

**Corporate Storytelling and Sustainability in Skincare Brand Websites: A
Multimodal Discourse Analysis****Gisna Auliya¹ ✉, Lina Herlina², Sajidin³**^{1,2,3}Master's Program in English Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung,
Indonesia**Article Info****Abstract***Article History:*

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This study examines how corporate storytelling on skincare brand websites constructs sustainability and ethical values through multimodal discourse. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research applies Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis grounded in Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework. The data comprise visual and verbal texts from the official websites of two skincare brands from different countries: From This Island (Indonesia) and Innisfree (South Korea). The analysis focuses on representational, interactive, and compositional meanings to uncover how brand values are ideologically framed and naturalized through multimodal resources. The findings indicate that both brands strategically mobilize visual grammar to legitimize sustainability and ethical claims, positioning them as integral to brand identity. The interplay between visual and verbal modes functions to enhance audience engagement and credibility while simultaneously commodifying ethical narratives. This study concludes that corporate storytelling on skincare websites operates as a strategic multimodal discourse that shapes consumer perception and reinforces corporate ideologies.

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INTRODUCTION

When websites serve as a visual communication medium for companies to create corporate identity and image (Hatmanti & Irwansyah, 2023). Corporate websites represent new forms of interactive communication that have become interactive cultural objects. Companies communicate through the network, making the boundaries between producers and viewers much more blurred. Shared experiences, values, information, and knowledge that emerge about a company and customers spread from social interaction and the creation of new narrative content in digital spaces. Corporate storytelling is used to promote a brand or product in terms of

creating a good image for the company to attract consumers (Molina-Plaza, 2023).

One of multimodal analysis approach comes from systemic functional linguistic which explains how to identify meaning from text. The SFL system interprets the functional relationship between language and social structure, works on the definition of linguistics, and lays the theoretical groundwork (Halliday, 1994). In the context of advertising, there is visual and verbal text to interpret the meaning. According to the theory of Visual Grammar, every semiotic system has the potential to project social relations between producers and viewers (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Guo & Feng, 2017).

The relevance of Kress and van Leeuwen's concept is that Halliday's theory of SFL sees

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language not only as a meaningful semiotic text structure but also as having a specific relationship that connects the meaning of the text with the external environment (Halliday, 1994). This is called a metafunction, which consists of three metafunctions: the ideational metafunction, the interpersonal metafunction, and the textual metafunction. However, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) use different terms for the same subjects: representational instead of ideational; interactive instead of interpersonal; and compositional instead of textual (Hu & Luo, 2016).

The ideational function are the functions of experience and reasoning, and the language that connects these pieces expresses the subjects and objects of a sentence (Halliday, 1994). From the perspective of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) representational meaning can be defined as the relationship that exists between actors, objects, settings, and viewers (Guo & Feng, 2017)

The interactive meaning is a transformation from the systemic functional linguistics, and it is similar to the interpersonal function that is found in visual grammar. Language is the action of social individuals engaging in some significant activities, according to the interpersonal function, which maintains that language is the action. It is comprised of three components, which are as follows: attitudes, social distance, and contact (Guo & Feng, 2017). Specifically, the representational meaning deals with the way in which images depict the relationships that exist between the individuals depicted in the picture (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). There are two types of representations: conceptual representation and narrative representation. Narrative representation can be further subdivided into action process, reaction process, speech process, and thinking process, which are collectively referred to as the six processes in Halliday's Transitivity system (Hu & Luo, 2016)

The compositional meaning is similar to the textual function in systemic functional grammar, and it is transformed from the systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994). It concerns how elements of a text are organized to create coherent and combines the language with the context in order to force the speaker to say only the words that are relevant to the area of the context in order to

achieve the goal that it has set for itself (Guo & Feng, 2017).

