; Santhanakrishnan et al., 2026). Analyzing message structure, content, and discourse through Carlson et al.'s (1993) typology in diverse contexts, such as China and Pakistan, reveals that greenwashing rarely takes the form of outright falsehoods (Dai et al., 2014; Shagufta & Javed, 2026). Instead, brands commonly resort to semantic ambiguity, omissions, the “sin of no proof”, and symbolic visual cues to sway consumer perception (Dai et al., 2014; Shagufta & Javed, 2026). Furthermore, structural analytical tools like Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar have proven valuable for interpreting digital imagery; yet, scholars warn that these interpretations can be subjective without a clearly defined empirical framework (Nguyen, 2023).

In response to these subtle deceptions, regulatory bodies have begun to take decisive action. Current legal frameworks, such as the European Union's ECGT Directive (2024) and the United States FTC Green Guides (2012), enforce stringent “Blacklist” principles. These regulations compel businesses to rigorously oversee their written and visual content. Regarding advertising, the laws strictly prohibit ambiguous claims like “100% natural”, “zero carbon footprint”, misleading scientific jargon, and unqualified assertions. Likewise, they strictly forbid “visual traps”, which include: (1) misuse of imagery, like forced depictions of vibrant nature to obscure harmful chemicals; (2) misleading graphics, including icons that mimic well-established eco-labels; (3) deceptive proportions.

From this scholarly and regulatory landscape, a critical research gap surfaces. Most existing literature predominantly focuses on “diagnosing” past greenwashing instances or evaluating their commercial consequences (Dai et al., 2014; Ho et al., 2024; Santhanakrishnan et al., 2026; Shagufta & Javed, 2026). Given the increasingly stringent global legal frameworks that explicitly ban vague language and visual deception, the lack of research on how brands can effectively “adapt and comply” is a significant oversight. Additionally, the absence of a comprehensive multimodal approach, integrating SFL for lexicogrammatical analysis, Visual Grammar for decoding visual semiotics (Nguyen, 2023), and Speech Act Theory for evaluating pragmatic intent, hampers our ability to differentiate between genuine eco-communication and subtle greenwashing.

This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring a set of 50 environmental advertisements (see Appendix 1) that successfully comply with current anti-greenwashing regulations. By employing Felicity Conditions as an objective metric for this compliant corpus, the study meticulously analyzes legitimate discursive and visual strategies. Utilizing this integrated framework, the research aspires to answer the following three pivotal questions:

- (i) Which lexicogrammatical techniques are utilized in the chosen advertisements to formulate environmental assertions, as examined through Systemic Functional Linguistics?
- (ii) How are visual assets employed and organized to support or reinterpret these environmental assertions, according to the principles of Visual Grammar?
- (iii) How does the multimodal interplay between linguistic and visual elements, evaluated through Felicity Conditions in Speech Act Theory, demarcate the boundary between deceptive greenwashing and transparent eco-communication?

Ultimately, the insights gained from this comprehensive theoretical and empirical analysis are synthesized to create a practical matrix. This proposed framework aims to serve as a strategic guide for advertisers, empowering them to craft engaging, eco-friendly campaigns that leverage the green trend while ensuring complete compliance with anti-greenwashing standards in both copy and visual design.

2. Method

This study employs a Corpus-assisted Multimodal Discourse Analysis (CAMDA) approach. By compiling a specialized corpus of 50 eco-advertising campaigns, the research establishes a solid empirical foundation, which is then examined through the qualitative framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to explore the intricate interplay between lexicogrammatical choices and visual representations.

The rationale for selecting CAMDA is rooted in the evolution of modern communication, where advertisements manifest as intricate, multisemiotic constructs that blend text, imagery, and layout. Relying exclusively on textual analysis risks overlooking essential layers of visual meaning. Methodologically, MDA serves as a comprehensive framework that provides a robust theoretical foundation for the seamless integration of two analytical tools: (1) Halliday's (2014) SFL for verbal text, (2) Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar for imagery. This integration facilitates a thorough evaluation of communicative surfaces. Practically, this approach acts as a powerful tool for revealing subtle greenwashing techniques, which often do not present as explicit verbal falsehoods but instead emerge from the dissonance between ostensibly safe textual claims and emotionally manipulative visuals. Moreover, it establishes a direct foundation for applications in marketing English pedagogy, equipping learners with critical thinking skills that enhance their understanding of multimodal communication.

