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## SHOPPING AS ‘BEST PRACTICE’ — ANALYZING WALMART’S SUSTAINABILITY POLICIES\*

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**Abstract.** Nowadays, companies who want to engage environment-friendly consumers increasingly rely on green-economy oriented campaigns. Such categories of (ethical) consumers are numerically increasing, and expressions evoking environmental friendliness are becoming particularly trendy. In this vein, words such as ‘sustainability’ have been variously recontextualized/reframed and have become an ‘ought to’ for media-savvy companies ‘with a vision’ — Walmart, the American multinational retail corporation, being a relevant case in point. It is no accident that, on the first Google page for ‘sustainability’, ‘Walmart’ proudly surfaces: <http://corporate.walmart.com/global-responsibility/sustainability>. The company has made an explicit commitment not just to expand the business but also to improve communities and enhance the sustainability of the products they sell, by encouraging more responsible production practices, while at the same time making product choices more affordable for customers, as reported on its website. However, as the world’s largest company, Walmart is an easy target for attack mainly by environmentalists. Sometimes, Walmart gives its critics grounds for some legitimate criticism in a variety of fields ranging from the supply chain emissions to renewable energy and preserving habitat. Such criticism resonates across the media, owing to their ‘lack of closure’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), finalized to offer an unbiased perspective. Against this ‘complexified’ (Macgilchrist 2007) background, our study aims to examine, from a broadly Multimodal and Positive Discourse Analysis perspective, the Walmart website ‘sustainability’ pages with their variety of communicative strategies, advertising ‘responsible’ Walmart positive attitudes to fundamental issues like Energy, Waste, Products and Responsible Sourcing.

**Keywords:** green-economy, multimodal and positive discourse analysis, communicative strategies, advertising ‘responsible’

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, companies increasingly rely on green-economy oriented campaigns, in order to engage the growing number of ethic, environment-friendly consumers. Expressions evoking environmental friendliness are becoming ever trendier and there is a widespread awareness that value-based needs rather than simple material needs must be met, in order to satisfy the consumers’ wishes more effectively. Accordingly, popular words such as ‘sustainability’ have been variously re-contextualized/re-framed and have become an ‘ought-to’ for media-savvy companies ‘with a vision’.

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\* Although this paper is the product of joint research, the Sections Aims; Integrated Methodology; The Appraisal Framework Resources; Lines of Appeal; Data — *Walmart Sustainability 2.0* Video; Discussion, were written by Lucia Abbamonte, while the Sections Positive Discourse Analysis — The Proactive Orientation; Ecolinguistics — The Cognitive Orientation; Corpus; Procedure; Data — *Walmart Today — A Sustainable Lifestyle*; Discussion were written by Flavia Cavaliere. The INTRODUCTION and the CONCLUDING REMARKS were written together by the authors.

Walmart, the American multinational corporation and the largest retailer in the world<sup>1</sup>, is a relevant case in point, since its explicit, advertised goals are perfectly in line with the contemporary ‘green-oriented scenario’. Interestingly enough, Walmart’s advertising campaigns seem to echo the Sustainable Development Goals, as declared through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the United Nations Summit on 25 September 2015. In the words of Helen Clark, the UN Development Program Administrator, “World leaders have an unprecedented opportunity this year to shift the world onto a path of inclusive, sustainable and resilient development”. The dedicated website foregrounds a graphic representation that shows such goals in a captivatingly symmetrical way, with bright colours and catchy iconic images, so as to make them visible/credible (figure 1)<sup>2</sup>.



**Figure 1.** Sustainable Development Goals (retouched here for copyright reasons)

<sup>1</sup> In brief, in 1962, ‘Mr. Sam’ Walton opened the first Walmart store in Rogers, Ark., and nowadays Walmart has 2.3 million associates worldwide — 1.5 million in the U.S. alone, and each week, nearly 260 million customers visit Walmart’s 11,500 stores under 63 banners in 28 countries and e-commerce sites in 11 countries. The revenue for the fiscal year 2016 was of \$482.1 billion.

<sup>2</sup> In detail, the Sustainable Development Goals are; 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere; 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries; 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss; 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development. Retrieved from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/post-2015-development-agenda.html>. Last accessed September 2016.

In this environment-sensitive scenario, many for-profit companies try to obtain the certification of *Benefit Corporations*. In order to be recognized as ‘B-Corp’ by the nonprofit B Lab, for-profit companies have to meet rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency. Nowadays, there is a growing community of more than 1,600 Certified B Corps from 42 countries and over 120 industries, whose unifying goal is working together to redefine success in business<sup>3</sup>.

Walmart is increasingly acting as a B-Corp, e.g., in 2005, Walmart took a leading role in disaster relief, contributing \$18 million and 2,450 truckloads of supplies to victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and in 2010 committed \$2 billion through the end of 2015 to help end hunger in the United States<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, Walmart launched a global commitment campaign to sustainable agriculture, aiming to strengthen local farmers and economies, while providing customers access to affordable, high-quality food, and made a major commitment to environmental sustainability, announcing goals to create zero waste, use only renewable energy and sell products that sustain people and the environment<sup>5</sup>. In gist, the company’s commitments are to expand the business while at the same time improving communities. Part of Walmart’s efforts to that effect include its recent Restorative Justice programmes. Since shoplifters frequently target Walmart’s shops, the company strongly needed to ease the burden on law enforcement by adopting non-coercitive, sustainable methods. Accordingly,

Walmart has begun a novel experiment: deal with shoplifters internally by meting out its own version of law and order through an initiative called “Restorative Justice.” The idea is to give some accused shoplifters, such as first-time offenders, the option of completing an online remedial program designed to deter through education, rather than jail time. [Josh Sunburn August 15, 2016, <http://time.com/4439650/walmart-shoplifting-crime> our italics].

