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### Too Influential or Too Inadequate? A Critical Discourse Analysis of Environmental Advertising

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Too Influential or Too Inadequate? A Critical Discourse Analysis of Environmental Advertising

Communication Studies Capstone

University of Portland

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### Abstract

This study focused on how environmental advertising constructs messages and shapes reality for consumers. Guided by discourse theory, this study used critical discourse analysis to examine and thematize images of environmental advertisements, resulting in the four themes of personalizing, personification, time, and shock value over specifics. From these findings and their analysis, it became clear that today's consumers of environmental advertising are in a predicament: these advertisements create unwarranted feelings of responsibility, blame, and pressure, while simultaneously falling short in offering substantive advice on how to make meaningful change. To address this twofold problem, this study created a guide to be a more critical consumer of media, as well as a suggested media campaign to offer a better approach to environmental advertising.

*Keywords:* Environmental Communication, Green Advertising, Discourse Theory

## Introduction

Climate change is the most pressing issue of our time. The existence of a healthy, inhabitable earth is on the line, and therefore all of humanity is also at risk. What can be done? Who is to blame? Media and advertising companies have invested substantial time, energy, and money into influencing how you answer those questions. Whether we know it or not, the communicated messages we consume through media and advertising have significant power in creating what we see to be reality. In this case, our understanding of environmental issues, what can be done to address these issues, and who is to blame for them is all shaped by the media.

With this in mind, this study focused on researching how environmental advertisements construct messages and shape reality for consumers. Discourse theory guided this work, with the claim that language is not neutral, and communication plays an active role in constructing society. Using critical discourse analysis methodology to analyze images of environmental advertisements, this study found that these advertisements construct messages and shape reality through personalizing the message, providing voice to nonhuman objects and animals, illustrating the concept of time, and focusing on provocative imagery over specific information. These findings point to the predicament that consumers find themselves in, as environmental advertisements simultaneously create feelings of responsibility, blame, and stress, while also falling short in offering concrete actions to be taken to address the problems.

Clearly, a new approach is needed. From these findings, a guide was created to offer help to consumers as they navigate this predicament. The guide includes insightful questions to ask oneself when consuming environmental messaging as well as a suggested campaign that is

both more reflective of the factual best practices for addressing climate change while also more empowering in that it can lead to meaningful action.

### **Rationale for study**

According to digital marketing experts, most Americans are exposed to around 4,000 to 10,000 advertisements each day (Marshall, 2015). Though this number also includes indirect advertisements, for example seeing brand logos and names on clothing or appliances, it does point to the fact that we as consumers are overwhelmed with advertising. While general climate change communication has received increased focus over recent years, there remains to be more opportunities for research on environmental *advertisements* and how they influence consumers. Given the urgency and magnitude of the issue of climate change, as well as the growing prevalence of environmental advertising, we need now, more than ever, to continue to develop a greater understanding of how these advertisements influence consumers, for good and for bad. More specifically, we need to attempt to better understand the purpose of these advertisements, how much of these advertisements are rooted in fact and truth, the efficacy of these advertisements, and where they fall short.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Framework**

In exploring how environmental advertisements influence consumers, I will use discourse theory, along with the lens of the critical paradigm. Discourse theory is an interdisciplinary theory based on the assumption that language is *not* a neutral vehicle, but rather plays an active role in constructing reality. This theory is often used to analyze text,

images and speech. Many discourse theorists understand people to be active sense-makers who perform actions by using the context's setting and cultural understandings (Molder, 2009).

This term *discourse analysis* dates back to the 1950s when the linguist Zelig Harris undertook a large research study on language production. Later on, John Sinclair and Malcolm Coulthard argued for the importance of studying real-life interaction when researching linguistics, pointing to today's understanding of discourse theory. In addition to this shift to studying real-life material in the context of language, discourse theory and analysis took hold as the social sciences was beginning to understand language as not a passive medium, but rather "an active and constructed tool that co-constitutes the world around us" (Molder, 2009). This assumption that language actively constructs and co-constitutes the world leads into discourse theory's argument that that our own accounts of reality are *constructions* of reality, rather than actual reflections of reality. In the 1970s, French philosopher, Michel Foucault made significant contributions to discourse theory by introducing the concept of power. This contribution expanded this theory from a focus on everyday interaction, to a greater focus on institutionalized rules of society (Molder, 2009).