To ensure a rigorous selection process and reduce researcher bias, two independent coders assessed the advertisements based on specific criteria, achieving a significant inter-coder reliability score of Cohen's $k = 0.798$ (rounded to 0.8), which indicates "substantial to excellent agreement". The selection of these 50 advertisements is grounded in their recognition as highly impactful marketing campaigns that promote environmental sustainability, all while strictly adhering to the standards that prevent greenwashing. To guarantee thorough representation across various industries, the data collection follows a set of well-defined criteria:

- (1) The advertisements must convey direct or indirect messages concerning environmental protection, emission reduction, recycled materials, or ecological conservation.
- (2) Priority is given to campaigns from globally influential brands shaping the marketing communications landscape (particularly within Western and US markets), as these entities act as primary trendsetters for green advertising.
- (3) The sampled advertisements must integrate both linguistic components (text/copy) and visual components (video/image) to facilitate simultaneous analysis through SFL and Visual Grammar.
- (4) The year 2011 marks a critical turning point initiated by Patagonia's landmark "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign, which inaugurated an era of radical transparency. The timeline extends through 2025 to capture contemporary developments, including electric vehicle (EV) marketing and ambitious carbon-neutrality commitments from tech giants like Microsoft and Apple, thereby reflecting modern climate-action advertising trends.

The collection of the corpus is carried out using Purposive Sampling via reliable digital archival platforms, including Ads of the World, official corporate YouTube channels, and digital sustainability reports. After the data gathering phase is finished, the analysis process is performed in an organized manner through three consecutive stages:

- (i) Classification of Discursive Orientation (According to Carlson et al., 1993)

Before initiating the micro-structural analysis, a thorough categorization and coding process is conducted on the 50 advertisements. This process is guided by the environmental claim orientations delineated by Carlson et al. (1993). Each advertisement is carefully evaluated and classified according to these established orientations, providing a structured framework for subsequent analysis.

(1) In the realm of Product and Process Discourse, particularly regarding Recycling and the Circular Economy, several initiatives have emerged that warrant closer examination. Notably, collaborations such as Adidas x Parley's "Run for the Oceans" and The North Face's "Clothes the Loop" serve as rich case studies. These programs seek to investigate the extent to which these brands may fall into the "Hidden Trade-off" trap, in which the transformation of waste into commercially viable products could obscure broader environmental implications. By analyzing these initiatives, researchers can gain valuable insights into how effectively brands balance innovative sustainability efforts with the potential compromises in their overall ecological impact.

(2) The discussion surrounding Image and Macro-Commitment in corporate campaigns underscores how companies such as Apple, Google, and Ford are positioning themselves within the sustainability landscape. For instance, Apple's campaign "A Climate Change Promise", Google's initiative "Greenest Cloud", and Ford's slogan "Go Further" exemplify an image-oriented approach. This classification facilitates a more nuanced analysis of how these companies differentiate between establishing a clearly defined roadmap for achieving their sustainability goals and making vague commitments that lack specificity. By examining these initiatives through this lens, we can assess the effectiveness and transparency of their messaging concerning environmental responsibility.

(3) The Anti-Consumerism Discourse, particularly focused on environmental truths, is exemplified by Patagonia's bold campaign titled "Don't Buy This Jacket". This initiative encourages consumers to reflect on their purchasing habits and consider the environmental impact of their decisions. Similarly, IKEA Canada has launched its "Green Friday" initiative, which promotes sustainable practices and encourages mindful consumption. Together, these efforts represent a significant shift away from traditional linear capitalist models. They advocate for a framework that emphasizes complete transparency in communication, urging both individuals and companies to prioritize environmental stewardship over profit-driven motives.

(ii) Multimodal Deconstruction (SFL & Visual Grammar)

At this stage, the techniques used to either elucidate or shape the message are interpreted simultaneously through both visual and textual elements. This dual approach integrates imagery and written content, allowing for a richer understanding and a more nuanced influence on the audience.

(1) The Linguistic Dimension (Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics) examines how campaigns such as Tesla's "Electric Future" use Material Processes to portray a sustainable lifestyle. It also analyzes how TOMS' "One for One" campaign employs the Mood system to convey power dynamics and promote a shared social responsibility agreement between the brand and the consumer.