*Walmart’s choice to turn to Restorative Justice programmes is in line with its social-oriented, discursive, empathic image:*

Restorative Justice (RJ), envisioned as a new model of coping with crime by changing criminal behaviours, has attracted many adherents over the last decades. [...] The aims of RJ essentially involve re-establishing social equality in relationships by promoting reconciliation and encouraging a sense of agency. Such goals are pursued through a process whereby parties with a stake in a specific offence cooperatively decide how to deal with its consequences [...] Discursive skills and *dialogistic* exchange are the *par excellence* medium in RJ negotiations. The latter are mainly based on the meeting between victims and offenders where the mediators expertise is essential to the positive outcome of such sessions. [Abbamonte and Cavaliere, 2012: 110,117]<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. AIMS

Against this background, our study aims to examine the Walmart’s videos on ‘sustainability’ with their variety of communicative strategies, where ‘responsible’ Walmart positive attitudes to fundamental issues like Energy, Waste, Products and Responsible

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<sup>3</sup> See among others <https://www.bcorporation.net>.

<sup>4</sup> *Our History: Sam Walton*. Retrieved from <http://corporate.walmart.com/our-story/our-history>.

<sup>5</sup> *Sustainability/ Energy*. Retrieved from <http://corporate.walmart.com/global-responsibility/sustainability/>.

<sup>6</sup> See also, among others, Abbamonte and Cavaliere 2013; Abbamonte, 2014.

Sourcing are promoted. From a broad Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) approach, we will analyse the ways in which Walmart's videos convey the messages of 'sustainability', and of 'green-oriented', 'environment-sensitive', 'consumer-friendly' productive and commercial activities, for the advertised purposes of creating a better, healthier society in a better and more just world.

### 3. INTEGRATED METHODOLOGY

When dealing with multimodal texts, such as Walmart's Sustainability videos, which rely on the synergic interaction of many different communicative codes (shapes, images, colours, lighting, composition, perspective, music, words, rhythm, sequence, setting, etc.) the issue of using comprehensive methodology/ies comes to the foreground. Furthermore, since these videos also include discourses and talks in the fields of attitudes, emotion languages and advertising, an integrated methodology (Abbamonte 2012) seems to be the more practical choice. In other words, we need to face the analytical challenge of utilizing the tools and resources from different approaches. Hence, our main approach to the analysis of aspects of contemporary Walmart corporate communication relies on a MCDA perspective (Kress 2010, van Leeuwen, 2013, Martin 2004), which enabled us to analyse both the *audio-visual* and the *verbal* components of the multimodal texts under investigation, since it is an intrinsically comprehensive and inclusive methodology<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> CDA is probably the most comprehensive attempt to develop a theory of the inter-connectedness of discourse, power, and ideology. The term 'critical' principally means unravelling or 'denaturalising' ideologies expressed in discourse and revealing how power structures are constructed and negotiated in and through discourse. CDA research specifically analyses institutional, political, gender, and media discourses which 'testify to more or less overt relations of struggle and conflict' (Wodak 2001:2). [...M]ore recently there has been a visual turn inspired by scholars who have incorporated visual images into concepts of discourse and have moved towards broader multimodal conceptions (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; Machin 2007). This extension of CDA into visual semiotics also has its origins in early Hallidayan theory, which maintains that language is only one semiotic resource out of many and that several forms of representations, linguistic and non-linguistic, are used in the construction of discourse. For example, while political and ideological views of newspapers can be expressed in the choice of different vocabularies (e.g. 'resistance fighters' vs. 'insurgents') and different grammatical structures (e.g. active vs. passive constructions), visual structures in the form of images just as much can convey ideological meanings. Applying some of the linguistic principles found in SFL [...i.e. a set of tools derived from SFL that allows us to study the choices of visual features as well as lexical and grammatical choices in language], Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) shows how images, photographs, diagrams, and graphics also work to create meanings communicated by a text, which are often more implicit or indirect than language. [...] One of these tools is social actor analysis (van Leeuwen 1996), a linguistic and visual inventory of the ways we can describe and classify people and some of the ideological effects that these classifications can have. [Abridged from Mayr. 2012:1-2, Semiotix XN-7] <http://semioticon.com/semiotix/2012/03/multimodal-critical-discourse-analysis/>.

Since issues of social esteem, desirability, pro-active attitudes and change/improvement are entailed in these videos, we utilised additional resources (see below) for more fine-grained analyses.

#### 4. THE APPRAISAL FRAMEWORK RESOURCES

A major focus of these videos is on the values of social esteem, which are analytically classified in the Appraisal Framework (AF), within the category of Attitude/Judgment<sup>8</sup>. In more detail, from an AF perspective<sup>9</sup>, Walmart's goals mainly amount to gain *social esteem* and avoid *social sanction*. In White's account, the AF was developed as some researchers felt the need to define the attitudinal values by which texts apply social norms to evaluate human behaviour. Virtually all evaluative uses of language can be investigated by utilizing the AF resources. For example, such resources can help identify certain patterns by which so-called 'objective' texts within the media favour certain values of attitude while excluding others (Martin, 1992: 523, 535).

In gist, the system of Appraisal comprises three large interactive systems:

1. Attitudinal positioning
2. Intertextual positioning
3. Engagement and dialogistic positioning

The Attitudinal Positioning resources, concerning positive and negative evaluations, are further sub-categorised into:

- I. *Affect*
- II. *Judgement*
- III. *Appreciation*

Judgement, in particular, refers to meanings that are analysed to evaluate human behaviour either positively or negatively by reference to a set of institutionalized norms. Judgement can be either explicit or implicit and is divided into two broad categories, Social Esteem and Social Sanction, as shown in Table 1.