This theory is appropriate for this investigation since it emphasizes the ability of language – text, speech, and visual images – to construct our understandings of reality. Moreover, in this context, this theory also provides a connection between language and *power*, that being the power of media and advertising companies to create certain understandings of the climate change crisis, who is responsible for this crisis, and what can be done about it.

Before conducting and contributing my own research on this topic, we must first explore and review existing literature related to climate change communication and the role of media.

While reviewing multiple pieces of literature, there were various themes that were repeated throughout that will help understand the greater array of existing literature.

### **Media**

The primary overarching theme found in existing literature is *media*, under which two other important concepts fall, including agenda setting, and greenwashing or green advertising. To begin with the larger overarching theme of media, we can turn to Corbett (2006) who discusses media extensively, often questioning the intention, purpose, and truthfulness of media. In regard to news media, Corbett points out that “media do not fundamentally challenge the dominant power structure because they are an integrated part of it.” (Corbett, 2006, p. 242). Olausson (2011) also discusses the media, pointing out that we must acknowledge that media is, “the primary intermediary between science, politics, and the citizens, as well as their agenda-setting role for citizens’ meaning-making on climate change” (Olausson, 2011, p. 295). Much of this paper will be guided by this challenge of media in general, pointing to how it has constructed our understandings of environmental issues, both in where it falls short in this sense, and where it may overstep.

### **Agenda Setting**

An important theme found in environmental communication related to the media is agenda setting. Corbett (2015) describe agenda setting as the idea that while media doesn’t necessarily tell us *what* to think, it does effectively tell us what to think *about*. The media, as well as the government, has considerable influence in what topics are on our minds. Pralle (2009) explains how problems appear to rise and fall in importance, often changing independently of the actual state of the problem. Moreover, some problems that we are

*actually* facing are not deemed by the media and the government as important problems and therefore do not receive the needed attention. Pralle (2009) continues, also pointing to the changing industry of media, saying that the media, “can exacerbate cyclical patterns of attention, as it is under pressure continually to find new problems and new solutions, or at least new angles on old ones. As a result, media attention to problems is likely to rise and fall over time” (Pralle, 2009, p. 788).

### **Green Washing/Green Advertising**

An additional influential theme found throughout environmental communication literature is the concept of green advertising and greenwashing. Generally speaking, advertising is a necessary activity for companies and organizations to engage in to promote their brand and sell products. Given the current capitalistic economic structure in the United States, advertising is essential, as companies need to ultimately make money to be successful. As Corbett (2006) points out, “Ads are not the root cause of environmental evil... Advertisements are not alone in attempting to influence our thoughts and behaviors” (Corbett, 2006, p. 148). “However,” Corbett (2006) continues, “there is enough evidence to suggest that advertising has a ‘special cultural power’ and sends particular powerful messages about the natural world and our relationship with it” (Corbett, 2006, p. 148). With that in mind, advertisements are certainly worthwhile to be studied in this context. *Green advertising* encompasses ads that, “promote environmental sustainability or convey ecological or nature-friendly messages that target the needs of environmentally concerned customers, regulators, and other stakeholders” (Schmuck et al, 2018, 415). Schmuck et al (2018) shares that previous research has identified three major advertising appeals used in green advertising: “ (1) functional or fact-based appeals; (2)



emotional or image-based appeals; and (3) a combination of the previous two types of appeals” (Schmuck et al, 2018, p. 414).