(2) The Visual Dimension, a concept derived from Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar, delves into the intricate analysis of visual elements that can evoke powerful emotional responses, often referred to as pathos. This framework can be utilized effectively for persuasive communication and potential manipulation in advertising. A striking illustration of this is found in Nissan's campaign titled "The Electric Vehicle Polar Bear". In this campaign, the choice of a polar bear as a central figure is particularly compelling; the bear's intense gaze directed towards an urban landscape significantly enhances the emotional impact of the message. This deliberate visual strategy carries a deeper presupposition, suggesting a sense of urgency regarding environmental issues. By framing the electric vehicle as the sole path to ecological salvation, the campaign effectively compels viewers to consider the implications of their choices, positioning the electric vehicle as not just an option but a necessary solution in the face of environmental crisis.

(iii) Pragmatic Evaluation and the Construction of a "Transparent Green" Matrix

The integration of SFL and Speech Act Theory within this analytical framework is highly complementary, as the lexicogrammatical choices identified through SFL serve as the foundation for assessing the pragmatic validity of environmental claims. Specifically, the realization of a particular Speech Act is fundamentally governed by the lexicogrammatical structures that encode it. For instance, when evaluating a Commissive act, such as a brand's

pledge to achieve carbon neutrality, Speech Act Theory mandates that the utterance fulfill the Preparatory and Sincerity Felicity Conditions. This means the speaker must demonstrate genuine intent and a concrete capacity to perform the promised action. SFL provides the precise metrics to verify this. A felicitous environmental Commitment is predominantly realized through Material Processes like build, eliminate, invest, combined with measurable Circumstances like by 2030, a \$2 billion fund. In contrast, when an environmental claim relies heavily on abstract Relational Processes like “We are green” without material substantiation, SFL analysis reveals the lexicogrammatical void that renders the Commissive act infelicitous, thereby indicating a significant risk of greenwashing.

In this study, the authors conduct an in-depth textual and visual analysis of a selection of 50 advertisements, applying the frameworks established by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) within Speech Act Theory to critically evaluate the ethical implications of the discourse presented. Each statement within these advertisements is carefully examined against the Felicity Conditions, which serve as criteria for assessing the appropriateness and effectiveness of communicative acts.

The present research will highlight how Patagonia’s approach is characterized by negative messaging. Specifically, its Negative Directives skillfully meets the Sincerity Condition, effectively conveying a genuine commitment to ethical practices. In contrast, we will also explore how the pledges made by various automotive and tech companies, categorized as Commissives, often fail to uphold these standards. These commitments frequently descend into what we term Infelicitous utterances, revealing instances of greenwashing that mislead consumers about their environmental impact. Through this analysis, we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the ethical landscape in advertising and its implications for consumer trust and corporate responsibility.

3. Results

The initial phase of our analysis reveals the importance of categorizing the corpus, as it offers significant insights into the ways brands strategically construct their environmental messaging. By examining this distribution, we can better understand how different approaches correspond to varying levels of greenwashing risk. Table 1 below provides a detailed breakdown of these classifications within the selected advertisements, illustrating the relationship between each discourse orientation and its associated risk profile for misleading environmental claims.

Table 1: Distribution of Eco-Discourse Orientations and Associated Risks

Orientation (Carlson, 1993)	Representative Campaigns in the Corpus	Characteristics & Greenwashing Risks (Hidden Trade-offs)
Product	Allbirds: Printing carbon footprints directly on shoes.	<i>Focus:</i> Emphasizes particular sustainable materials or design choices.
	Lush: Selling “Naked” products without plastic packaging.	<i>Risk:</i> The distortion known as “Part-for-Whole.”
	Everlane: Jackets made entirely from ocean-bound plastic.	
Process	Apple: Committing to a 100% carbon-neutral supply chain.	<i>Focus:</i> Highlights supply chains, energy consumption, and waste handling.
	Budweiser: Brewing 100% of its US beer using wind power	<i>Risk:</i> Overstating adherence to established legal requirements as a virtue, or promising future actions that are not yet defined.

