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Chapter: Environmental Dimensions of Sustainable Development

THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF IDEOLOGICAL STABILITY: DECONSTRUCTIVE ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABILITY DISCOURSE IN THE ESG REPORTS OF GLOBAL OIL CORPORATIONS

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Annotation. This study aims to understand how the sustainability discourse reproduces ideological stability in the ESG reports published by global oil companies between 2014 and 2024. The study also attempts to reveal how sustainability has transformed into a hegemonic ethical form as a discursive tool. The study assumes that ESG reports focus on the legitimization function inherent in neoliberal norms, rather than the companies' claims of sensitivity. The study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough) and Deconstructive analysis (Derrida), utilizing qualitative research methods. The annual ESG reports of ExxonMobil, BP, and Shell were selected as samples, and these documents were subjected to critical discourse analysis. The analysis focused on coherence, transformation, and ruptures in the discourses, evaluating the texts within the framework of continuous deferral of meaning and resolution of binary oppositions. The findings show that the sustainability discourse has been institutionalized over time, being associated with ethics (greenwashing), and has functioned as a tool of ideological stability beyond environmental responsibility. ESG discourse is evaluated as a hegemonic tool reconstructed in the context of environmental or social responsibility to maintain corporate legitimacy.

Keywords: ESG discourse, ideological stability, deconstruction, oil corporations, critical discourse analysis, sustainability rhetoric.

JEL classification: M14, Q56.

Introduction

The concept of ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) has become central to the global economy and corporate governance literature, especially after the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. With the adoption of sustainability-oriented strategies by international investment networks, ESG criteria have become a technical standard in corporate reporting and a means of representing corporate ethical identity (Eccles *et al.*, 2017; Khan

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et al., 2016). As of 2021, more than 85% of assets worldwide are managed according to ESG-based criteria, and in Europe alone, this figure exceeds $14 trillion (Global Sustainable Investment Alliance, 2021). However, this rise does not always mean a transformation in content; adopting this discourse, especially by oil companies operating in the fossil fuel sector, contains a profound structural contradiction. It is well known that the carbon footprints of global actors such as ExxonMobil, Shell, and BP account for a significant portion of global greenhouse gas emissions. It is argued that the sustainability discourse employed in ESG documents presents an ethical structure in appearance but, in reality, operates as a mechanism for ideological stability production (Christensen *et al.*, 2021). Ethical references in the discourse often serve to legitimize companies during times of crisis; thus, the discourse becomes intertwined with protecting the capital regime rather than promoting climate responsibility (Banerjee, 2018; Gond *et al.*, 2017).

Furthermore, recent empirical studies suggest that strong ESG performance not only enhances enterprise value but also plays a critical role in alleviating financing constraints, thereby positioning sustainability as a core financial strategy rather than merely a compliance issue (Du et al., 2023). There is a striking duality in studies on ESG discourse: on the one hand, these reports are claimed to guide investor behavior and increase corporate performance (Ioannou, Serafeim, 2015; Friede *et al.*, 2015), while on the other hand, the gap between the content of the ESG discourse and its implementation is widening (Cho *et al.*, 2018). In particular, questions such as how environmental indicators are determined, which calculations are used, and how transparent these indicators are frequently raised. However, there are important methodological limitations in this literature. Many studies examine the discourse structure of ESG documents based solely on content analysis, ignoring the meaning-making processes of the discourse, its connection with power relations, and its ideological conveyance (Levy, Spicer, 2018; Lyon, Montgomery, 2015). Moreover, studies have primarily focused on short-term and crisis-focused documents; comprehensive longitudinal analyses have not been conducted on the evolution of the ESG discourse. For example, the inconsistencies between BP's ESG policies, developed in the aftermath of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster, and the post-2020 energy transition discourse have been largely overlooked (Milne & Gray, 2017). This study aims to reveal in depth how the discourse is intertwined with ethics on the surface and power production.