Closely tied to the concept of green advertising is *green washing*, which came about as a result of companies sharing green claims about their products that were deceptive, confusing, or even simply false. *Greenwashing* refers to these misleading appeals. Schmuck et al (2018) shares that with consumers growing skeptical of green advertising, companies have had to adapt and “are inclined to apply more substantial and less deceptive claims, which points to a ‘more responsible approach to green advertising’” (Schmuck et al, 2018, p. 415).

As Schmuck et al (2018) found in their study, this green advertising is effective. The study compared green advertising to conventional ads and found that “both types of green ads led to higher brand attitudes and purchase intentions” (Schmuck et al, 2018, p. 424-425). The two types of green ads used in this study were perceived environmental utilitarian benefit and virtual nature experiences. In other words, advertising a brand as environmentally friendly increases the customer’s perceived utilitarian benefit while also providing a virtual nature experience, which leads to more positive evaluations of the brand, and ultimately higher likelihood of purchasing of the product.

### **Research Question**

Guided by discourse theory, with special focus on the concept of green advertising, this study aims to answer the following research question:

*RQ #1: How do environmental advertisements construct messages and shape reality for consumers?*

### **Methods**

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

This study used critical discourse analysis to investigate environmental advertisements. Critical discourse analysis involves studying texts, speech, and visual images to uncover the “shared meanings that contribute to, or represent, social structures and ideologies” (Cramer, 2009). In comparing it to traditional discourse analysis, a key difference is that critical discourse analysis has explicitly political and social goals: This approach seeks to acknowledge and expose the injustice and inequality that exists in societal structures. Given that this study was conducted with the discourse theory as the theoretical framework, the related critical discourse analysis methodology was most appropriate. Critical discourse analysis methodology shares the assumption with discourse theory that language is not a neutral vehicle, so this methodology will appropriately recognize how environmental advertisements can influence consumers.

### **Data Collection**

Once the methodological approach was decided, I went about collecting images of environmental advertisements to analyze. This process included searching Google images with the search terms “environmental advertisements,” and close variants. These searches were conducted in an incognito window, to aim for objectivity and avoid previous searches from influencing the results. 30 images were collected in total. These images were created and distributed within the past fifteen years (2005 - 2020) to represent the current environmental advertising practices. The advertisements I gathered were from various sources, including nonprofit organizations like World Wildlife Fund and Keep America Beautiful, and for-profit companies, like Fiji Water and Jeep.

### **Data Analysis**

After gathering 30 images of environmental advertisements, the next step was to analyze the artifacts. This analysis process began partway through data collection, so that I could tailor the later searches to fill in noticeable gaps in my gathered artifacts. This study used an iterative grounded analysis, which involves alternating back and forth between reading the data and existing theories and models. Iterative grounded analysis includes three distinct parts: primary cycle coding, secondary cycle coding, and thematic or advanced cycle coding. To begin, primary cycle coding involved combing through the gathered images and analyzing the elements of each image carefully. Each important or meaningful aspect of the photo was assigned a descriptive word or phrase that captured that aspect's essence. These words or phrases are called *codes*. Using the tools in Google Drive, I was able to highlight that portion of the image and add the word or phrase as a "comment," which would appear on the screen next to the image. These codes were then all written out onto slips of paper, along with the number of the source image, or the image that had been used to create the code. Once all of the data had been broken apart into these codes, it was time for the secondary cycle coding. This step of data analysis involved laying out all the strips of paper with their codes and then organizing the codes into broader categories based on commonalities between the codes. This was done by making piles of paper slips with similarities and giving each pile a vivid and descriptive name. Once I was satisfied with these groupings, I moved onto the third step of analysis, advanced data analysis, which involved grouping together similar categories and creating broader themes. These themes were given names to encompass the greater meaning. The entire process of coding, categorizing, and thematizing the images took roughly 8 hours to complete.

and was an immersive experience into the artifacts through which I was able to develop significant findings.