The North Face: Encouraging customers to bring old clothes for recycling.		
Image	Tesla: Framing electric vehicles as a symbol of modern, luxurious living.	<i>Focus:</i> Links the corporate brand to broader ecological values or moral ways of living.
	Rivian: Positioning the brand as a friend of nature by celebrating wild reserves.	<i>Risk:</i> Creating an ambiguous “Green Halo” without meaningful environmental measures.
	TOMS: Donating shoes or supporting eco-projects using profits	
Environmental Fact	Patagonia: Advising against buying their jackets to reduce consumerism.	<i>Focus:</i> Employing educational content or social commentary.
	Ben & Jerry’s: Broadcasting climate justice protests.	<i>Risk:</i> Utilizing environmental information to provoke incorrect conclusions (Emotional Greenwashing).
	WWF: Depicting forests as human lungs to warn against deforestation.	

Following a thorough classification process, the 50 advertisements were categorized into distinct groups based on Carlson’s (1993) typology, as detailed in Table 1. This foundational step sets the stage for the subsequent phases of the study, which involve data extraction and a comprehensive multimodal-pragmatic analysis.

The categorized advertisements yield valuable data, which is systematically organized into three primary strategic clusters. This organization is crucial for evaluating the intricate interaction between lexicogrammatical elements and visual structures within the advertisements. To inform this analysis, we draw upon Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Visual Grammar frameworks, which facilitate an in-depth understanding of how language and visual design work together to convey messages. Additionally, the analysis delves into the pragmatic validity of the utterances present in the advertisements, guided by the principles of Speech Acts. This theoretical lens allows us to examine how the advertisements not only communicate information but also perform actions in a communicative context.

By arranging the extracted data into these three strategic clusters, we can systematically decode the environmental messaging constructed by the advertisements. This detailed classification underscores the complex interplay between linguistic and visual elements, providing insights into how these structures collaboratively influence the intended meaning and effectiveness of the advertisements in conveying their environmental messages.

(i) Cluster 1: The “Anti-Consumerism” and “Absolute Transparency” Strategy

(1) Comprising 12% of the analyzed corpus (6 out of 50 campaigns), this niche yet highly impactful strategy is exemplified by brands such as Patagonia, REI, IKEA Canada, and Allbirds. These companies are at the forefront, demonstrating how businesses can create a positive influence within their communities and the environment.

(2) In SFL and visual grammar analysis, these brands utilize Material Processes to challenge conventional patterns of consumer behavior effectively. The textual Theme places significant emphasis on renunciation and radical transparency. For example, REI’s landmark “Opt Outside” campaign disrupted traditional norms by closing all retail locations on Black Friday, overtly rejecting the culture of mass overconsumption. Similarly, IKEA Canada encourages consumers to focus on reselling furniture instead of purchasing new items.

(3) In pragmatic evaluation, these campaigns exemplify inverted Directives. While traditional advertising typically commands consumers to make purchases, these brands instead encourage consumers to refrain from consumption or call upon competitors to adopt radical transparency, as demonstrated by Allbirds' candid disclosures regarding their carbon footprint. Such messaging fulfills the highest Sincerity Condition, as these brands willingly incur short-term financial losses, such as store closures and anti-purchase messaging, in order to prioritize genuine ecological advocacy.

(ii) Cluster 2: The "Emotional Manipulation" and "Romanticization" Strategy

(1) Accounting for 28% of the dataset (14 out of 50 campaigns), this approach leans significantly on visual storytelling. It is exemplified by iconic brands like Nissan, celebrated for its innovative vehicles; Jeep, renowned for its rugged off-road capabilities; and Corona, known for its refreshing beer and laid-back atmosphere.

(2) In SFL and visual grammar analysis, these campaigns effectively employ compelling Narrative Visual Structures combined with evocative audio-visual elements intended to evoke strong emotional resonance (pathos). Nissan depicts a polar bear departing its melting Arctic habitat to explore an urban cityscape, while Jeep utilizes the iconic voice of astronomer Carl Sagan to advocate for planetary stewardship.

(3) In pragmatic evaluation, this group employs Expressives and Assertives to underscore a pressing ecological reality. However, from a multimodal perspective, the contrast between the displaced polar bear (presented as known information) and the electric vehicle (introduced as new information) creates an ambiguous implicature. This semantic disparity runs the risk of promoting Emotional Greenwashing, as it leverages pathos to divert consumers' attention from the significant industrial impacts associated with automotive manufacturing.