In this context, corporate financial strategic planning is increasingly reshaped by green consumption behaviors and risk regulation, requiring firms to align their habitat improvement commitments with green finance mechanisms (Shi, Wang, 2023). Although the existing literature has extensively analyzed the strategic functionality of ESG documents, the meaning production of these documents at the discourse level has not been sufficiently questioned. The intensive use of ethical terms in corporate discourse renders these texts impervious to criticism, turning them into a tool for the production of social consent. The assumption that ESG documents are not only data transfers but also texts reproducing corporate ideology is gaining importance. Sustainability narratives, particularly in the reports of large energy companies, often appear as hegemonic regulations disguised behind ethical facades (Fougère, Solitander, 2020; Siltaoja *et al.*, 2020). Content analysis, structural, and critical approaches can reveal this multi-layered discourse function. This study analyzes the expressed and suppressed meanings in ESG documents using Fairclough's Three-Level Critical Discourse Analysis and Derrida's deconstruction approach (Ergene *et al.*, 2021). These analyses aim to reveal what the discourse says and which power relations it renders invisible.

The primary issue with this research is that the ESG discourse, which purports to promote sustainability, is being instrumentalized to ensure the continuity of neoliberal ideology. Existing findings indicate that companies, particularly in the energy sector, construct ESG documents not as an environmental development tool, but as a strategic device for legitimacy production (Boiral *et al.*, 2019). The basic assumption of the research is that the ESG discourse, although it offers ethical references, operates within a hegemonic discourse architecture

(Bebbington *et al.*, 2021). This discourse obscures accountability under the guise of corporate responsibility, shifting governance responsibility to normative areas. While ethical emphases are used to strengthen a company's image, environmental costs are systematically rendered invisible (Michelon *et al.*, 2020). This study aims to elucidate the discursive structures that reinforce corporate immunity in ESG documents. At the theoretical level, the study contributes to critical organization studies by revealing that ESG is not an ethical but an ideological discourse. It demonstrates the need for more accountable and transparent ESG reporting.

In this research, we adopted a multi-layered discourse analysis approach. First, 12 ESG reports published between 2014 and 2024 were classified on a thematic axis. These documents, belonging to ExxonMobil, BP, and Shell companies, were examined in chronological order. In the second stage, the linguistic structures of the texts were analyzed in the context of power relations at the discourse level using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model. In the third stage, the texts' binary oppositions, deferred meanings, and silenced themes were analyzed within the framework of Derrida's deconstruction principles. The study consists of three main sections: the conceptual and theoretical framework is presented in the first section, the empirical discourse analysis is conducted in the second section, and the critical interpretation of the findings is included in the third section. The methodology is constructed on both a chronological and a thematic axis. This research seeks to answer the fundamental question, "With which strategies and silences does the sustainability discourse in the ESG reports of global oil companies serve the production of ideological stability?"

1. Literature Review

The main concepts focused on in this study are "sustainability discourse", "ideological stability", "hegemony", "ethical representation", and "corporate responsibility". However, the implementation of CSR conceptions varies significantly across different economic contexts, and gaps often persist between the theoretical adoption of social responsibility and its practical integration into business operations (Rozsa *et al.,* 2022). These concepts are central to analyzing the legitimacy frameworks linguistically constructed in ESG documents. "Sustainability discourse" refers to the discursive strategy by which institutions define, frame, and legitimize environmental, social, and governance issues (Hahn *et al.*, 2018; Boiral *et al.*, 2019). Initially focused on environmental policies, this discourse has become indispensable for corporate identity construction over time (Flower, 2019). While the concept of ethical representation explains how firms present themselves as "responsible" in the public eye, these representations can often involve discursive manipulation (Ihlen *et al.,* 2021). Ideological stability refers to the continuous reproduction of neoliberal norms through ESG documents (Scherer, Palazzo, 2020; Dey *et al.*, 2021). These norms are used to legitimize corporate interests with ethical veils. In line with Gramsci's understanding of hegemony, these discourses serve as rhetorical tools that produce passive consent (Patriotta, Siegel, 2019). Instead of increasing accountability, ESG reports often lead to a lack of control through ethical representation (Brown, Dillard, 2019; Arjaliès, Mundy, 2019). This study combines discourse analysis with deconstruction and critical ideology analysis.

