



Balancing Growth with Sustainability in Discourse? Environmental Ideologies in Kenyan Corporate Communication

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ABSTRACT

Background: Environmental discourse shapes public understanding and influences the interpretation of ecological responsibility and sustainability. However, the notion of economic growth is prevalent in these discourses, depicting economic development as compatible with ecological responsibility. In spite of this, research into the growth ideology in corporate environmental discourse in Kenya is minimal.

Objective: The present study investigated the discursive construction and reproduction of growthism alongside ecological responsibility in environmental management reports.

Method: Drawing on a corpus of 36 environmental reports, a mixed-method design was employed with quantitative findings reinforcing qualitative discourse analysis. Keywords, lexical patterns and collocations were analysed and interpreted on the basis of Critical Discourse Analysis and the ecological framework.

Results: The findings revealed that growth ideology was manifested through passivation and nominalization of expansion-related terms such as growth alongside a high prevalence of statistical quantifiers. At the discourse practice level, growth ideology was reproduced through the marketization of ecological challenges, normalisation of growth and the rationalization of economic progress as the ultimate corporate objective.

Conclusion This ideological construction therefore served to reinforce institutional control by corporations who linguistically legitimise economic growth in the eyes of the shareholders, at the expense of ecological protection.

Unique Contribution: The findings demonstrated the role of language in perpetuating the growth narrative in sustainability communication, which has the potential to influence the shareholders' perception about corporations' ecological responsibility. The results provided further insights into the current corporate struggle to balance economic expansion with ecological sustainability as realised through language.

Recommendations: Regulatory bodies such as the Capital Markets Authority and NEMA should integrate eco-linguistically beneficial language into their reporting standards. The agencies need to encourage discursive strategies that explicitly frame ecological risk instead of camouflaging it in the name of sustainability. Additionally, ecolinguistic and critical language awareness training programmes could be incorporated into everyday shareholder education, besides other professional training materials.

Keywords: *Growthism, environmental discourse, Ecolinguistics, critical discourse analysis, sustainability, Environmental Ideology.*



INTRODUCTION

The United Nations (UN) (2015) publicly endorsed sustainability and sustainable development in its economic, social and political agenda through UNEP (2024). This propelled the ecological consciousness agenda to other global discourses in form of press reports, website content, advertisements and narratives. The international agenda has given rise to increased environmental communications from the corporate world. This can be attributed to the need for compliance with regulatory requirements, customer expectations and reputation management. The diverse genres of environmental corporate communications may carry partial messages about the environment or function strategically. For instance, sustainability reports may be tailored to legitimise corporate activities as opposed to the communication of ecological awareness.

Based on critical discourse studies and systemic functional linguistics perspectives, ecolinguistics provides a lens for evaluating the narratives in our society. It explores the influence of language on the connection between humans and non-humans (Halliday, 1990; Stibbe, 2015). Corporate discourse is neither neutral nor unbiased in its transfer of environmental texts. Instead, the discourse uses language as a platform where different ecological narratives are negotiated, contested and evaluated as observed by Hahn and Lülfs (2014). This means that in an attempt to solve the prevailing ecological problems, there is a need to promote language that supports ecological awareness and resist corporate language that perpetuates destructive discourses and behavior. The present study was thus guided by three main objectives: to examine the lexical and grammatical structures used to realise the growth narrative and to investigate how growthism is reproduced in the ESG reports. The study also sought to investigate the social-cultural implications of the growth narrative on the public's understanding of the human relationship with nature.

Ideologies as conceptualized by Stibbe (2015) are stories about how groups or individuals interpret reality and their expectations which determines their thoughts, discourse and action. Previous studies including Vazquez (2021) have shown that corporations are at the risk of greenwashing where language can be manipulated to present sustainability efforts that may be non-existent. Based on this framework, the present study sought to evaluate and reveal beneficial discourse patterns that corporations can adopt to enhance their environmental reporting standards and the effect of the discourse utilized.

Halliday (1990) took issue with a distortion in most routine grammars of the industrial age; he argued that the grammars painted a wrong notion about the world we live in. He observed that these grammars promote consumption of natural resources, portraying them as limitless. This grammar promotes an anthropocentric view where humans get to rate and quantify resources depending on their needs which contrasts the reality.