(iii) Cluster 3: The "Lifecycle Extension" and "Behavioral Restructuring" Strategy

(1) Emerging as the prevailing trend, this strategy represents 60% of the total corpus, encompassing 30 out of 50 campaigns. This substantial majority signals a clear market shift towards actionable sustainability, as demonstrated by prominent brands such as Dell, renowned for its innovative technology solutions; Samsung, celebrated for its cutting-edge electronics; Tide, a leader in laundry detergents; and Hellmann's, famous for its iconic mayonnaise.

(2) In SFL and visual grammar analysis, this cluster recontextualizes well-known objects by providing tangible and actionable solutions through practical demonstrations. Dell introduces an innovative laptop design that can be entirely disassembled in seconds without the need for screws, while Samsung offers visual guides for transforming legacy smartphones into smart home IoT sensors.

(3) In pragmatic evaluation, these campaigns represent a well-considered blend of Assertives, which highlight technological benefits, and Directives, aimed at altering consumer habits. Tide encourages consumers to adopt cold-water laundering to reduce household energy usage, while Hellmann's offers innovative culinary suggestions for making use of food waste. These communications steer clear of abstract conjectures, providing consumers with concrete, actionable tools, such as modular designs, recipes, and utility applications, to facilitate the adoption of sustainable lifestyles.

4. Discussion

The examination reveals that contemporary environmental advertising is undergoing a profound transformation, necessitated by increasing regulatory scrutiny and evolving consumer expectations. To successfully navigate this complex landscape, brands must abandon superficial and grandiose claims in favor of communication grounded in verifiable data and meaningful initiatives.

The findings underscore three critical mechanisms that serve to differentiate genuine transparency from greenwashing behaviors:

(i) **Transparency Through Empirical Data and Bold Initiatives:** Effective campaigns are characterized by their restraint in using inflated adjectives and exaggerations. For example, brands like Everlane focus on delivering raw data regarding environmental impacts, while Allbirds goes a step further by directly printing lifecycle carbon footprints onto product tags. Additionally, innovative market strategies such as REI's decision to close its retail operations on significant shopping holidays reflect a commitment to sustainability that diverges from mere marketed claims.

(ii) **Transition from “Neutralization” to “Elimination”:** A key focus of scrutiny has shifted towards the nature of corporate commitments, particularly in regard to carbon neutrality. These commitments are often viewed as insufficiently specific and vague. In contrast, initiatives that aim for comprehensive remediation, such as Microsoft's frameworks designed to historically reverse emissions accumulated since 1975, demonstrate a commitment to substantive environmental accountability. These broader targets not only meet rigorous preparatory and sincerity standards but also help mitigate the risks associated with making ineffective or misleading claims.

(iii) **Multimodal Corporate Collaboration:** The landscape of successful eco-advertising has shifted away from the singular, self-serving narratives often associated with traditional advertising. Instead, the emphasis is on collaborative partnerships across sectors. For instance, consumer goods manufacturers are increasingly forming alliances with specialized recycling networks, as exemplified by P&G's partnership with TerraCycle. Simultaneously, financial institutions are engaging with environmental organizations, as illustrated by American Express collaborating with Parley for the Oceans on marine conservation efforts. This collaborative approach reflects a more equitable distribution of ecological responsibility and is further reinforced through interpersonal lexicogrammatical structures that foster strong institutional trust with the public.

Ultimately, the research suggests that the future of environmental advertising lies in genuine commitment to transparency, collaborative action, and a focus on tangible outcomes rather than hollow promises. By embracing these principles, brands can build authentic connections with consumers, ultimately driving lasting change in the marketplace.

Building on the insights gained from the corpus analysis through integrated theoretical frameworks, this section explores the academic implications, practical contributions, and pedagogical applications of the research within the realm of specialized language education. Primarily, this study makes a noteworthy contribution to the methodology for analyzing advertising discourse. By transcending single-modal approaches, the integration of SFL, Visual Grammar, and Speech Act Theory offers a comprehensive analytical lens that effectively reveals the underlying mechanisms of greenwashing. This enables both researchers and practitioners to discern the subtle dissonance between lexicogrammatical choices and visual representations.