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<sup>8</sup> Appraisal: An Overview. Retrieved from <http://www.grammatics.com/appraisal/appraisalguide/framed/frame.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> The Appraisal Framework (AF) was developed between 1990 and 1995 by Professor Jim Martin and his team based at the University of Sydney. It has emerged as an extension of M.A.K Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics within a wider literacy project named *Write it Right* from the Disadvantaged Schools Program of the New South Wales Department of Schools Education. The aim was «to examine the written genres of a range of significant key learning areas of secondary education (English, history, science, mathematics and geography) and to consider their relationship to the written genres of selected work situations (the media, science industry and administration)». See also F. Christie, J.R. Martin (Eds.), *Genres and Institutions: Social Processes in the Workplace and School*, London, Cassell, (1997) 2000, p. 1. The Appraisal Framework website has constantly been updated by P.R. White (2005, 2012, 2015) and is now denominated as "The Appraisal website — The language of Attitude, Arguability and Interpersonal Positioning". Retrieved and distilled from <http://www.grammatics.com/appraisal/index.html>.

Table 1

**The full system of Judgement\***

Social Esteem	positive [admire]	negative [criticise]
<b>Normality</b> (custom) 'is the person's behaviour unusual, special, customary?'	standard, everyday, average...; lucky, charmed...; fashionable, avant garde...	eccentric, odd, maverick...; unlucky, unfortunate...; dated, unfashionable ...
<b>Capacity</b> 'is the person competent, capable?'	skilled, clever, insightful...; athletic, strong, powerful...; sane, together...	stupid, slow, simple-minded...; clumsy, weak, uncoordinated...; insane, neurotic...
<b>tenacity</b> (resolve) 'is the person dependable, well disposed?'	plucky, brave, heroic...; reliable, dependable...; indefatigable, resolute, persevering	cowardly, rash, despondent...; unreliable, undependable...; distracted, lazy, unfocussed...
<b>Social Sanction</b>	positive [praise]	negative [condemn]
Veracity (truth) 'is the person honest?'	honest, truthful, credible...; authentic, genuine...; frank, direct...;	deceitful, dishonest...; bogus, fake...; deceptive, obfuscatory...
<b>propriety</b> (ethics) 'is the person ethical, beyond reproach?'	good, moral, virtuous...; law abiding, fair, just...; caring, sensitive, considerate...	bad, immoral, lascivious...; corrupt, unjust, unfair...; cruel, mean, brutal, oppressive...

\*P.R.R. White (2015). *An introductory tour through appraisal theory*. Judgement evaluating human behaviour. Retrieved from [http://grammatics.com/appraisal/ AppraisalOutline/UnFramed/AppraisalOutline.htm#P186\\_38019](http://grammatics.com/appraisal/ AppraisalOutline/UnFramed/AppraisalOutline.htm#P186_38019).

**5. LINES OF APPEAL**

Another interesting aspect of the videos under scrutiny is the specificity of the language of advertising with its recognised lines of appeal (Dyer 1988). It has been observed that advertisers utilise different themes proven to appeal to the audience, such as ideal families; glamorous /elite lifestyles, success stories; romantic love stories; beautiful natural settings; beautiful women and handsome men; sex appeal; arrogance; humour; (Fowles 1976, 1996; Dyer 1988). Lately, emotions<sup>10</sup>, cyber-scenarios, and beautiful tableaux of (exceptionally) *clean, pure natural setting*, where healthy, powerful, beautiful human bodies move and shine at ease, are also utilised<sup>11</sup>. It is by now a shared notion that advertisers resort to stereotyping and intertextual references (to/from well-known art works, comedies, movies etc.) to the effect of making their advert memorable and interesting (Dyer 1988, Saward 2012).

<sup>10</sup> As concerns the musical dimension, the Italian playlist *Spotify* subdivides musical tunes not only according to genres, but also to moods: *the happy hipster, young, wild and free, caffeine rush, deep focus, mood booster*. The Italian *Mediaset Premium* TV broadcasting company subdivides its programmes according to emotions and vital energy: *energy, discovery, joy. Smart Box*, a new formula to promote travels, sells emotional experiences, such as “adrenalina”, “peccati di gola”, “atmosfera d’incanto”. Retrieved from Playlist. [https://support.spotify.com/it/using\\_spotify/playlists/save-your-music-with-playlists/](https://support.spotify.com/it/using_spotify/playlists/save-your-music-with-playlists/).

<sup>11</sup> In a similar line, there is a growing body of fiction literature that deals with climate change and global warming, but from a dystopia perspective. For example, Michael Crichton’s *State of Fear* (2004), defined as a techno-thriller, presents climate change as “a vast pseudo-scientific hoax” and criticizes the scientific opinion on climate change. Further, Margaret Atwood’s trilogy *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013) presents a dystopic world grounded on social inequality, nightmarish genetic technology and catastrophic climate change.

## 6. POSITIVE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS — THE PRO-ACTIVE ORIENTATION

The pro-active orientation of the Walmart's videos also need to be accounted for. Now, CDA is best known for its tendency to deconstruction and its foci on ideologically driven discrimination (gender, ethnicity, social variables), and, typically, has not offered productive accounts of alternative forms of social organisation, nor of social subjects, other than by implication (Kress 1996, 2000). Instead, a recent complementary perspective (Positive Discourse Analysis) has been provided by J.R. Martin (2004) on the potential resources of discourse analysis for promoting positive, pro-active attitudes. In his own words,

One face [of discourse analysis], and the better established of the two, I'll refer to as CDA realis. This is the deconstructive face of CDA, and is concerned with exposing language and attendant semiosis in the service of power [...]. CDA realis continues to make an immense contribution to studies of the interestedness of discourse, across contexts where inequalities of generation, gender, ethnicity and class disrupt humanity [...]. The complementary face of CDA I'll refer to as CDA irrealis, since I judge it has realised much less of its potential. This face is oriented not so much to deconstruction as to constructive social action [...] to make the world a better place. (Martin 2004: 179—200, *passim*).