The corporate world builds conversations around maximizing economic growth, profit and unbounded production against the background of natural resources that are limited. The grammar used in this case promotes an ideology that is contrary to ecological protection. This ideology



was further criticized by Halliday due to its portrayal of ‘growth’, ‘large’ and ‘fast’ as better than ‘small’ and ‘slow’. In fact, language has been shown to contain discontinuities in its reference to human beings and other creation. For instance passivisation in English language downplays the role of inanimate elements of nature whereas humans are assigned agent status ;humans are shown as active participants in society while the role of the rest of creation is diminished.

Halliday (2001) noted that modern economic perspectives advocate for boundless economic growth as the ultimate goal. This perception is regarded as a destructive narrative manifested through words such as *high productivity* and *economic growth*. The narrative further implies that natural resources are infinite, ignoring the effects of uncontrolled consumption. Ma and Stibbe (2022) highlighted ideologies such as consumerism as negative stories that contradict the ecosophy while promoting excessive consumption, discontent and ecological destruction.

Recent studies into the language of sustainability communication have focused on the dangers of greenwashing with less attention on environmental ideologies realised in text. In a CDA study on the linguistic strategies of corporate environmental reporting, Mahendra (2026) identified modality, passive constructions ambiguity and positive framing. This study was however focused on the linguistic realisation of greenwashing as a practice in the context of the Pakistani corporate world. Similarly, Feghali et al (2025) synthesized literature on greenwashing, but from a socio-cultural perspective that paid little attention to the linguistic elements in such sustainability discourse. Investigative emphasis on sustainability rhetoric and greenwashing was further evident in Shagufta, and Javed (2026), who employed CDA on environmental communication. Their qualitative study examined lexical condensation, symbolism and evidence selection as linguistic strategies that promoted greenwashing.

Majority of existing studies have focused on multinationals that operate across various environments that are different from the African and Kenyan context Cho et al., (2010). Additionally, most studies have highlighted the major themes in the reports at the expense of the linguistic implications of these themes. Moreover, limited attention has been paid to the ideological aspects of the reports. Researchers have also not exhaustively connected how sustainability talk has been discursively embedded into the reports to produce different discourses and interpretations. In terms of methodology, studies have largely employed other linguistic frameworks, thus ignoring the analytical potential of the ecolinguistic framework and its tools.

Based on this prospect, the present study therefore regarded corporate environmental discourse in Kenya as a fertile site of meaning production, negotiation and construction. By employing ecolinguistic framework on corporate texts, the study sought to reveal dominant ideologies, frames and their ecological impact by evaluating them against an ecosophy evident in the reports. The present study sought to undertake an Ecolinguistic analysis of corporate environmental reports in Kenya. An ecolinguistic approach to corporate discourse is an ideal tool for unearthing clusters of linguistic elements that shape a peoples’ world view. This includes their beliefs, values and ethos Stibbe (2015). For instance, a discourse which consistently prioritizes economic growth as a key objective of the human society, impacts negatively on



ecological behavior. Pezzullo and Cox (2018) exemplify the growth ideology in their account of dominant discourses. The ‘Growth is good for the economy’ narrative constitutes one of the implicitly accepted ways of thinking. These are regarded as naturalised and taken-for-granted perspectives of evaluating discourse.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study takes an eclectic approach that combines critical discourse analysis (CDA) and ecolinguistic discourse analysis (EDA) theories. The two frameworks provide a set of tools for exploring the relationship between man and the physical environment. The frameworks are also complementary to one another, due to their different but related tenets. Ecolinguistic discourse analysis (EDA) emphasizes the impact of language use on the natural environment. EDA is ideal as it constitutes both ecological analysis of discourse and the analysis of ecological discourse (Alexander and Stibbe (2014)). It investigates whether a discourse aligns with environmental protection or opposes it.

On its part, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) supplements EDA by examining the linguistic realisation of ideologies and embedded power relations. The CDA principle of social practice as determined by power dynamics, helps to account for inequalities and ideologies in everyday interaction. In the context of environmental discourse, CDA explains the impact of corporate and capitalistic ideologies in environmental management reports and their effect in shaping public attitudes towards environmental protection. CDA as proposed by Fairclough (2003) also offers an elaborate three-pronged framework for analyzing discourse focusing on textual analysis, discursive practices and social practice level. These are key to revealing the representation of environmental concerns in the reports, the discursive construction of the reports as well as the role of language in legitimising particular ecological behavior or policy. This eclectic approach therefore builds on the critical focus of the present study. The combination provides a framework that effectively captures the social political context of environmental discourse as well as its ecological implications. The shared focus between the two theories therefore guided textual analysis. Moreover, in responding the research questions, the two provided for investigation into how belief systems are embedded in language thereby unveiling unsustainable ideologies.