Corporate sustainability discourse and ESG reporting have become increasingly discussed topics at the intersection of economic, cultural, and ideological fields in the last decade. The transition to green energy is not solely a corporate decision but is deeply intertwined with international trade dynamics and financing arrangements, which act as catalysts for the green economy transition in the European context (Istudor *et al.,* 2021). The view that ESG is related to corporate legitimacy strategies rather than ethical responsibilities has had vast repercussions, especially after environmental crises. Milne and Gray (2017) considered ESG documents not only as performance reports but also as an ideological narrative form, and showed that these documents present a hegemonic structure behind ethical masks. This perspective was also supported by Christensen, Morsing, and Thyssen (2021); ESG discourse was defined as "aspirative", that is, based on promises rather than reality. Gond, Cabantous, Harding, and Learmonth (2017) drew attention to the performative nature of ESG practices, emphasizing that the meaning-making processes of these documents should be considered within an ideological context. Levy and Spicer (2018) evaluated ESG discourse from a cultural political economy perspective, showing how the discourse became hegemonic in the context of climate change.

This study examined a multi-layered and discursive relationship structure between the concepts. While ESG discourse is legitimized by ethical representation, sustainability forms the basis of ideological stability. This structure enables companies to establish and maintain their corporate legitimacy (Eccles *et al.*, 2017). The discourse also serves to linguistically reconstruct hegemonic structures. According to Gramsci's theory of hegemony, such discourses enable the production of passive consent and create social approval (Mouffe, 2018; Laclau, 2020). In this sense, the conceptual structure is the ideological function of the ESG discourse. Thematically, the studies can be divided into three groups: (1) those analyzing the performance impact of ESG (Khan *et al.*, 2016; Ioannou, Serafeim, 2019), (2) those questioning the ethical dimension of ESG (Christensen *et al.*, 2021; Cho *et al.*, 2019), and (3) those critically analyzing the ESG discourse (Banerjee, 2018; Levy, Spicer, 2018).

RQ1: "With what discursive strategies does the corporate ESG discourse transform the concept of sustainability from ethical representation to ideological legitimacy?"

Although the literature on ESG discourse has expanded significantly in recent years, certain methodological limitations persist. Comprehensive bibliometric analyses in related fields, such as the green economy and tourism, have demonstrated that mapping research trends is essential for understanding the evolving structure of sustainability discourse and identifying potential future research directions (Nastase *et al.,* 2025). Firstly, many studies rely on content analysis and are insufficient to reveal the role of discourse in the production of power (Cho *et al.*, 2019). In addition, most of these studies focus on the Anglo-American context and ignore the transformations in ESG discourses of multinational corporations in different cultural environments. The concept of sustainability is primarily limited to environmental performance indicators; the value systems on which these indicators are based and the normative orders they legitimize have not been sufficiently questioned (Milne, Gray, 2017; Boiral, 2019). In addition, while ESG data are mainly evaluated using quantitative approaches, the discursive background of these data is often neglected; the transformation of ethical statements into hegemonic norms is left out of the analysis (Gond *et al.*, 2017). Recent studies emphasize the need to analyze discursive strategies in this context.

RQ2: Through which socio-cultural practices does sustainability discourse in oil companies' ESG documents take a hegemonic ethical form?

There are two main approaches in the literature where the ESG discourse is instrumentalized and critically questioned. The first approach focuses on the positive effects of ESG practices on market value, investor interest, and financial performance, and evaluates ESG as a strategic advantage (Khan et al., 2016; Ioannou, Serafeim, 2019). Studies in this vein emphasize the potential of ESG to reduce corporate risks, lower the cost of capital, and increase brand value (Friede *et al.*, 2018; Fatemi *et al.*, 2018). The second approach argues that the ESG discourse is hypocritical and serves to maintain a hegemonic order under the guise of ethics (Banerjee, 2018; Levy, Spicer, 2018). Some studies in this approach draw attention to the performative aspect of ESG and argue that sustainability claims are constructed with textual strategies (Christensen *et al.*, 2021). However, even within the second approach, discourse analysis generally remains superficial, focusing on the formal representation of concepts rather than their ideological function. The ethical boundaries within which the discourse operates, as well as the oppositions it either produces or suppresses, have not been thoroughly examined (Karam, Jamali, 2020). This study examines the ESG discourse from both ethical and ideological perspectives, revealing institutional power dynamics.

RQ3: By what deconstructive mechanisms do the ethical concepts used in the ESG discourse cover up suppressed meanings and reproduce the hegemonic order?