### **Findings**

Advertisements have significant influence in shaping how consumers view the world and their role in it. This is no less true for advertisements relating to the environment and the environmental crisis at hand. This study was undertaken to gain a better understanding of how environmental advertisements construct messages and shape reality for consumers. Guided by discourse theory and critical discourse analysis methods, 30 images were collected, coded, categorized, and thematized. This analysis process resulted in four main themes to address the research question of how environmental advertisements construct messages and shape reality for consumers: personalizing, personification, time, and shock value over specifics. In the following pages I will unpack and explain each of these themes.

#### **Personalizing**

To begin, the theme of personalizing was most prominent among the images analyzed. This theme encompasses how advertisements target the audience personally, with straight forward demands to viewers and even personal threats. This theme also includes how some of the advertisements focused on how environmentally friendly actions can benefit humans (the viewer). Additionally, this theme of personalizing also covers advertisements that communicate to viewers a sense of agency and influence. These advertisements attempt to personalize the experience of climate change, often by taking an explicitly anthropocentric stance. The following examples illustrate the different aspects of this theme.



Figure 1. World Wildlife Fund Advertisement, 2008

This advertisement from the World Wildlife Fund depicts a human body after being mutated into appearing with the face of a fish. In addition to the unsettling image, the capitalized and bold white font grabs the reader's attention with a personal demand: "stop climate change," and a personal threat, "before it changes you." This message brings the large and abstract issue of climate change to the *personal* sphere. With the threat of one's own body mutating and turning into a fish, one is likely to take the threat of climate change more seriously.

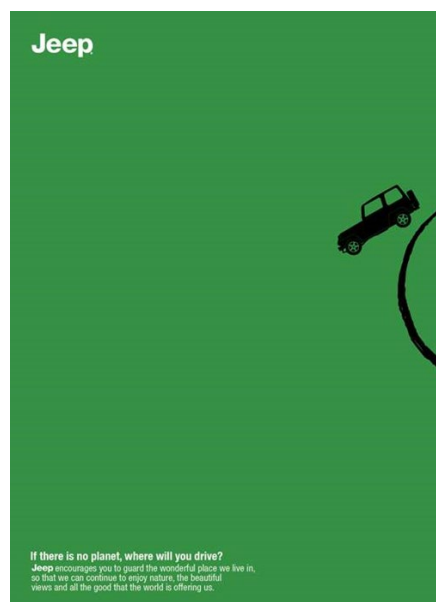


Figure 2. Jeep Advertisement, 2012

This second example of the personalizing theme is an advertisement by the automobile maker Jeep. The words at the bottom of the advertisement ask, “If there is no planet, where will you drive? Jeep encourages you to guard the wonderful place we live in, so that we can continue to enjoy nature, the beautiful views and all the good that the world is offering us.” This provocation is completely focused on the human benefit of protecting the environment. By asking the viewer to solely consider their own life and the joy they receive from being in nature, this advertisement, once again, brings the issue of climate change home in order to encourage the viewer to do what they can to address the issue of climate change.



*Figure 3. Fiji Water Advertisement, 2008*

The third and final example of the personalizing theme is this advertisement from FIJI Water. The company’s slogan at the time is shared in large letters, “Every drop is green.” (The slogan has since changed to “Earth’s Finest Water”). The personalizing comes from the encouragement at the bottom of the ad, “Your FIJI Water purchase helps reduce carbon emissions and project Fijian rainforests.” This mention of “your” purchase personalizes the experience for readers, encouraging them to imagine how their purchase of a bottle of water

can “help” the environment, regardless of the fact that plastic pollution can now be found on every beach in the world (Plastic Pollution – Facts and Figures, n.d).

### Personification

The second important theme developed through the analysis of these advertisements is personification. This theme contrasts acutely with the previously discussed personalizing theme, and instead encompasses advertisements that give voice to non-human animals and objects. The conversation about climate change is dominated by those who can have a voice, and species-speaking, this limits the conversations to humans. Therefore, with some creativity, organizations have used advertisements to provide a platform for animals and other objects to share what they have to say relating to the environment and the climate crisis we face.