Anchored in these analytical insights, the study compiles its key findings into the Language Strategy Matrix for Transparent Eco-Discourse (see Appendix 2). This matrix serves as an actionable diagnostic toolkit for advertisers to evaluate their corporate communication, ensuring that eco-claims meet pragmatic felicity conditions. Lastly, translating these research findings and the proposed matrix into pedagogical practices presents considerable benefits for Business English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula. This approach allows educators to nurture learners' critical discourse analysis skills through real-world case studies while simultaneously enhancing professional writing competencies, such as green copywriting, focusing on the mastery of transparent lexicogrammatical and visual structures.

This study delves into the urgent necessity of distinguishing authentic ecological sustainability from the deceptive practices of greenwashing prevalent in today's corporate communication. By employing a comprehensive methodology that combines Halliday's (2014) SFL, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar, and the Speech Act Theory developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), the research establishes a cohesive framework for MDA. This innovative approach transcends traditional analyses that often focus on a single mode of communication, revealing how textual and visual elements work in concert to either uphold or undermine the conditions necessary for effective and truthful communication.

Through a detailed empirical examination of a diverse corpus of 50 advertisements, the study uncovers that effective and transparent environmental communication is characterized by three core principles: (1) radical transparency, (2) empirical substantiation, (3) actionable frameworks that encourage positive behavior. In stark contrast, greenwashing tends to exploit semantic ambiguity, deploy emotional appeals, and make insubstantial commitments that lack genuine intent. The findings specifically indicate that brands committed to authenticity tend to utilize material processes and present measurable data, opting for straightforward representation over embellishments. For instance, brands like Everlane and Allbirds have transitioned from ambiguous claims of carbon neutrality to specific goals focused on historical remediation, akin to the definitive targets set by Microsoft. Moreover, such compliant brands emphasize collaborative accountability over self-aggrandizing narratives of corporate heroism.

In synthesizing these insights, the research proposes the Language Strategy Matrix for Transparent Eco-Discourse, a tool that enriches the field by providing strategic communicators with a diagnostic compliance toolkit, as well as offering educators a practical framework for Business English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula. Looking ahead, future studies should expand this multimodal corpus to include burgeoning digital platforms, such as short-form video algorithms and interactive social media avenues, while also investigating cross-cultural differences in regulatory practices and consumer perceptions concerning green claims.

5. Conclusion

This study delves into the urgent necessity of distinguishing authentic ecological sustainability from the deceptive practices of greenwashing prevalent in today's corporate communication. By employing a comprehensive methodology that combines Halliday's (2014) SFL, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar, and the Speech Act Theory developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), the research establishes a cohesive framework for MDA. This innovative approach transcends traditional analyses that often focus on a single mode of communication, revealing how textual and visual elements work in concert to either uphold or undermine the conditions necessary for effective and truthful communication.