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) focuses not only on verbal language but also considers various semiotic modes such as visuals, colors, typography, layout, and symbols (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In the process of using language, non-verbal aspects, such as visual pictures, which come after the verbal one, are almost completely neglected (Pratiwy & Wulan, 2018). Norris (2016) explains the theoretical concept in analyzing visual data in a multimodal approach that images have the concept of interaction. Yong and Rao (2024) stated that multimodal discourses, such as images and videos, are crucial for conveying information, participating in social activities, constructing knowledge, and understanding reality. This approach allows researchers to reveal how meaning, ideology, and power relations are constructed through a combination of various modes in multimodal texts, especially in digital media and advertising. Chen and Erickson (2019) used a multimodal discourse analysis approach to analyze how snack brands use their corporate stories to create an image as healthy and ethical products and advertise their health qualities. This is in line with the research by Hartono, Prima, and Dewobroto (2022), which examines how skincare brands position consumers as empowered agents through green beauty discourse, making them a form of moral skincare, similar to the opinion of Chen and Erickson (2019).

Despite the growing interest in multimodal critical discourse analysis in the context of skincare advertising, studies focusing on corporate storytelling on skincare brand websites remain limited. Most existing studies focus on the type of advertising on social media, celebrity endorsements, or general visual and verbal strategies. Pratiwy and Wulan (2018) examine multimodal elements using visual grammar theory in Dettol television advertisements.

Previous studies demonstrate that beauty and skincare advertisements rely heavily on multimodal strategies to construct attractiveness, credibility, and desirability. Khoirunnisaa and Harti (2023) found that Indonesian beauty advertisements on Instagram featuring Korean celebrities strategically integrate verbal and visual

elements to construct aesthetic and engaging brand identities in line with the research by Ningsih and Suasih (2024) which found that K-Culture significantly influences Indonesian consumers' purchasing behavior toward imported South Korean cosmetic serum products. This led the researchers to take sample data from two skincare brand websites from two different countries, Indonesia and Korea.

Television and digital beauty advertisements also employ multimodal semiotic systems to deliver persuasive messages. Pricilia and Suyudi (2023) showed that linguistic and non-linguistic elements in the Garnier Sakura White advertisement collaboratively construct meanings that are easily understood by audiences. Meanwhile, Hartono et al. (2022) highlighted how Garnier's Green Beauty advertisement employs scientific terminology and empowering discourse to position consumers as agents of environmental change, demonstrating how beauty advertising increasingly intersects with moral and sustainability narratives.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), as cited in Molina-Plaza (2023), analyzed how meaning is constructed in corporate narratives. There are two types of modes that categorize channels of representation, namely verbal and visual images. The main modes of meaning used are verbal representation in the form of written/spoken text and visual-spatial representation in the form of static images (scenes in the company, perspective and clarity, distance, layout, and distance between individuals). This led the researchers to take samples in the form of narrative texts, brand stories, and static images obtained from skincare websites.

Beyond product promotion, corporate storytelling functions as a strategic discourse that embeds brands within broader cultural and moral narratives. Chen and Eriksson (2019) argue that corporate stories in food branding moralize health discourse, transforming abstract and symbolic health claims into branding resources. Similarly, Ottman et al. (2023) found that corporate storytelling in healthy snack brands colonizes health discourse to create a moral identity that may mislead consumers while appearing socially responsible. These findings suggest that corporate storytelling does not merely inform consumers but

constructs ideological meanings that align brands with values such as health but in term of skincare is beauty, morality, and responsibility. Through multimodal resources, companies shape consumer perceptions and normalize commercial interests within moral and cultural frameworks.

Panggabean, Zein, and Putri (2022) demonstrate that multimodal visual elements in skincare advertisements, in the form of visual language that analyzes the images and sentences used in them, play a crucial role in conveying credibility and persuading audiences on social media.

Khoirunnisaa and Harti (2023) examined Instagram advertisements for Indonesian beauty products featuring Korean celebrities using a multimodal discourse highlighting how visual and verbal elements work to engage consumers through aesthetic and appealing representations. Research in the context of storytelling as a marketing strategy has been proven to effectively increase audience engagement and strengthen brand identity, as conducted by Maulida and Isnaini (2025) and Ansari (2025).