The PDA attitude has educational implications as well. In Martin's words, it can act as a window on the construction of values and the circulation of power through “a discourse which we can use both to monitor and design change — and thus materialise CDA irrealis in the interests of its visions of better worlds” (2004: 19). In the contemporary semiosphere, the languages of advertising typically aim to shape and foreground visions of better worlds, which can also be widely acknowledged and endorsed as authentic and reliable, such as the visions promoted through the campaigns by the Italian 1971 Foundation  *Pubblicità Progresso*. Walmart's campaigns move along similar lines, yet the corporation itself, its advertised goals notwithstanding, is not exempt from criticism<sup>12</sup>.

## 7. ECOLINGUISTICS — THE COGNITIVE ORIENTATION

For a more complete understanding of our Walmart videos, insights from a complementary approach, i.e. ecolinguistics, were also useful. To some extent, Martin's PDA notions paved the way for these recent orientations in discourse analysis, which also emphasise the need for transformative narratives (Stibbe 2016)<sup>13</sup>. In the words of Stibbe, ecolinguistics<sup>14</sup>:

*can explore the more general stories we live by — patterns of language that influence how people both think about, and treat, the world.* Ecolinguistics can investigate mental models

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<sup>12</sup> Such criticism, as well as Walmart's responses, are easily retrievable on line, but an analysis of these debates lies beyond the scope of the present article.

<sup>13</sup> A. Stibbe (2016). Ecolinguistics: the search for new stories to live by. Seminar — Catania 7 September.

<sup>14</sup> Ecolinguistics is evolving as a rich and multifaceted approach, including ecocriticism (Garrard 2014), ecopoetics (Knickerbocker 2012), ecofeminism (Adams and Gruen 2014), ecopsychology (Fisher 2013), ecosociology (Stevens 2012), political ecology (Robbins 2012) and environmental communication (Cox 2012).

that influence behaviour and lie at the heart of the ecological challenges we are facing. There are certain *key stories* about economic *growth*, about technological *progress*, about *nature* as an object to be used or conquered, about profit and success, that have profound implications for how we treat the systems that life depends on. [...In particular, as regards environment-related topics] *the language of advertising can encourage us to desire unnecessary and environmentally damaging products*, while *nature writing can inspire respect for the natural world*. How we think has an influence on how we act, so language can inspire us to destroy or protect the ecosystems that life depends on. *Ecolinguistics*, then, is about *critiquing forms of language that contribute to ecological destruction*, and *aiding in the search for new forms of language that inspire people to protect the natural world*. (Stibbe 2015: III and passim, our italics).

To some extent, **PDA and ecolinguistics share a pro-active attitude** and emphasize the need for forming sensitive attitudes. Indeed, communities are formed around attitudes to things (Bourdieu, 1980), and in our times, a strong need for re-shaping communities according to positive values is increasingly felt. To give one example, Pallera (2014), CEO of Ninja Marketing, presented a new approach based on transpersonal psychology, to identify individuals at transpersonal level, i.e. as part of a larger community, rather than as a set of isolated selves<sup>15</sup>. This rhetoric of solidarity is foregrounded in the (video) narratives of Walmart's sustainability campaigns.

## 8. CORPUS

Our corpus consists in the following Walmart's sustainability videos (below). Our qualitative analysis highlighted thematic analogies and recurring visual and verbal features, as illustrated in the data sections.

1. Walmart Sustainability 2.0 — Introduction — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lje89Y9nWD0>
2. Walmart Today: A Sustainable Lifestyle [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guMjWM\\_3n-Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guMjWM_3n-Y)
3. How Wal-Mart embraced sustainability — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxC0TOFSIdU>
4. Walmart's Sustainability Efforts — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P\\_zgtlW2TWY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_zgtlW2TWY)
5. Wal-Mart Sustainability Overview — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qb8VUZAtNXo>
6. Wal-Mart measures sustainability <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwjuJQ6BI7U>
7. Walmart Drives Sustainability — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iO2hYvWYBkI>
8. 2014 Walmart Sustainability Milestone Meeting Highlights — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WR2jTnxH6D4>
9. Walmart Moms for Sustainability — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4gujVfcg80>
10. Walmart Drives Sustainability with Oracle RightNow — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xS89fMHVcZw>
11. Walmart's sustainability journey — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2pNBLiHI4k>

<sup>15</sup> M. Pallera (2014). Un e-commerce ha quadruplicato il valore grazie all'amore. C'è un marketing che vende e migliora il mondo. *Centodieci*. Retrieved from <http://www.centodieci.it/2014/12/dal-marketing-3-0-spiritualita-quando-lazienda-risuona-lanima/>. N. Falco Simeone (2015). Nasce il Marketing Transpersonale, il nuovo paradigma che cambia l'approccio alla disciplina. Retrieved from <http://www.ninjamarketing.it/2015/05/20/marketing-transpersonale-nuovo-paradigma>.



12. Goals of Walmart's sustainability journey — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnh5ug0\\_5d4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnh5ug0_5d4)
13. Walmart — The Future is Sustainability — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tz8FAam\\_Oa8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tz8FAam_Oa8)
14. Walmart — Sustainability Showcase — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrZedWL80Uk>
15. Walmart — 2015 Sustainability Milestone Webcast — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuz3csDqQuQ>

These videos are broadcasted through YouTube, which is an intrinsic indicator of relevance and transitive communication. The relationship between YouTube and the advertising world is growing stronger: in the words of Wojcicki and Kyncl, “YouTube pitches itself to advertisers as the medium of the future [...and predictably], in five years, the majority of advertiser-supported videos will take place on a mobile device”<sup>16</sup>.