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Appendix A

Summary of the 50 Selected Eco-Advertising Campaigns

No.	Brand	Campaign Name	Corpus Description & Summary
1	Patagonia	"Don't Buy This Jacket"	Advising customers against buying jackets unless truly necessary to reduce waste.
2	IKEA Canada	"Green Friday"	Encouraging customers to resell old furniture for discount codes, promoting a circular economy.
3	adidas x Parley	"Run for the Oceans"	Combining sports and environmental protection by turning marine plastic waste into bestselling sneakers.
4	The North Face	"Clothes the Loop"	Encouraging users to bring old clothes and shoes of any brand to stores for recycling.
5	TOMS	"One for One"	Committing to donate a pair of shoes to children in need or support environmental projects from profits.
6	Tesla	"Electric Future"	Promoting the transition to electric vehicles, establishing renewable energy, and EVs as symbols of modern, luxurious living.
7	Nissan	"The Electric Vehicle Polar Bear"	Depicting a polar bear leaving its melting habitat to enter a city, conveying the urgency of emission reduction.
8	Ford	"Go Further"	Focusing on the research and production of hybrid and electric vehicles to lower global emissions.
9	Apple	"A Climate Change Promise"	Committing to making the entire supply chain and all devices carbon neutral.
10	Google	"Greenest Cloud"	Highlighting data centers operating on 100% renewable energy.
11	Lush	"Naked"	Selling solid items like soaps and shampoos without plastic packaging, accompanied by visual eco-messages.
12	Burt's Bees	"Greater Good"	Celebrating natural ingredients, sustainable farming practices, and bee protection.
13	The Body Shop	"Enrich, Not Exploit"	Committing to 100% recycled packaging and cruelty-free testing.
14	Starbucks	"Strawless Lids Initiative"	Eliminating plastic straws and introducing strawless lids with a focus on ocean health and micro-waste reduction.
15	Starbucks	"Grounds for Your Garden"	Encouraging customers to take used coffee grounds home as free plant fertilizer.
16	Ben & Jerry's	"Climate Justice Campaigns"	Utilizing protests, social campaigns, and videos to advocate for climate justice.
17	Oatly	"Post-Milk Generation"	Using satirical, playful out-of-home advertising to promote oat milk as an eco-friendlier alternative to dairy.
18	Panera Bread	"Panera for Earth"	Introducing visual initiatives for vegan food, lower agricultural carbon footprints, and water management.
19	Seventh Generation	"Come Clean"	Providing 100% transparency on ingredients for eco-friendly cleaning agents and warning against harsh chemicals.
20	Method Products	"Fear No Dirt"	Promoting hand soaps and laundry detergents packaged in aesthetic bottles made from ocean plastic.
21	P&G	"It Takes a Village"	Partnering core brands with TerraCycle to establish complex packaging collection and recycling systems.
22	Burt's Bees	"Bring Back the Bees"	Raising awareness of declining bee populations and guiding consumers on planting wildflowers to save ecosystems.
23	Ford	"F-150 Lightning: Powering Your Home"	Showcasing the electric pickup truck's capability to supply backup power to an entire home during outages using clean energy.

24	Rivian	"Keep the World Wild"	Positioning the brand as a friend of nature via silent ad films celebrating the wild beauty of US national preserves.
25	Jeep	"Pale Blue Dot"	Using Carl Sagan's narration to promote the 4xe plug-in hybrid (PHEV), calling to protect our only planet.
26	Hertz	"Let's Go Everywhere in an EV"	Advertising large-scale EV rental services to help consumers experience green mobility without ownership.
27	Allbirds	"Meet the Carbon Footprint Label"	Pioneering the direct printing of carbon footprints on shoes, calling competitors to do the same for transparency.
28	Nike	"Move to Zero"	Featuring items made with at least 20% recycled materials toward a zero-waste, zero-carbon future.
29	Target	"Target Forward"	Launching outdoor and TV campaigns featuring private label items with circular, easily recyclable packaging.
30	REI	"Opt Outside"	Closing all stores on Black Friday and paying employees to step outdoors, rejecting hyper-consumerism.
31	Everlane	"ReNew Collection"	Launching jackets made entirely from ocean-retrieved plastic bottles with transparent production costs and impacts.
32	Microsoft	"Carbon Negative by 2030"	Committing via short documentary ads to remove all carbon emitted since its 1975 founding.
33	HP	"Windows of Hope"	Introducing laptops built with ocean-bound plastics, focusing on protecting coastal livelihoods.
34	Samsung America	"Galaxy Upcycling at Home"	Guiding users to upcycle old phones into smart home gadgets (e.g., baby monitors, light sensors) to extend hardware lifecycles.
35	Dell	"Concept Luna"	Advertising a futuristic computer concept fully disassemblable within seconds, without screws, to simplify repair and recycling.
36	Corona	"Plastic Fishing Tournament"	Organizing plastic-fishing events in marine areas, turning fishermen into ocean cleaners, and buying back plastic at above market fish prices.
37	Budweiser	"Wind Brewed"	Airing Super Bowl ads claiming 100% of US Budweiser is brewed with wind energy, featuring iconic horses and Dalmatian dogs.
38	Chipotle	"Real Foodprint"	Integrating an app feature showing the exact water saved and land protected when choosing sustainable organic menus.
39	Hellmann's	"Make Taste, Not Waste"	Super Bowl ads urging Americans to cook with fridge leftovers to curb food waste and lower greenhouse emissions.
40	Heinz	"The Marz Edition"	Testing tomato growth under simulated Mars harsh conditions to research sustainable agricultural solutions against climate change.
41	Dove	"No Digital Distortion" & Recycled Packaging	Committing to cut 20,500 tons of virgin plastic annually by adopting 100% PCR recycled bottles across all body washes.
42	Colgate	"Save Water"	Capturing continuous tap water waste during teeth brushing to urge turning off taps to save clean water millions.
43	Tide	"Turn to Cold"	Partnering with celebrities to advocate for shifting to cold water laundry, saving electricity, and household utility bills.
44	Clorox	"Clorox EcoClean"	Introducing plant-based disinfecting formulas proving strong cleaners can be biodegradable and water-safe.