Figure 4. World Wildlife Fund Advertisement, 2018

This first example of the personification theme represents the majority of images that fall into this category as it shows an animal, in this case a lion, with wording that is intended to

be a message directly from the lion to the viewer. In this case, the lion, dressed in clown paint and appearing next to a drum, asks, “Your amusement or **my life**” in reference to animals being mistreated in circus shows. This question provokes the viewer to consider what is more important, the life of an animal or their amusement by watching such animal in a circus, or, more generally, their amusement from a variety of activities that threaten animal well-being.



Figure 5. Keep America Beautiful Advertisement, 2013

The second example of this theme of personification illustrates a less common, though still significant, category of advertisements that depicted inanimate objects sending a message. In this example, part of Keep America Beautiful’s I Want to Be Recycled campaign, there is a plastic water bottle, saying “I want to be a bench. Recycle me.” Giving voice to an inanimate object is attention grabbing. This method a unique way to encourage viewers to recycle water bottles and plays with a human’s response to the statement and demand coming from an inanimate object.

### Time

A third theme that came out of the analysis of these various environmental advertisements is time, which includes all of the images that speak to the concept of time in



some manner. In these advertisements time is often seen as limited and running out, which creates a sense of anxiety and stress for the viewer. The advertisements that fall under this theme often used visual metaphors to create their messages of running out of time, offering an effective way to visualize the abstract idea of time.



*Figure 6. Bund Environmental Group Advertisement, 2011*

This advertisement by Bund Environmental Group illustrates the concept of time with a clock. This image depicts how time is running out to address climate change by showing the clock hands inching closer to one another and, in the process, squishing a mother and baby gorilla who display facial expressions of extreme fear. The overall message of time ticking and animal threat is encapsulated in the image's text, which writes, "Every 60 Seconds a Species Dies Out." Other advertisements in this theme used metaphors comparing the earth and its rising temperature to a melting candle, and the rising sea levels to liquid in an hourglass.

### **Shock Value over Specifics**

The fourth theme is shock value over specifics, which represents how many environmental ads focus more on grabbing the viewer's attention through shocking and provocative images and pay less attention to providing factual data or specific

recommendations. This method aligns with the advertising industry's purpose of gaining the attention of consumers. Almost all the environmental advertisements fall into this category to some extent, though many others use various techniques on top of the use of eye capturing imagery.



*Figure 7. Endangered Wildlife Trust Advertisement, 2010*

This advertisement by the Endangered Wildlife Trust illustrates this theme in that it shows an image of a dead bird full of pieces of plastic that it had eaten. The message being that the bird had died from ingesting plastic pollution from humans. The message is solidified with the text, "If you don't pick it up, they will." This advertisement recognizes the impact that this image will have on viewers who will likely recognize the inherent wrongness of a bird dying from eating plastic that had been polluted by humans. As such, this advertisement lets the image do the talking, so to speak, and keeps the design quite simple.

### **The Problem**

In reviewing the findings that resulted from an intensive critical discourse analysis of environmental advertisements, a problem for media consumers appears. This problem is twofold. First, environmental advertisements, as described above, put undeserved and

unwarranted responsibility, blame, and pressure on the consumer. Yet at the same time these advertisements also do not offer specific, factual words of advice and do not lead to any significant action being made against climate change.

To address the first part of this complex problem, data shows that while individual actions matter, making significant progress in the fight against climate change needs more than individual action. In her article, “I Work in the Environmental Movement. I Don’t Care if You Recycle,” climate justice expert, Mary Annaïse Heglar writes;

The belief that this enormous, existential problem could have been fixed if all of us had just tweaked our consumptive habits is not only preposterous; it’s dangerous. It turns environmentalism into an individual choice defined as sin or virtue, convicting those who don’t or can’t uphold these ethics (Heglar, 2019).