## 9. PROCEDURE

In our analysis, to better describe how images compose/convey meaning and shape (hyperbolic) visual metaphors, we utilized many of the following notions (abridged from Stinson, 2012; Ascher and Pincus, 2013; Chandler, 2016), as follows:

- ◆ Composition
- ◆ Salience (the dominant image that draws our attention)
- ◆ Gaze vectors (the lines that draw us towards a particular image. Gaze Demand: The eyes of the image demand out attention ; Gaze Offer: The person in the frame could be looking beyond the frame)
- ◆ Colour and lighting (e.g. red = passion; blue = peace and tranquillity; black = death or fear) monochromatic: Black and white; Saturation: the colour could be bleached out — open aperture of the camera lens so too much light floods in; Chiaroscuro: dramatic use of light and dark shadows.
- ◆ Symbolism and icons, intertextual allusions (references to other texts and well known symbols/ images).

As regards *perspectives*, we can have high angle shots when the camera is higher and above the subject, for orienting viewers, and low angle shot when the subject is taken from below, so that it appears more powerful/threatening. To compose an image, close up, medium or long distance shots are the more frequent options and establish the landscape and the actors' relationship to the scene. Canting (the image is tilted left or right on the axis) and two-point shots (a shot of two people together) are also utilized.

## 10. Data — *Walmart Sustainability 2.0* video

Among the above listed videos, owing to space constraints, we selected as examples the two that most significantly depict and represent the sustainability themes, according

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<sup>16</sup> D. Lieberman. 2015. ‘YouTube Pitches Itself To Advertisers As The Medium Of The Future’. Retrieved from <http://deadline.com/2015/04/youtube-advertising-newfront-future-video-1201418305>. Bought by Google in 2006, YouTube allows users to watch, upload, and share videos through easily available technology and is the world's largest video site, boasting more than 1 billion users who upload 300 hours of video a minute (Wegert 2015). In this way, a very wide variety of user-generated and corporate media videos can be displayed, including TV clips, music videos, video blogs, and educational videos.

to the criteria of relevance<sup>17</sup>. Here follows the script of the *Walmart Sustainability 2.0 — Introduction*, which revolves around themes of *progress, change for good, development and increase, efficient and pure energy sources*. We analysed it along the dimension of the AF Attitudinal positioning, which includes the somewhat overlapping notions of Affect, Judgement and Appreciation, as follows.

Legend:

**Affect** [positive<sup>+</sup>/negative<sup>-</sup>]

**Judgement** [social esteem<sup>+</sup>/social sanction<sup>-</sup>]

**Appreciation** [positive<sup>+</sup>/negative<sup>-</sup>]

In the decades ahead, a **dramatically different world**<sup>+</sup> will begin to take shape. **Powerful forces**<sup>+</sup> have already begun contributing to this transformation.<sup>+</sup> The growing<sup>+</sup> global economy *increased reliance on technology*<sup>+</sup> and a higher demand for energy. But perhaps more than any others, two trends **we** have already begun to see will shape our world. First billions of people are lifting themselves **out of poverty and joining middle class**<sup>+</sup>, with this progress comes a desire to enjoy the comforts and conveniences of modern life. Second, those of us already in the middle class have begun to develop *higher expectations* of the product **we** buy. **We will continue to care about costs and quality**<sup>+</sup>. The coming years will see an even greater demand for products that come to us efficiently, ethically and sustainably.<sup>+</sup> **We will need** to alter the ways **we** take natural resources from the earth and make the products **we** sell. **We will need to refine** how **we** move those products and ourselves around the world. **We will need to** rethink how **we** buy and use those products and ultimately how **we** reuse them. **Making these changes** will require a total transformation of business as **we** know it. **We** need to look at our businesses more holistically<sup>+</sup> and ask questions about everything necessary to make them *productive*<sup>+</sup>. How do **we** run businesses **more efficiently using energy sources that don't pollute**<sup>+</sup> our air, water and soil. How do **we** eliminate the concept of waste from our processes and begin to reuse the resources we have thrown away for so long. How do **we** make products that are not only recyclable<sup>+</sup> but also more durable<sup>+</sup> and that can be used multiple times and in multiple ways? The **solutions**<sup>+</sup> to these many challenges represent **opportunities for innovation, ingenuity and partnership**<sup>+</sup> on a scale unprecedented<sup>+</sup> in human history. There are **opportunities** to do *the right thing*,<sup>+</sup> right not only for the planet but also for the billions of people who call it home. There are **opportunities** for small and large businesses to *prosper and grow*.<sup>+</sup> *Not only can businesses succeed, in the future, they can also lead the way*.<sup>+</sup> Some have already begun. [Sustainability 2.0. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lje89Y9nWD0>]

<sup>17</sup> The notion of relevance, amplified from the usual acceptation of the word, traditionally pertained to psychological and cognitive studies (among others, Higgins and Bargh 1987; Humphreys and Garry 2000; Fecteau and Munoz 2006), and has recently been utilised in communication studies and linguistics as well. Moving from Grice's maxims of conversation, in the 1980s and 1990s, Sperber and Wilson developed the Relevance theory (1986; 1997), with attention given to the context and the cognitive environment where the speech acts take place. In brief, the relevance theory considers that linguistic communication is based on *ostension*, i.e. the communicator 'shows' meaning, and *inference*, i.e. the recipient deducts new information presented in the context of old information. Such deduction is spontaneous and gives rise to *contextual effects* in the cognitive environment of the audience, which are a necessary condition for relevance. The greater the contextual effect, the greater the relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 119). In some detail, any utterance said on a specific occasion is relevant, as well as whatever bears on the meaning of an utterance; also, data or findings taken to bear on some phase or aspect of linguistic analysis are relevant. Accordingly, speakers/writers are expected by a maxim of relation to make their contribution to an interchange relevant rather than irrelevant (see also Jaworski and Coupland 2006). From this and contiguous perspectives, Content value, Cognitive value, Socio-emotional value, and Information source value become relevant (Soojung, Oh 2009).