To address these gaps, the present study analyzes corporate storytelling using visual grammar theories by Kriss and Van Leeuwen (2006) to reveal how skincare brands build moral, cultural, and emotional meaning, as well as visual and verbal elements, on their website pages to create a positive company image. The data of this study comprise two stories of skincare brand website from Indonesian and Korean skincare brand. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do skincare brand websites use visual grammar to convey brand's values?
2. How do visual and verbal text interact to persuade audiences and communicate brand values?

METHODS

This study used descriptive and qualitative methods. Miles et al. (2014) define qualitative data as sources, descriptions, and explanations of human processes. To determine causality and find explanations, qualitative data can be presented chronologically. Qualitative research analyzes words, images, and objects. A complete and

detailed description of the results with many ideas and concepts is the goal. The data were collected from the corporate story pages of two skincare brands companies: From This Island and Innisfree, selected for their narrative content through visual and verbal elements. This study integrates the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis based on Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) into its methodology. The analysis focused on the meaning of representational, interactive, and compositional. Each element was coded and interpreted to reveal how brands construct values, ideology and identity and how the corporate storytelling persuade audiences. This study involves the following steps:

- The official websites of both brands were taken into consideration when making the selection of websites.
- Pages that presented the company's corporate storytelling or brand narratives were selected for inclusion in the selection of story pages.
- The screenshot capture process consisted of taking screenshots of the chosen pages between Screenshots were captured during the period of December 26 to December 27, 2025. in order to guarantee that both the visual and verbal aspects of the content were captured
- Each screenshot was saved and labeled with the brand name, page title, and date of access in order to maintain accuracy and traceability. Documentation was an important part of this process.
- After completing the data collection in the form of screenshots, interpretation was carried out in the context of representational, interactive, and compositional.
- Analysis of each category is then presented.

All screenshots were taken from publicly accessible official websites. Proper citations were maintained to respect intellectual property rights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents findings and discussion based on the analysis of four corporate storytelling images from the websites of From This Island (Figures 1 and 2) and Innisfree (Figures 3 and 4). The analysis applies Kress and Van Leeuwen's

(2006) framework to examine how visual elements convey brand values and how visual and verbal texts interact to persuade audiences.

The Use of Visual Grammar to Convey Brand Values



Figure 1. Corporate storytelling image from the *From This Island* website showing local botanicals and traditional harvesting (accessed December 26, 2025).

In Figure 1, From This Island visually represents local botanicals and traditional harvesting practices. The image employs a narrative representational structure depicting human interaction with natural resources. The presence of two people, plants, and natural environments emphasizes action and process to suggesting authenticity and respect for traditional knowledge. This visual choice constructs the brand's moral value of sustainability and cultural preservation, positioning the brand as deeply rooted in Indonesian local wisdom.



Figure 2. Community impact and sustainable sourcing message on From This Island website (accessed December 26, 2025).

Similarly, Figure 2 highlights community impact and sustainable sourcing. It emphasizes community impact and sustainable sourcing. The visual composition emphasizes people and nature as equal contributors, underscoring principles of ethical responsibility and social engagement. The application of warm, earthy tones and natural light

enhances emotional significance, fostering a sense of harmony between humanity and the environment. The images avoid direct gaze, serving as offer images that encourage viewers to contemplate the brand's ethical practices rather than participate in direct interaction.



Figure 3. Innisfree's sustainability and ethical skincare message on the corporate story page (accessed December 27, 2025).

In contrast, Innisfree's corporate storytelling adopts a more symbolic and conceptual representational structure. Figure 3 emphasizes sustainability and ethical skincare through clean visuals, minimal human presence, and carefully arranged natural elements. This abstraction constructs a global and professional brand image, associating sustainability with scientific credibility and corporate responsibility.



Figure 4. *Green Tea in Jeju, the inspiration behind innisfree's skincare* (accessed December 27, 2025).