In this article Heglar describes this process as victim blaming, also pointing out that the 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report shared that the vast majority of global greenhouse gas emissions come from just a handful of corporations. Heglar encourages us to forget the idea that climate change is our individual faults, and instead, “take on the collective responsibility of holding the true culprits accountable” (Heglar, 2019). This problem is evident in nearly all the environmental advertisements studied, seen in the personal threats, demands, and statements giving power and responsibility to the consumer.

The second part of this two fold problem comes in conflict to that discussed above. While offering unwarranted messages of personal responsibility and blame for climate change, the environmental advertisements lack specific words of advice for what the consumer can do, if they were to take action. If the advertisements advised anything they told viewers in

numerous examples to “act now,” to “keep it clean,” and to “use what you need.” While these advertisements may spark emotional responses of responsibility, pressure, guilt, or shame, these pieces of advice are largely useless, as they are unlikely to inspire any concrete or significant action be taken. A complex and contradictory problem like this demands attention. I plan to address this problem in the following section with a guide offering suggestions for individuals to be more critical of the media they consume.

### **Discussion**

This research was undertaken to explore how environmental advertisements construct messages and shape reality for consumers about environmental degradation and the climate change crisis. Above all, this research was guided by discourse theory which provides the theoretical background arguing that language is not a neutral vehicle, but rather language has is actively constructing our world around us. This study’s findings, explicated above, further support this theory. The findings proved that the advertisements actively play a role in reality construction through personalizing the message, providing voice to nonhuman objects and animals, illustrating the concept of time, and focusing on provocative imagery over specific information. These findings also incorporate Michel Foucault’s concepts of power, in regard to the power that advertising agencies have over the consumer. This research extends what is already known about discourse theory by further incorporating how language is used, both for good and for bad. More specifically, this research extends this theory by how this power of language can be misused and exploited, as well as how this power of language can be used differently for increased efficacy and authenticity.

In response to these points, the findings illustrate that these advertisements misuse and exploit the power of language, most prominently, by an overemphasis on *personalizing* the message of who is responsible for taking action against climate change. These demands to the viewer, direct references to “you,” and anthropocentric messaging create unfounded ideas that solving climate change is completely up to consumers. Additionally, these advertisements add more undeserved pressure and anxiety on consumers by using the concept of *time*, specifically how time is running out.

Furthermore, the findings show that the advertisements fall short in using their power for creating real change in their focus on *shock value over specifics*. Provocative imagery combined with little specific advice other than to “act,” result in a consumer unprepared to take the “action” that is being encouraged. In all, these advertisements put consumers in a predicament, as they are forced to grapple with feelings of responsibility, blame, and stress, while also not being told accurately and explicitly what actions they can take to have the most beneficial impact on the movement to combat climate change.

The practical significance of this project lives in the response to this problem and the subsequent predicament consumers find themselves in. The following is a guide for individuals to be more critical consumers of the advertisements they consume.

### **Your Guide to Navigating Environmental Advertising**

**Overall Purpose:** This guide is to encourage consumers to become familiar with the discourse theory’s main argument: language (including text, images, and speech) has the power to construct your reality. Therefore, I argue, we should respect and carefully consider the language we come across and consume, especially through the form of advertisements. As

demonstrated above, advertisements use a variety of different methods and tools to provoke certain reactions, feelings, and thoughts in the viewers, and we should all be more aware, both of what we are being told and how. The overall purpose of the guide is to help consumers to not be passive consumers of advertisements, but rather actively be critical of the messages they are receiving through the powerful means of communication from powerful sources.

**The Questions:** This guide comes mainly in the form of important and thought-provoking questions. The design of these questions drew some insight from Stewart and Logan's (2002) concept of dialogic listening. Dialogic listening is an interpersonal communication technique that involves navigating the tension between *letting the other happen to you* and *holding your own ground*. According to this concept, *letting the other happen to you* relates to allowing the another to connect with you and even influence you, while holding your ground involves asserting yourself authentically (Stewart and Logan, 2002). In this context, the concept can be used to navigate the tension of taking in the advertisement and giving it a chance to communicate its message, while also being sure to, as a consumer, hold your ground of being critical of the message and assert oneself where there is disagreement or discord.