Apparently, affect is the overarching dimension, finalized to engage the viewers in being/feeling part of the presented activities, mainly through the use of the inclusive **we** and the repeated question form, through the medium of a persuasive voice over accompanied by an empathic music. Both the need for change and sustainable opportunities are foregrounded, so as to meet with Social Esteem judgements. Apparently, such opportunities can be achieved through cooperative efforts under Walmart’s leadership.

The following table synthetically highlights the main **notions** and **techniques** we identified in the video under analysis.

Table 2

**Walmart Sustainability 2.0 – Introduction – analysis**

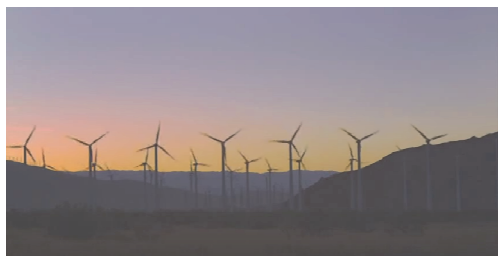
Lines of appeal (verbal+visual levels)	Salient Positive NOTIONS/ MYTHS (verbal level)	Scenario of sustainable activities (verbal+ visual levels)	Techniques (audio-verbal)	Composition/perspective	Colour and lighting	Iconicity/Symbolism
PROGRESS/ BETTER LIFE/ IMPROVEMENT: <i>Billions of people... out of poverty joining the middle class.... and beyond</i>	TRANSFORMATION, CHANGE, GROWTH: <i>Unprecedented in human history, Different, Growing, Increasing, Trends, Shape, Begin, Partnership, Opportunities</i>	Alternative energy use and production (solar panels, eolic turbines, waste recycle) <i>Ethical, efficient, sustainable use of the planet resources [social esteem]</i>	Voice over; Empathic music; Hyperbolic language: <i>Dramatically, Higher, Greater</i>	Mostly verticality and low angle shot	Green, White, Lightness	Clouds, Blue sky, Humanized landscape, domesticated machines, Human cooperation, man+machine synergy

To give a few visual examples, here follow some pictures taken from the video (all retouched for copyright reasons). In picture 1, the notion of progress coming from cooperation among individuals is represented. Natural colours contribute to foreground the synergy between the work of man and nature.



**Picture 1.** Partnership, Opportunities

In pictures 2 and 3 alternative sources of energy are displayed through a skillful dynamics of gaze vectors and angle shots, against engaging (sunset, moving clouds) natural settings.



Picture 2. Eolic turbines



Picture 3. Eco-skyscraper



Picture 4. Re-use- Reduce- Re-cycle

Picture 4 foregrounds a phase of the much emphasised WALMART re-cycling processes, set against the background of a clean, blue sky.

## 11. DISCUSSION

Apparently, the path to a cleaner, safer and righteous world passes through the purchasing of Walmart's products. The 4 "R's" of WALMART sustainability *Re-use-Reduce- Re-cycle- Re-think* are the verbal/visual iconic leit-motif of the campaign. *The pragmatic value and the persuasive force of the video sinergically rely on both the visual and the linguistic levels*, which utilise a variety of resources, as shown in both table 2 and pictures 1—4. As highlighted in terms of AF (see above *Walmart Sustainability 2.0* script), a captivating narrative is thus built that, in terms of PDA, could function as an influential story for the virtual audience of the potential Walmart customers. Indeed, influential stories (and metaphors) do influence the way we live; as Stibbe (2016)<sup>18</sup> made clear, such stories *influence how we think, talk, and act*. However, its persuasive advertising rhetoric notwithstanding, Walmart's credibility has been variously questioned by its critics<sup>19</sup>.

## 12. DATA — WALMART TODAY — A SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE

In the second video we are going to illustrate, the emphasis is again on Walmart's role in 'making the world a more sustainable place'<sup>20</sup>. Within this video, a major focus

<sup>18</sup> To some extent, Stibbe echoes Lakoff and Johnson (1980).

<sup>19</sup> An analysis of cross-mediatic criticism of Walmart's actions and campaigns lies beyond the scope of this analysis, but examples are easily retrievable on line.

<sup>20</sup> This video also illustrates the 'ripple effect of opportunity', i.e. how Walmart provides its employees ('associates') opportunities to grow and pursue different career through specialised training and education. Furthermore, financial services (mortgages, saving plans, financing higher education etc...) are also illustrated.

is on the ‘Love Food, Hate Waste’ programme taking place at ASDA stores, the Walmart’s associate company in the UK<sup>21</sup>.

The ASDA efforts to reduce food waste, thus improving their ‘Green Britain’ Index<sup>22</sup>, are engagingly represented by showing pleasant and collaborative interactions among ASDA shop-assistants and selected customers. Assistants teach parents and children how to reduce food waste by utilizing quizzes, recipe cards, stickers etc. Here follows the script of the video, which revolves around themes of cooperative teaching-learning, finalized to enact the ‘Love Food, Hate Waste’ and ‘Save money, Live better’ mantra. We analysed it along the dimension of the AF Attitudinal positioning, which includes the somewhat overlapping notions of Affect, Judgement and Appreciation.

Legend:

**Affect** [positive<sup>+</sup>/negative<sup>-</sup>]

Judgement [social esteem<sup>+</sup>/social sanction<sup>-</sup>]

*Appreciation* [positive<sup>+</sup>/negative<sup>-</sup>]

As you know, Walmart is a leader in *making the world a more sustainable place*<sup>+</sup>. [...Two written slogans appear, with white lettering on green field, and the yellow logo, in the shape of an asterisk/flower:] «ASDA Save money, live **better**<sup>+</sup>». «Community life — ASDA. We **love**<sup>+</sup> food and **hate** waste<sup>+</sup>».