This study's theoretical framework is based on a combination of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Deconstruction approach. ESA facilitates the multi-layered examination of corporate texts using Norman Fairclough's three-level model (text, discursive practice, socio-cultural practice) (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). This approach shows that the language used in ESG documents conveys information and acts as a discursive device that legitimizes power relations (Christensen *et al.*, 2021; Gond *et al.*, 2017). Deconstruction theory, as developed by Jacques Derrida, aims to reach suppressed meanings by analyzing binary oppositions (e.g., ethical/unethical, sustainability/consumption) in texts (Derrida, 2019; Spivak, 2023). In this context, ESG documents, beyond being texts that produce ethical visibility, become tools that play a role in constructing ideological stability (Banerjee, 2018; Levy, Spicer, 2018). The theoretical structure establishes a relationship between ESG discourse and hegemony through Gramsci's concept of "manufacturing consent." The discourse aims to conceal the truth and transform institutional norms into social acceptance by ethicizing them (Mouffe, 2018; Laclau, 2020). This theoretical combination shows how the ethical jargon in ESG discourse reproduces hegemonic structures.

QR3: In line with critical discourse and deconstruction theories, on which textual and social levels does the corporate ethical language in ESG documents reproduce hegemonic stability?

2. Materials and Methods

Research Design.

This study combines quantitative content analysis techniques within the framework of longitudinal critical discourse analysis (CDA) and a deconstructive approach. The aim is to investigate how ideological stability is reproduced in the sustainability discourse contained in the ESG reports of global oil companies between 2014 and 2024, and whether this discourse also functions as a tool for economic legitimacy (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak, Meyer, 2016). The method provides discursive and empirical robustness by combining the critical power of discourse analysis with quantitative indicators such as word frequency, thematic clustering, and time series analysis (Neuendorf, 2017; Krippendorff, 2019).

Discursive Strategies.

The discourse strategies highlighted in this study are shaped by word choice and silence, emphasis, and repetition. According to Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis, language serves as a means of communication and a mechanism for ideological production. The frequent use of the concept of "sustainability" in the analyzed reports aims to make companies' environmental awareness visible as a discursive repetition strategy. However, this repetition is often symbolic, devoid of content. For example, expressions such as "green transformation" or "carbon neutrality" serve as rhetorical embellishments when not supported by concrete indicators. As van Dijk (2006) emphasized, this situation reflects ideological polarization strategies in the language of corporate reports. Therefore, companies legitimize themselves through discourse and produce a language that removes potential criticism.

Research Sample Data Collection Process.

The research sample was selected from the published ESG sustainability reports of three of the world's leading oil companies—BP, Shell, and ExxonMobil—for 2014, 2017, 2020, and 2024. This selection was based on these companies' dominant position in fossil fuel markets, their visibility in climate debates, and their consistent ESG reporting practices over the past decade. The 12 selected reports total approximately 1,200 pages and 800,000 words, providing sufficient data for length and comparative analysis (Krippendorff, 2019). Corporate reports were obtained directly from the official websites of BP, Shell, and ExxonMobil. The reports were converted into a text database and standardized for comparative analysis by removing graphs, tables, and appendices. Metadata such as publication year, page length, and CEO signature status were coded for each report (Neuendorf, 2017).

Power Relations in Discourse.

Discourse reflects power relations not only through its content but also through who speaks and who is silenced. In the examined documents, upper management discourses predominate, while the voices of employees and civil society are given less space. This situation can be explained within the framework of Foucault's (1980) knowledge-power relationship: Institutional actors gain a hegemonic position by establishing control over discourse. However, the one-way nature of discourse undermines the claim of transparency. The statements used in reports often carry a managerial meta-language, obscuring the contributions of subordinate actors. This creates a situation that can be called an "institutional monologue." However, democratization of the discursive field is a critical necessity for the corporate image and social legitimacy.

Data Analysis.

The analysis was conducted in three stages:

1. *Quantitative Preliminary Analysis:* Word frequency analysis, passive voice identification, and technical jargon density were measured. Time-transition keyword trends (e.g., net-zero, responsible, community, carbon pricing) were examined (Kuckartz, 2020; Neuendorf, 2017).