METHODS

The specific Mixed Method Research approach for this study was the explanatory sequential research design. This entailed collecting and analysing the quantitative data, followed by qualitative interpretation. The findings of the quantitative phase were expected to inform the focus of the qualitative phase as seen in Creswell and Creswell (2018); frequency analysis output provided data for the qualitative analysis. Purposive sampling technique was utilized to select a sample of 36 ESG reports from the target population of 182 reports disseminated between the years 2020 and 2024. These provided a multi-sectoral selection, picking reports from sectors such as banking, agriculture and telecommunications. A total of 42,913 tokens or words were uploaded to Antconc software for word searches, collocations and frequencies. The Antconc functions such as the wordlist functions were used to prompt the software for textual data output. The study examined the reports for linguistic data in form of frequent words and phrases, clauses and sentences. Data analysis employed summative content analysis of eco-relevant terms and



keywords. The keywords, specific lexis and instances of occurrence were checked using Antconc software (4.3.1) and manually coded for ideologies. To ascertain the connection with environmental discourse, linguistic patterns were compared to respective financial statement registers. Analysis also considered Fairclough's version of CDA, six step procedure which connected textual data to discourse practice and ultimately, social practice. For enhanced reliability, a coder was engaged, where inconsistencies were discussed to reach an agreement with the researcher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following Fairclough (2003) three dimensional framework, the analysis traces the ideological representation of environmental issues at the textual level which forms a basis for discursive features and reveals the underlying ideology at the explanation level. At the textual level, the study identified passivization, nominalisation, statistical quantifiers and lexical choice. At the interpretation level, the production and consumption of the idea of growth was articulated through naturalisation of the concept of growth as well as intertextuality and strategic use of text.

Textual Analysis

Passivation

The use of passive voice is associated with the deletion of the agent or minimization of the doer of the action. The use of passivation is a distinct grammatical structure that is prevalent in environmental discourse. Inspired by Halliday's (1977) notion of foregrounding, the use of passive voice was shown to emphasize certain aspects of the global environmental crisis by attributing them more importance and urgency in comparison to others. In the same vein, Steffensen and Fill (2014) highlighted the significance of grammatical choices in environmental communication where structures can enhance environmental consciousness, emphasize messages or encourage behavior change.

The passive construction features the form of the verb to 'be', and a past participle verb, followed by an optional agent. In the selected reports, passivation was identified as summarized below using various formations of the passive form.

Table 1: Passivisation

Rank	FORM OF THE VERB 'TO BE' in passive	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Were	22	44%
2.	Was	20	41%
3.	Are	5	10%
4.	Is	2	5%

Table 1 shows the frequency of passive voice use in the environmental reports, with a total of 49 relevant instances identified.. The most prominent constructions featured the form of the verb 'to be', and *were* plus past participle which occurred 22 times where it was used passively in plural



form. *Was* came in second in rank appearing in 20 passive sentences. *Are* and *is* were used 5 and two times respectively to form a passive voice construction.

The high incidence of ‘were’ may be associated with the fact that the corporations are entities-plural. The combination of *were* with a verb aided in emphasizing actions as opposed to the actors. In the same way, the form of the verb ‘be’ in ‘was’ plus a verb helped the report to implicitly manipulate language and highlight the doing word as opposed to the subject performing it. ‘Are’ and ‘is’ were used less in formation of passive forms in comparison with ‘were’ and ‘was’. This may be attributed to preference for collective effort reference as opposed to individual ecological responsibility. In the present study, instances of passivization were exemplified as shown below:

- 1) Forest officers were allocated to monitor the growth and survival of the trees, and regular reports on the number of trees planted and their survival rate will be provided to the EAC Secretariat BAN 2
- 2) management policies in place to help ensure risks are managed and mitigated across the organization EXTf 3
- 3) 1.4% of waste generated was taken to dumpsite and 2.1% incinerated. MANU 1.

In excerpt 1, the report features a passive construction where the agents have been omitted. In both cases, the identities of entities *allocating* resources were omitted. This passivisation also worked to naturalise growth as it placed more relevance on economic gain in terms of growth and consumption. Additionally, the constructions shrouded responsibility as the statements failed to reveal the individual or entity expected to undertake the stated actions. This grammatical choice worked to depict consumption which has been shown to contribute to ecological harm than good.