[Amy Downes — Community Life coordinator informs the viewers about the ongoing ‘Love Food, Hate Waste’ activity.] “It is something we do as business to reduce waste<sup>+</sup> from our stores. The idea of reducing food waste<sup>+</sup> is really important to us.” [Then speaks Laura Babbs — Sustainability manager] “This is really **good focus**<sup>+</sup> to me because the average family with children waste 60 pounds a month on food<sup>-</sup>. So [...we want to] make sure that *great quality food*<sup>+</sup> that we give to **our customers**<sup>+</sup> is **best**<sup>+</sup> stocked, to really live in the **save-money-live-better**<sup>+</sup> mantra.” [Then speaks June Thurston, Hereford] Hi, I am June, I am a Community Life Champion<sup>+</sup>, today [we are doing an activity...] the **little lads**<sup>+</sup> can choose little stickers to see what size portions they should actually be eating<sup>+</sup>.” [A little boy speaks] “I had never known you can freeze baked beans.” [A smiling elderly woman speaks] “I think it is important for us to do these things<sup>+</sup>.” [A smiling younger woman speaks] “**It helps parents**<sup>+</sup> **find new ways of teaching children all these good tips**<sup>+</sup>.” [Then June Thurston is heard again, as a voice over, while images of smiling faces and of a girl with the Down syndrome are sequentially shown] “I think it is really important to engage<sup>+</sup> the customers in this way. It is a one to one. We have got the paper work, the recipe cards, the quiz. Everything is designed to teach them. If I can learn just a little something every day, **it’s a job well done**<sup>+</sup>.” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guMjWM\\_3n-Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guMjWM_3n-Y)

<sup>21</sup> Founded in the 1960s in Yorkshire, Asda is one of Britain’s leading retailers, with its 616 stores. Its main office is based in Leeds, Yorkshire. To give some figures, about 18 million people shop at Asda stores every week. Asda joined Walmart in 1999.

<sup>22</sup> In 2011 ASDA company started a survey on their customers green-sensitivity, since, in their own words, “We know our customers care about being green and they want to lead more sustainable lifestyles. [...]. What our Everyday Experts tell us shapes the way we do business. Back in 2014, 85% of our Everyday Experts told us that they wanted Asda to help them reduce food waste”.

Accordingly, in 2015, they ran the ‘Love Food Hate Waste’ activities across their 600 stores. They promoted in-store events, popped stickers on produce, and offered tips, tricks and recipes for leftovers, thus reaching over 6 million customers that, allegedly, are now saving £57 every year. Retrieved from [https://sustainability.asda.com/sites/default/files/Green%20Britain%20Index%202016%20web\\_2.pdf](https://sustainability.asda.com/sites/default/files/Green%20Britain%20Index%202016%20web_2.pdf).

The overarching dimension here is Social Esteem, as related to the promotion of pro-active initiatives, aimed at generating change at both individual levels and community level towards a more sustainable use of food. An inspiring story of empathy with the needs of the families (of customers) is thus developed through the alternation of the lively, practical, sympathetic speakers, who aim at making ASDA’s efforts visible through the use of smiles, facial expressions, gestures, (enthusiastic) voices and uniforms.

The following table highlights the main **notions** and **techniques** we identified in the video under analysis.

Table 3

**Walmart Today – A Sustainable Lifestyle – analysis**

Lines of appeal (verbal+visual levels)	Salient Positive NOTIONS/ MYTHS (verbal+visual levels)	Scenario of sustainable activities (verbal+ visual levels)	Techniques (audio+visual levels)	Composition/perspective	Colour and lighting	Iconicity/Symbolism
Progress/ Better Life/ Improvement: Smiling interactions shop-assistants- children; Slogans: <i>Quality food, Save money</i>	Transformation, Change, Growth: <i>Better lives;</i> <i>Love food, hate waste;</i> <i>Teaching children to consume better food</i> [ <b>Social esteem</b> ]	Inspiring visual narrative in UK ASDA friendly setting [ <b>Social esteem</b> ]	Lively music; Har- monious alterna- tion of committed individual speakers: Cheerful present- ers & collaborative ASDA assistants & customers (mums +children)	Mostly eye- level shots, canting, two points shots	Bright blue, fluo green + bright colours	Fore- grounded logo and colours, green uni- forms, colorful stickers with vege- tables

To give a few visual examples, here follow some pictures taken from the video (all retouched for copyright reasons). In pictures 5 and 6, we can see the campaign slogan and the ASDA logo, which are often foregrounded in the video with their captivating bright colours (fluo-green, white and yellow) and iconic words/phrases, effectively framed in a meaning bearing visual composition.



Picture 5. Love food/hate waste



Picture 6. ASDA logo

Picture 7 displays the stickers used in the activity to teach children the right amount of vegetables that should be eaten a day, which are emphasized by the photo framing and the brilliant colours (mostly shades of green).

Picture 8 is an eye-level shot of the sustainability manager, which emphasizes her interactive attitude. Again, the ASDA logo and the green-tinged background frame the visual composition.



Picture 7. Food portion stickers



Picture 8. Sustainability manager

### 13. DISCUSSION

The *Walmart Today — A Sustainable Lifestyle* video encompasses a variety of ways in which Walmart's corporation engages the communities towards more sustainable lifestyles. The focus of our analysis was on ASDA stores 'Love Food, Hate Waste' activities. The video utilizes lively music, bright colours, and the speaking head techniques to foreground the message that a kind of community is gathering, with the expressed goal of reducing food waste and promoting healthier and better lifestyles. In particular, the Asda Logo is repeatedly shown: an asterisk or flower, symbolizing the friendliness and outstanding quality of the brand. The shape of the logo stands for the 'organic' and environmental-friendly nature of its business. Its bright colours underline the companies' commitment to quality, and to the wellbeing of its customers. Additionally, the use of simple colors (yellow, green and white) depicts the passion and the basic nature of the business, and evokes the freshness of their produce<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Abridged from *The Walmart Brand* website. Retrieved from <https://www.walmartbrandcenter.com/our-core-identity.aspx>.