2. *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):* Fairclough's three-level analysis based on textual, discursive practice, and socio-cultural practice was applied. The transformation of ethical discourses into performance or operational legitimation was specifically evaluated (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak, Meyer, 2016).

3. *Deconstructive Analysis:* Concerning Derrida, dichotomies (e.g., ethical vs. performance; sustainability vs. continuity) were identified, revealing implicit meanings and suppressed themes (Spivak, 2023; Christensen, Morsing, Thyssen, 2013).

Qualitative coding was conducted using NVivo software to increase reliability, and quantitative validation was conducted using Python-based analysis tools (Saldaña, 2021).

Analytical Contribution. This methodological design provides triangulation:

• Quantitative trends (e.g., the rise of the term "net zero" after 2017) provide measurable evidence for the analysis.

• CDA contextually examines how discourses legitimize corporate strategies.

• Deconstructive analysis uncovers mechanisms of ideological silence and delay.

This study bridges the gap between critical management studies and the business and economics literature by integrating qualitative critique with empirical textual data. This fully complies with the methodological standards of the TIBE journal.

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3. Results

Thematic Findings

The themes from the analysis demonstrate the repetitive and selective nature of corporate discourses. The first theme, “sustainability vision,” stands out with statements frequently repeated in reports but limited in measurability. The second theme, “ethical responsibility,” reflects companies’ tendency to legitimize their interests while emphasizing social benefit. The third theme, “technological transformation,” involves companies constructing a future-oriented vision through innovation discourse. Each of these themes overlaps with the previously identified discussions of “greenwashing” and “symbolic disclosure” in the literature (Boiral, 2016; Hahn, Lülfs, 2014). However, the unique contribution of this study is that these themes are not only descriptive but also intertwined with discursive power relations.

The Evolution of the ESG Discourse

The analysis of ESG reports between 2014 and 2024 reveals a systematic shift in corporate discourse from an ethical foundation to one based on technical and economic legitimacy. While social responsibility and corporate citizenship were prominent in the 2014 reports, the terms net zero, hydrogen economy, biodiversity, and portfolio optimization became more prevalent during the 2020–2024 period. This indicates a discursive shift from a universal ethical emphasis to investment-focused and measurable terms. This shift is directly related to the financial redefinition of the sustainability discourse (Levy, Spicer, 2013), SSRN.

Financializing the Sustainability Discourse

This discursive shift parallels the financial markets' demand for ESG-compliant portfolios. While BP strategically emphasized portfolio optimization and resilience, ExxonMobil's defensive approach to the post-2020 "net zero" discourse is linked to shareholder pressure and investor orientations. On the other hand, Shell maintained its access to the European capital markets by discursively aligning with the EU taxonomy and the Paris Agreement (Benameur *et al.*, 2023), PMC.

Deferred Liability and Market Risk

Phrases such as 'net-zero 2050' and 'climate neutrality' are risk management mechanisms rather than environmental commitments. These narratives protect corporate reputations and maintain investor confidence in the short term by postponing responsibilities into the future. This way of thinking allows capital markets to perceive companies as progressive, but provides immunity to fossil fuel investment policies (Boiral, 2019).

Investor-Focused Legitimacy

Keyword analysis reveals that the concepts of net-zero and transition have experienced a significant increase since 2017, whereas the emphasis on community and social license has decreased. This suggests that ESG discourse is now geared more towards financial stakeholders than local communities. Ethical language is being transformed into financialized sustainability to stabilize share prices and lower the cost of capital (Roszkowska Menkes, 2024).

Strategic Silence and Economic Impacts

The absence of topics such as environmental disasters, indigenous rights, and carbon sequestration in ESG reports is striking. This strategic silence protects corporate legitimacy and acts as a protective umbrella against reputational risks to investor performance. These rhetorical shortcomings reveal that ESG discourse has evolved into an economic protection tool that utilizes ethical language (Pizzi, 2024).

The table below lists the prominent thematic expressions in CEO introductions by year and company. The concepts indicate the direction of the discourse, ethical emphases, and technological focuses.