Are and *Was* in excerpts 2 and 3 respectively, were used to develop sentences in passive form that were agentless. In excerpt 2, the reader is left to make their own assumptions as to who is responsible for risk management and mitigation. Similarly, excerpt 3 cites the actions of *dumping* and *incineration*, of which no actor is assigned to perform the said acts in the interest of the environment. This further perpetuates the growth story as waste is also regarded as a phenomenon with capacity to grow or increase. This may suggest a shift of blame where corporations may shield themselves from commitment to their pledges or promises in as long as revenue is generated. In a similar vein, Lischinsky (2015) observed the presentation of the natural environment as an entity in CSR reporting, which was meant to diminish company culpability.

Further in agreement with the present study, Lohar and Iqbal (2022) aver that passivation emphasizes the action while the actors behind environmental degradation remain in disguise. Passivisation therefore works to reinforce economic growth while omitting the agents of action. This feature is also in line with Ashraf, Murtaza, and Arslan (2025) argument that passive constructions tend to encourage greenwashing practices. The scholars argued that such constructions constitute linguistic resources that facilitate obstruction of agency; this makes it a



discourse of manipulation. The findings are also in line with Noor et al (2025) who also noted the manifestation of passive constructions and explained them as a form of agency deletion.

Nominalisation

Nominalization entails the conversion of adjectives and verbs into nouns. Nominalization works along with passivisation in discourse and may aid in analyzing any hidden ideologies in a text. In a similar manner to the passive voice, nominalization may lead to blame shift and deletion of agency, Halliday and Martin (1993), Billig (2008). Nominalization is a type of grammatical metaphor where one grammatical form (like a noun) is used in expressing a concept that is commonly described by another word form such as an adjective or verb. The combination of grammatical structures and cognitive processes that manifest nominalization are seen as an instrument that is key to our interpretation of environmental issues. This is because it acts as a tool for activating particular cognitive schemas in the real world, which makes them seem more important to the reader. In the present study, nominalisation was examined for its role in revealing environmental values and perspectives. It is evident that the language of the ESG reports was keen to highlight economic success and growth while environmental issues were presented vaguely. Nominalisation therefore aided in the articulating growth as the most significant goal for the corporations. The use of nominal constructions to emphasize economic success and expansion are as summarised in the table below.

Table 2: Nominalization

Rank	Nominalized term	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Development	18	47 %
2.	Consumption	7	18%
3.	Growth	5	13%
4.	Expansion	4	10%
5.	Implementation	4	10%

In Table 2, A total of 38 nominalized words were singled out across the corpus and interpreted in the context of occurrence in the Illustrations below. Of these, *development* was the most prevalent with a 47% occurrence. This may be attributed to the nature of corporate discourse under investigation. Following closely was the nominal *consumption* due to the consumer driven nature of the reports. *Growth* also had five nominalisation incidences, followed by expansion used instead of 'to expand'. Lastly *implementation* appeared four times as a nominalised word , facilitating the construction of complex, abstract corporate concepts. These were further exemplified in the context as below:

4). The **implementation** of this plant positions our business not only as environmentally conscious but also as cost-prudent and eco-friendly. AGRIC 2

5). Responsible **Consumption** and **Production**, resource usage is monitored and managed. . TELE 3



- 6). Increased sales of electrified vehicles and expansion of the value chain related to electrified vehicles

In excerpt 4, *implementation* is nominalized in relation to minimizing destructive practices. However, the construction manages to present this information in a formal tone but fails to mention the agent of the action. This shields the corporation from future accountability since there is no indication of the specific department or individual to ‘implement’. Excerpt 5 also features the notions of consumption and production which are nominals used in place of the verb forms ‘consume’ and ‘produce’. This facilitates the compaction of several ideas into one construction. It is also important to note that, the term consumption is related to consumerism, an ideology criticized by Stibbe(2021) for its impact on natural resources. The use of the nominal versions allows for their acceptance as normal and inevitable events in the life of the company. Excerpt 6 demonstrates the preference for the nominal ‘expansion’ in place of the more direct verb ‘to expand’. The nominalisation of the word ‘expand’ also facilitates agent deletion thus obscuring the agent expected to perform the action.