45	GE	"Ecomagination"	Promoting massive wind turbines and clean water filtration tech for major cities as part of major B2B green initiatives.
46	NextEra Energy	"Building America's Clean Energy Future"	Mapping out solar and wind farms gradually replacing traditional coal-fired power plants.
47	WWF	"Lungs"	Presenting print posters where leaves resemble human lungs, conveying that destroying forests strips human breath.
48	Greenpeace	"Deforestation continues with the turn of a page"	Illustrating print ads where flipping a page transforms a tropical rainforest into waste paper shreds.
49	National Wildlife Federation	"Restoring coastal resilience"	Partnering with brands on educational ads emphasizing the need to restore natural wildlife corridors.
50	FedEx American Express /	"Priority Earth" / Recycled Ocean Plastic Card	Committing to global carbon-neutral shipping by 2040 and launching credit cards made from beach-recovered plastics.

Appendix B

Language Strategy Matrix for Green Discourse and Transparent Advertising

Communication Situation / Objective	Discursive & Pragmatic Strategy (Speech Acts)	Lexicogrammatical & Semantic Tools (SFL - Halliday)	Visual Tools (Visual Grammar - Kress & van Leeuwen)	Application in ESP Marketing Curriculum Design
1. Presenting Product Attributes (Avoiding vague buzzwords & the “part-for-whole” trap)	Claims should be based on empirical evidence, steering clear of vague qualitative descriptors.	Material Processes combined with measured Circumstances (e.g., a 20% reduction in water usage). Not allowed: Relational Processes employed for labeling (e.g., “Environmentally friendly”).	Analytical Structures: Close-up shots of materials or technical specifications. Avoid: Artificial natural backgrounds (leaves, blue skies).	Vocabulary and Syntax Activity: Ask students to revise misleading environmentally-friendly advertisements (for instance, “Eco-friendly coffee”) into statements that highlight Material Processes and provide actual measurements (“Coffee cultivated using 50% less water”).
2. Future Commitments & Roadmaps (Avoiding unbacked empty promises)	Favorable Commissive Actions: Promises need to be supported by necessary preparatory conditions and actual capabilities for execution (e.g., Microsoft pledging to eliminate carbon emissions from 1975 onward).	Modality System: Powerful modal verbs (such as will, commit to) paired with particular Temporal and Manner Circumstances.	Linear/Timeline Formats: Showcasing the years in which milestones are achieved rather than idealized representations.	Analysis of the Case Study: Evaluate the corporate commitments made by Apple and Microsoft alongside those of an automotive brand to assess the legitimacy of modal verbs.
3. Call to Action (CTA) (Avoiding shifting total ecological responsibility onto consumers)	Bilateral Directive Acts: Creating a mutual responsibility agreement between the brand and the consumer (e.g., IKEA reselling pre-owned furniture, REI shuttering stores).	Mood & Theme Framework: Switching between “We” (the brand pledging to take action) and “You” (the consumer participating in collaboration) topical themes.	Balanced/Parallel Composition: Positioning brand action visuals alongside consumer action visuals on the same level.	Text for Copywriting Task: Ask students to create a Call to Action (CTA) for a sustainable fashion initiative utilizing a bilateral We and You framework.
4. Handling Legal Compliance (Avoiding framing standard regulations as unique features)	Eliminating Expressive Acts: No self-congratulation or boasting over mandatory legal obligations (e.g., eliminating CFCs).	Avoiding Attitudinal Adjuncts: Stripping away flattering modifiers (“Pioneering”, “Breakthrough”). Maintaining an objective declarative structure.	Low Salience: Placing legal compliance information in the margin with small font sizes, keeping it out of the visual focus.	Critical Reading: Have students identify “compliance-as-merit” errors in corporate PR materials to foster critical thinking.