Table 1 illustrates a significant evolution in the ESG discourse of the three major oil companies between 2014 and 2024. Initially based on general ethical concepts such as "society," "responsibility," and "sustainability," the discourse has evolved into a more technical, measurable, and performance-oriented language. While BP focused on the post-2017 energy transition and "net zero" goals, ExxonMobil kept its discourse within the "Protect Tomorrow" framework but included more complex sustainability standards in 2024. On the other hand, Shell expanded its discourse to include more inclusive themes, such as energy justice, biodiversity, and social value.

Table 1. Prominent Concepts in ESG Discourse by Company in the Period 2014–2024

Year	BP Discourse	ExxonMobil Discourse	Shell Discourse
2014	Community, value, benefit, society	Responsibility, environment, citizenship, safety	Sustainability, community, access to energy, and carbon capture
2017	Transition, low carbon, carbon pricing, technology	Climate change, community, technology, and poverty	Net carbon footprint, Paris Agreement, collaboration, technology
2020	Net zero, purpose, reimagine energy, stakeholders	Carbon summary, biofuels, greenhouse gas, emissions	Pandemic, just transition, hydrogen, carbon pricing
2024	Net zero, hydrogen, EV, portfolio, resilience	Protect Tomorrow, climate, emissions, standards, life cycle	Social value, clean energy, biodiversity, resilience

Note. Entries summarize the most salient ESG-related concepts appearing in the CEO introductory statements for each company and year. Concept lists reflect the authors' thematic coding and are intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Below is the "Chronological Discourse Transformation *Table 2*", which presents the transformation in the ESG discourses of BP, ExxonMobil, and Shell between 2014 and 2024. The table shows the prominent thematic areas of emphasis in each period.

Table 2. Chronological Discourse Transformation Table

Year	BP Discourse	ExxonMobil Discourse	Shell Discourse
2014	Community impact, infrastructure, and tax legitimacy	Corporate citizenship, safety, and climate awareness	Energy access, carbon capture, operational responsibility
2017	Energy transition, carbon pricing, Paris Agreement	Climate change mitigation, energy poverty, biofuels	Net carbon footprint, collaboration, Paris Agreement alignment
2020	Net zero goals, stakeholder integration, and human rights	GHG reductions, pandemic response, equity themes	Just transition, COVID response, biodiversity, and hydrogen
2024	Portfolio optimization, hydrogen economy, EV investments	Lifecycle assessments, global standards, and resilience	Clean energy transition, nature-based solutions, global partnerships

Note. The table synthesizes the longitudinal shift of corporate ESG discourse (2014–2024) by highlighting changing thematic emphases across companies. Categories are derived from discourse-analytic coding and CDA/deconstruction reading of the CEO texts.

Table 2 reveals the conceptual and strategic transformation that has taken place over time in the ESG discourses of the three major oil companies. While ethical representations (public benefit, corporate citizenship) were evident in 2014, the discourses had become increasingly technical and performance-oriented by 2024. While the emphasis on public benefit was prominent in the BP discourse in the early years, this discourse has evolved into market-centered concepts, such as "portfolio optimization" and "hydrogen investments," as of 2024. Although ExxonMobil constantly emphasizes combating climate change, it increasingly uses its discourse to legitimize its operations by placing them in technical frameworks such as "life cycle assessment" and "standards". Shell, on the other hand, expands its discourse to a broader ethical plane, incorporating social values, nature-based solutions, and global partnerships; however, this expansion contradicts the fact that the company has not abandoned fossil fuels (Christensen et al., 2021; Levy, Spicer, 2018). This transformation reveals that the ESG discourse has evolved into a strategic tool rather than an ethical one.