In agreement with these findings, Acha (2022) notes that nominalisation plays a major role in understating negative issues such as environmental destruction when used with verbs that entail ecological exploitation. Nominalization was also found by Noor,et al. (2025) in environmental discourse in the legal field as a form of abstraction that hides the agency of a problem or minimizes responsibility of actors in a discourse. This means that that the ideological functions of nominalization including agency deletion, cohesive functions and revelation of power relations which may undermine ecological conservation. Farooq and Umar (2021) consider nominalization as a euphemistic device that uses the derivational morpheme-ion to formulate nouns from verbs. These verbs are largely linked to ecologically destructive practices such as pollution and degradation. As realised in the data for the present study, nominal such as ‘consumption’ and ‘expansion’ remove the need for an agent or perpetrator of the destructive behavior. This in effect shields corporations from bearing the responsibility for ecological destruction while they emphasize economic increase or growth.

Growth-Oriented Statistical quantifiers

The use of statistics or metrics has been shown to add onto the economic narrative in corporate environmental reporting. Choi et al (2025) argue that statistical messaging heightens the ability to perceive risk and enhances intention in environmental communication. The statistics are regarded as credible evidence which shapes audience attitudes. Through statistical figures, numbers and currency as well as metric indicators, the writer presents information on the corporation’s progress towards certain set goals. In the current study, numerals were the most common quantifiers in relation to growth, investment and sales. As seen in the table below, the numerals formed a formidable part of the text. Currency symbols were also included with a low prevalence.

Table 3: Growth-Oriented Statistical quantifiers

Rank	Quantifier Type	Frequency	Percentage
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1.	Numerals	2812	99.6 %
2.	Currency	11	0.4 %

In the table 3 above, the high incidence of numerals is attributed to the need to quantify growth, progress and development. Numbers were used for comparison and to show improvements or decline in revenues, growth or investment as exemplified below. The study however excluded dates and page numbers in the token count of quantifiers. The occurrence of currency figures was linked to the need to show the financial implications of growth or economic income.

(7). Initially, with a capacity of 1,650 tonnes of cane per day, the company saw significant growth over the years, expanding to 3,500 TCT BAN 2

(8). It plays a major role in power generation thanks to its flexibility and capacity for responding to the strong growth in demand fueled by the electrification of uses. TotalEnergies' strategy • Increase the share of natural gas in the sales mix to 50% by 2030 ENER 1

(9). in addition, we realised KSh 220 million through sale of 488 570 pieces of network equipment to Toronto Merchants who will refurbish and re-use this equipment. In total, we collected 132 tonnes of e-waste TELE 3

In example 7, the selected corporation cited an increase in its production quoting a rise from *1650 tonnes* to *3500 tonnes*. This is reported as a commendable growth rate. However, the ecological implications for this growth' were not explicitly considered. In excerpt 8, a percentage was quoted in relation to sales and an increase in demand. This also points out the fact that growth is one of the major priorities as captured in the reported percentage. In excerpt 9, sales worth several millions were recorded alongside a promise that equipment will be reused. This implies that the reader is expected to correlate economic success with well-being. This association further pushes the 'growth is good', narrative where the public is expected to view economic expansion as an indicator of progress despite the fact that the success comes with ecological costs. Therefore, the statistical perspective engages measurements that represent expansion and resource exploitation as essential elements for progress.

In agreement with these findings Muhammad et al (2025) established that the quantification of nature was realised grammatically through specific numbers, infused amounts and non-specific numeration. This graduation and quantification of nature was noted to be a promotional strategy meant to marketise and commodify nature despite its positive outcomes. Acha (2025) additionally cites statistical information as a manipulative strategy where figures are used to hedge against the effects of consumerism. According to his study, the statistics not only contribute to the economic growth discourse, but also result in the erasure of nature. Therefore, the use of statistical messaging culminated in the reinforcement of the growth-focused aspect of the ESG reports in the present study.



Growth in Discourse Practice

The production, distribution and circulation of environmental reports of corporate Kenya facilitates interpretation of the discourse practice. The growth agenda was circulated as a dominant narrative in these reports as revealed through linguistic resources at the textual analysis level. The discourse practice was further summarized into rationalisation and normalisation of growth and marketization of ecological challenges where growth was regularised in the discourse whereas ecological challenges were framed as an economic opportunity. These are further expounded and exemplified below.