Figure 4 visually represents Jeju Green Tea as the core inspiration behind Innisfree's skincare products. The landscape imagery functions symbolically, presenting nature as a pristine and idealized source of purity. The wide shot and high modality of the image emphasize scale and freshness, reinforcing the brand's value of natural innovation. Unlike From This Island's community-centered visuals, Innisfree's imagery

places nature as an aspirational ideal rather than a lived cultural practice.

Interaction Between Visual and Verbal Texts

The findings also reveal a strong interaction between visual and verbal texts in communicating brand values. On the From This Island website, verbal texts accompanying Figures 1 and 2 emphasize local sourcing, empowerment of local communities, and ethical harvesting. These verbal messages are reinforced by visuals that depict real environments and practices, creating coherence between what is shown and what is stated. This alignment strengthens audience trust and emotional engagement.

Meanwhile, Innisfree's verbal texts in Figures 3 and 4 focus on sustainability, ethical responsibility, and natural ingredients derived from Jeju Island. The visuals support these claims through aesthetically refined imagery and minimalistic design, which communicate professionalism and global appeal. The combination of technical language and symbolic visuals enhances the persuasive power of the brand narrative. The findings demonstrate that both skincare brands use visual grammar strategically to construct corporate storytelling and convey brand values; however, they do so through culturally distinct approaches. Based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework, it is evident that visual meaning is shaped by representational choices, audience positioning, and compositional structure.

From This Island emphasizes moral and cultural values, particularly sustainability, community empowerment, and local heritage. The use of narrative visuals featuring real people and traditional practices positions the brand as authentic and socially responsible. This approach aligns with Indonesian cultural values that prioritize communal relationships and harmony with nature.

In contrast, Innisfree constructs its brand identity through symbolic representations of nature and sustainability. By idealizing Jeju Island as a pure and untouched environment, the brand creates an aspirational narrative that appeals to global consumers. This reflects a more corporate and globalized interpretation of sustainability,

where nature becomes a brand asset rather than a lived community practice.

Furthermore, the interaction between visual and verbal texts enhances persuasive communication in both cases. When images visually reinforce sustainability claims and ethical messages, audiences are more likely to perceive the brands as credible and trustworthy. This confirms that corporate storytelling on skincare websites functions not only as promotional content but also as a strategic visual discourse that shapes brand identity and consumer perception. This study analysis highlights how visual grammar enables skincare brands to communicate moral, cultural, and emotional meanings effectively while constructing a positive corporate image through digital storytelling.

CONCLUSION

Corporate storytelling on skincare brand websites functions as a strategic multimodal discourse that communicates brand values and persuades audiences through visual grammar, as demonstrated in the cases of From This Island (Indonesia) and Innisfree (South Korea). Based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar framework, this study shows that the integration of visual and verbal elements constructs moral, cultural, and emotional meanings that contribute to the formation of corporate image and consumer trust.

Addressing the first research question, the analysis reveals that skincare brands articulate their values through representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. From This Island employs narrative and realistic visuals of local botanicals and traditional harvesting practices to foreground community-based sustainability, cultural heritage, and social responsibility. In contrast, Innisfree relies on symbolic and conceptual representations of nature particularly the idealized imagery of Jeju Island to frame sustainability as a universal and globally marketable value linked to purity and innovation.

Responding to the second research question, the study demonstrates that visual and verbal texts operate synergistically to legitimize and reinforce brand values. In the case of From This Island, the naturalistic imagery enhances affective

engagement and constructs authenticity, while Innisfree's refined aesthetics and technical terminology project scientific credibility and global appeal. This multimodal interaction not only strengthens persuasive impact but also naturalizes ethical and environmental narratives as integral components of brand identity.

Overall, the findings highlight the effectiveness of visual grammar in corporate storytelling and underscore the role of culturally contextualized visual communication in digital branding. From a critical perspective, the study suggests that sustainability and ethical values are not merely communicated but strategically framed and commodified through multimodal resources, shaping consumer perceptions in the competitive skincare industry.

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