Significantly, the assistants keep smiling, and the customers react accordingly, thus, in terms of PDA, a persuasive narrative of fruitful teaching, resulting in positive co-operation between the Walmart-ASDA corporation and their customers, is shaped. From an ecolinguistic perspective, both the notions of spreading green-oriented awareness and of real improvement in sustainability-oriented behaviour are repeatedly shown at multi-modal level. Making explicit the themes of cooperative teaching-learning in the ASDA campaign, by contrast, mainly relies on the verbal level.

#### 14. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Apparently, Walmart Corporation and its associates' promotional communication prioritises their green-oriented, sustainable image. Their advertised efforts tend to encourage more responsible production practices, which (should) provide high quality, more affordable products, as reported on the websites and videos. As we have seen, Walmart's videos shape attractive and empathic multimodal narratives of vibrant, dynamic interventions, which include the production of clean energy, and reprocessing cycles. The development of Community Life-based programme also plays a strategic role in Walmart's campaigns, which aim at reaching out to the local communities (of customers). Indeed, the rhetoric of solidarity is straightforward in Walmart's sustainability campaigns, as Walmart's recent Restorative Justice (RJ) programmes also show. Such programmes aim to promote a socially engaged image of the company.

Furthermore, the fluid YouTube medium, by fully exploiting the grammar of visibility, allows Walmart sustainability campaign to achieve an all-pervasive effect and make its goals visible. The multimodal messages from the videos come down to this: by purchasing the advertised goods, metaphorically laden with positively configured and evolving values of sustainability, billions of people can 'save money, and live better healthier lives', thus emerging out of poverty, and ultimately saving the planet. In gist, shopping as best practice.

In terms of PDA, Walmart advertising displays positive production and distribution models to imitate, through the exploitation of multimodal representational resources, so as to render a persuasive vision of a better world. The contemporary (stereotypical) all-pervasive perception of the need for 'sustainability' and 'green-washing' is thus skillfully and synergically foregrounded both at verbal and audio-visual levels for advertising purposes — one level enhancing the other. From an ecolinguistic perspective, we can notice how Walmart's communication tends to align the virtual customers by getting them onside with the widely shared sustainability values, especially by representing its actions as an inspiring ongoing story of progress.

Which further contribution can ecolinguistics provide to the analysis of communication on the human relations with the environment? Apart from identifying the linguistic and visual resources and workings of such communication, can ecolinguistics make a difference? Largely, ecolinguistic scholars share a strong ideological motivation to promote positive change on the anthropic impact on the planet. As Stibbe (2016) made clear, "Scholars who study environmental communication are particularly concerned with the



ways people communicate about the natural world because they believe *such communication has far-reaching effects* at a time of largely human-caused crises [and thus they encourage] the search for new stories to live by [our italics]”. Now, in the advertising of Walmart’s sustainability efforts, the sustainability challenge is prioritised, and the goal to give billions of people better and healthier lives is captivatingly foregrounded. Hence, an alluring new story to live by is provided. However, credibility is an important issue in this and analogous stories, thus the next step for an ecolinguistic research on Walmart’s sustainability videos could be to verify the influence of such stories on the audiences through cross-media investigations.

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## «ПЕРЕДОВОЙ ОПЫТ» УОЛМАРТА: АНАЛИЗ НЕОДНОЗНАЧНОЙ ЭКОПОЛИТИКИ

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В настоящее время компании, желая привлечь внимание покупателей, заботящихся об окружающей среде, все чаще апеллируют к идеям экологичной экономики. Это обусловлено увеличением категории потребителей экопродукции и массовой популяризацией концепции «экологической безопасности». Термин «экологичность» постепенно становится основной смысловой единицей рекламных и медийных проектов всех перспективных компаний, так как способствует формированию позитивной корпоративной репутации. Международная американская сеть розничной торговли Уолмарт (Walmart) позиционирует себя как «зеленая компания» и активно использует методы экологичного маркетинга. Например, на первой странице поисковой системы Google по запросу «экологичность» выдается веб-адрес корпорации: <http://corporate.walmart.com/global-responsibility/sustainability>. На официальном сайте «Уолмарт» сообщается, что компания стремится не только к расширению бизнеса, но также озабочена состоянием окружающей среды и фундаментальными социальными проблемами. Тем не менее, в последнее время Уолмарт часто обвиняют в серьезных нарушениях экологических норм, в частности в сокрытии реального объема вредных выбросов в процессе использования возобновляемых источников энергии. Основной причиной столь острой критики является неспособность компании предложить адекватное решение существующих проблем (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Все это вызывает большой резонанс среди общественности и СМИ. Несмотря на двойственный, противоречивый характер деятельности корпорации Уолмарт (Macgilchrist 2007), в данной статье подчеркиваются ее положительные аспекты, в частности позитивное отношение компании к таким значимым проблемам, как энергетика, отходы и др. В статье используется комплексный критический дискурс-анализ, с помощью которого изучаются нюансы стратегий маркетинга и брендинга. Исследование направлено на изучение различных коммуникативных стратегий, мультимодальных средств, которые используются для создания привлекательных рекламных образов, способствующих формированию у реципиента чувства экологической и социальной ответственности.

**Ключевые слова:** экологичная экономика, мультимодальные средства, критический дискурс-анализ, коммуникативные стратегии

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