Rationalisation of Economic progress

Rationalisation constitutes one of the major typologies of legitimisation in discourse studies Van Leeuwen (2007). Rationalization influenced both the production and consumption elements of the discourse practice. In the context of corporate environmental discourse, rationalisation was manifested through narratives that explicated economic success as a product of unlimited growth. The ESG reports shaped growth as an inevitable and objective part of life. Realised through the quantification of natural resources, growth was interpreted as a measure of economic expansion. Similarly, the high incidence of passive markers and nominalisations in ESG reports also attested to the construed inevitability of growth among corporations. The growth narrative was further reinforced institutionally through attribution to institutional forces. The growth-centred narrative was evidently embedded in the ESG reports as they epitomized economic progress as the main objective of company operations. The rationalisation of growth through quantification and institutional authority appeal was as exemplified in the excerpts below.

10). Holcim, in accelerating growth, expanding our solutions and products, leading in sustainability and innovation, and delivering superior performance. MANU 2

11) Our project portfolio is aligned to the Least Cost Power Development Plan (LCPDP) which considers national demand growth and proposes generating plants taking cognisant of generation mix and capacity. ENER 2

In excerpt 10, the concept of growth was evaluated based on the increase in performance. The growth was evaluated positively as the source of 'superior performance', an indicator of the company's logical evaluation of growth as good. In excerpt 11, growth was rationalised through appeal to an authoritative or institutional figure-the LCPDP. The objective of growth is therefore justified by its alignment with the demands of the LCPDP which is deemed as correct in its expectations of economic progress for the selected corporation.

These findings align with Bondi (2016) who identified rationalisation as the most prevalent legitimization strategy in CSR reports. Rationalisation was achieved through reference to purposes and methods as well as technology and innovation. The findings also support Mattei (2025) in his discovery that current economic narratives prioritize economic growth at the expense of well-being. Instead he proposes a rationalisation of value and progress in line with sustainable living



and not just economic growth. As seen above, it is apparent that listed companies discursively appropriate growth in their ESG and CSR reports.

Normalisation of Growth

Fairclough (1995) highlights the connection between specific lexis and ideology, in particular, he argues that words can naturalize a particular ideology in the beliefs of speakers. The sampled environmental reports featured a high incidence of statements that presented economic growth as an expected outcome. Economic growth was particularly emphasized alongside sustainability practices. Several instances of normalisation of growth were realised based on the term growth and its conjugates such as growing, grown and grew as exemplified below.

(12). in action, over the past year. This indicates the important role that Sustainability reporting plays in highlighting the potential of the private sector to champion innovation, which in turn, spurs national development and growth that is harmonious with the Sustainable Development Goals. MANU 2

(13). A Sustainable Future Driven by Growth and Collective Purposeful Actions BAN1

In example 12 above, the terms *Development* and *growth* are shown as interrelated so that the reader naturally expects all growth and development to be ‘sustainable’ which might not be the case. In example 13 above, growth is propagated as a crucial ingredient to a ‘sustainable future’. The futuristic perspective further enhances the growth perspective which depicts a movement from one state of affairs to another. Besides, the future-oriented nature of such discourse, it has previously been linked to the neoliberal-ideologies which emphasize growth and development. Consistent with this, Tentama and Nabilah (2020), concludes that future-orientedness propels individuals and corporations towards a seemingly elusive outcome where achievement is not guaranteed. This further illustrates the growth-oriented nature of these reports where ecological concerns are seemingly trying to keep up with the economic demands of the corporate world.

Marketisation of ecological challenges

The market-based approach to nature is one of the discourse practices through which the growth theme is developed. This approach according to Mariki (2016) evaluates the economic value of natural resources. It argues for the sustainable use of resources in order to gain economically where economic interests balance with environmental protection. Marketization of the environmental challenges is a discursive practice that brings out the theme of growth. This is indicated by the choice of market-driven solutions proposed to counter challenges such as climate change. Marketization is realized through market-related concepts, principles of marketing and business in relation to natural resources. Moreover, this is achieved through the presentation of nature in terms of competition and business-related practice. In the present research ecological problems were regarded as opportunities for corporations to expand their



profits, sales and revenue. This production of ESG reports from a business perspectives were as exemplified in the excerpts below.