The following questions should be considered when viewing any environmental advertising:

1. *What is the message?*
  - a. Try to pinpoint and describe what the advertisement is specifically saying to you.
2. *How does this message make me feel?*

- a. Take a moment to reflect on your emotional reaction.
3. *What is the source? Who is funding this?*
    - a. Investigate the source of the image. Do they have a vested interest in you feeling the way you do? How do they benefit from you feeling this way?
  4. *What do “they” want me to do? Is this a concrete recommendation? Is this based in fact?*
    - a. Be critical of the action they are encouraging. Fact check the information to ensure its truthfulness.
  5. *Will these actions make a difference? How so?*
    - a. Imagine if you were to carry out the action encouraged. How much of a difference would that make? And what could make a greater difference?
  6. *How will you move forward?*
    - a. Here is where you need to discern what part of this message is useful and accurate enough for you will take away.

**The Campaign:** In addition to the questions outlined above, I also address this problem of environmental advertising placing too much responsibility on consumers while, simultaneously, not offering any concrete advice or solutions, with a proposed media campaign. This campaign would represent a needed shift in environmental advertising by sharing factual data about who is truly responsible for climate change and environmental issues. As I argue, larger institutions and corporations have disproportionately more negative

impact as well as disproportionately more power than the average individual consumer, and this information needs to be shared. Advertisements, for example, should expose what sources create the most greenhouse gas emissions. This media campaign would also include real, concrete, specific actions for the individual consumer to make the most difference. For example, advertisements would explain the importance of voting for candidates and policies who support environmentalist issues. Instead of simply saying to “act now,” these advertisements would leave consumers feeling empowered, yet not solely to blame. Moreover, through the powerful use of communication, these advertisements would construct a more accurate representation of reality for consumers.

### **Limitations**

Like with all research, there were limitations to this project. The primary limitation or shortcoming of this research was that, while this project’s purpose was more general and focused on the issue broadly, it encompassed a wide range of advertisements and perhaps did not narrow its focus enough to specific organizations, industries, topics, or issues. Moreover, this project could be undertaken with a greater number of artifacts. While 30 advertisements provided significant findings, more images could have yielded even richer material.

Additionally, a limitation to this study, as a whole, was the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis has led to instability in the life of the researcher, as with the lives of most individuals at this time, which resulted in a decrease in amount of time to invest in this project, as well as loss of access to resources, like a printer, that would have helped with the analysis process. Finally, a significant opportunity for further research would be to incorporate qualitative interviews from participants sharing thoughts and experiences they have from interacting with environmental



advertisements. Moreover, these interviews could test various different sample advertisements created for the suggested campaign, described above. This would create an interesting data set to further analyze how advertisements construct reality.

### **Conclusion**

Given the gravity of the issue of climate change and the threat it poses to all life on earth, it demands to be addressed from all possible angles, using all possible tools. This includes a communication angle. The narrative of climate change – what can be done, who is to blame – is created and shared through communication from media and advertising. This study investigated how environmental advertisements construct these messages and shape reality for consumers. The results found that this is done through personalizing the message, providing voice to nonhuman objects and animals, illustrating the concept of time, and focusing on provocative imagery over specific information. However, these findings pointed to a significant issue: environmental advertisements are both overstepping in how they place undeserved responsibility and pressure on the individual consumer, while also falling short, in not offering concrete, substantive advice. A new approach is needed. With this in mind, this study provided a helpful guide for consumers to question the media they consume and be more critical of its messaging, as well as offering a suggested media campaign that tackles the problem above. To address climate change, we can't just work *harder*, we also have to work *smarter*. There is a massive opportunity to use the power and reach of environmental advertising to create a new narrative that is both more accurate of how to best combat climate change, while inspiring to meaningful action by individual consumers.

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