- 14) Integrating sustainability into our business is not just about mitigating risks but also about seizing opportunities for growth and value creation. COMM 3
- 15) Instead of viewing waste as a liability, we see it as an opportunity to extract value. MANU 3 These include green products and services such as green lending and green financing.
- 16) we will make informed decisions, ensuring that our carbon trading venture aligns seamlessly with our sustainability goals and broader environmental aspirations. AGRIC 2

In excerpt 14, the selected corporation states that it intertwines sustainability with its economic practices. The company elaborates that its environmental conservation efforts are driven by the underlying opportunities that can be translated into economic gain. This implies that their main goal is to derive economic value from the conservation initiatives carried out by the company. The same case is witnessed in excerpt 15 where waste is deemed profitable. The corporation therefore downplays the impact of its waste generation and its effects presenting it instead as an opportunity to increase income for its shareholders termed as 'value creation'. Excerpt 16 further develops the market-driven agenda through marketing principles of competition and value. The concept of *carbon trading* can be interpreted as the motivation behind their sustainability efforts. This further reinforces the marketization of ecological challenges.

In line with these findings, Fairclough (1993) proposed marketization as a discursive strategy where corporations strategically attune themselves to be competitive and attractive to the public. This was further corroborated by Steffensen (2024) emphasizing that market dominance often translates into quantification and growthism. Halliday (2001) also criticizes a grammar that construes natural resources as boundless and limitless. This therefore diminishes the value of natural resources in the eye of the reader to the extent that it is only deemed valuable if it can produce financial gain for the shareholders and the company.

Social Legitimation of Economic growth in the social -economic context

Legitimation was conceptualised by Van Leeuwen (2007) as tenable through authorization, rationalisation and moral evaluation among other ways. Suchman(1995) proposes that legitimation as a general perception that an action by an entity such as a company is correct and appropriate based on certain values and beliefs. In the current study, the growth ideology was entrenched through the legitimation of growth at the explanation level. This entailed the justification and acceptance of progress, expansion and development as well as increased consumption as a socially acceptable idea.



Economic growth was therefore presented an automatic and justifiable goal of the corporations. This was further integrated through the economic and institutional power structures. The power structures were installed by the powerful actors-corporations and regulators- who were keen on policy structures that justified growth.

Furthermore, institutional reinforcement was achieved as a result of unequal relations between corporations and shareholders. The companies held institutional power to produce and legitimise the growth narrative as they controlled the dissemination of these reports and their content. In alignment with this, Mattei (2025) realised that through communication, economic discourse is framed. This has implications for policy development and societal perceptions towards sustainability. The asymmetrical relations between shareholders and corporations were therefore exacerbated by this growth ideology whose social, political and economic implications were evident in the ESG reports.

CONCLUSION

The growth ideology was realised discursively through passivisation, nominalization, and statistical quantifiers. These textual features served to conceal agency and show negative practices in abstract form. At the discourse practice level, the environmental reports were interpreted and consumed by readers as normalisation of growth, marketization of ecological challenges and rationalization of economic progress. This interpretation enabled for-deleted corporations to promote economic gains at the expense of environmental protection. At the social practice level, the environmental discourse in the reports exhibited power imbalance and asymmetry of relations since they promoted the belief that nature was for exploitation by man for economic success. Embedded in the discourses was the notion that institutional forces such as listed companies had a right to utilize resources as they wished in order to provide value for shareholders. Moreover, the discourses reproduced a discourse that elevated and legitimised economic growth above all other social and economic priorities. This therefore demonstrates the need to reexamine the language of environmental communication. The study has demonstrated that the language is not neutral but is rather replete with narratives in favour of economic growth and corporate expansion which may work to exacerbate ecological degradation. The findings have thus highlighted the need for improvements in ESG reporting to ensure that only beneficial ideologies are disseminated by corporate bodies. This can be achieved through the enactment of environmental communication policies alongside ecolinguistic audits and checks that instrumentalise language as a tool for ecological preservation rather than destruction.

Ethical Clearance

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles and approved by Machakos University, Kenya

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to express their sincere gratitude to Machakos University for providing the institutional support necessary for this research.



Sources of funding

This research paper received no internal or external funding.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

The study was conceived by Stella, who also handled the data collection and analysis. Prof. Geoffrey Maroko and Dr. Nancy Ong'onda contributed to the interpretation and overall review of the manuscript. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Data availability statement

The datasets on which conclusions were drawn are accessible on company websites of cited corporations.

Citation:

Muriungi, S. W., Maroko, G. M. & Ong'onda, N. A. (2026). Balancing Growth with Sustainability in Discourse? Environmental Ideologies in Kenyan Corporate Communication. *International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research*, 4(3), 534-550.
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