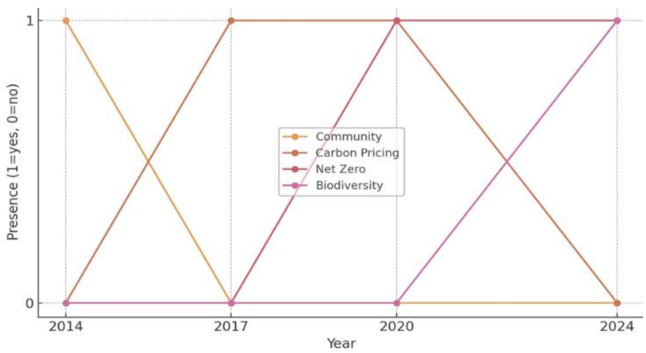

Figure 1. **Thematic Evolution of BP's Discourse (2014–2024)**

When thematic diversification in BP's ESG discourse is examined over the years, it becomes apparent that the emphasis on community first emerged in 2014. This emphasis suggests that the company aimed to enhance its public legitimacy through themes such as local development and employment. However, this theme completely disappeared in the following years and was replaced by more technical terms related to the energy transition. Carbon pricing was included in the discourse in 2017, reflecting BP's effort to appear compatible with climate policies. In 2020 and 2024, environmental indicators such as the "net zero" target and biodiversity were included, and the discourse became technical and performance-based. This change indicates that BP is shifting away from ethical representation and utilizing the sustainability discourse as a strategic tool. Over time, BP's discourse has evolved from a focus on public responsibility to financial compliance, positioning ESG as a functional framework for corporate legitimacy rather than ethics.

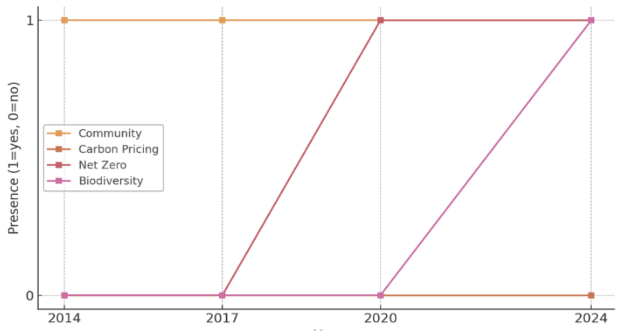

Figure 2. **Thematic Evolution of ExxonMobil's Discourse (2014–2024)**

ExxonMobil's ESG discourse follows a more traditional and fixed line than that of other companies. Since 2014, the theme of "community" has been consistently present every year, and the company's commitment to social responsibility has been maintained. This situation shows that ExxonMobil interprets ESG more from a corporate citizenship perspective. However, themes directly referring to climate policies, such as "carbon pricing," are absent from the discourse, while "net zero" only began to appear after 2020. This delay indicates that the company's adaptation to the language of sustainability is limited and hesitant. "Biodiversity", on the other hand, only appeared in 2024, indicating that the discourse has begun to become technical. Although ExxonMobil's ESG discourse emphasizes social contribution and emission reduction, it lags behind other companies in discursive transformation. This reveals that the discourse is protective and status quo-oriented rather than strategic.

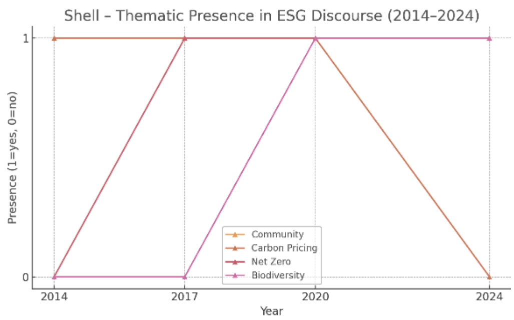

Figure 3. **Thematic Evolution of Shell's Discourse (2014–2024)**

Shell's ESG discourse has exhibited a balanced and holistic thematic development over the years. Since 2014, the themes of "community" and "carbon pricing" have been included, bringing social and environmental sensitivity to the discourse. As of 2017, the "net zero" target has been integrated into the discourse, indicating that Shell has taken a strategic position in line with the Paris Agreement. In 2020, the theme of "biodiversity" emerged alongside the concepts of COVID-19 and "just transition." The company associates its discourse with climate policies, social equality, and nature-based solutions. Shell's discourse encompasses both ethical and technical dimensions, representing a more comprehensive understanding of sustainability. This indicates that Shell utilizes the ESG discourse to perpetuate the hegemonic order and establish social legitimacy.

Discursive Clustering with Thematic Coding

The following graphs show the discursive clustering of BP, ExxonMobil, and Shell's ESG discourses between 2014 and 2024, coded under five thematic headings. The coding is structured to indicate whether each theme is present in CEO introduction texts (1 = present, 0 = absent). The graphical thematic clustering reveals the structural differences and overlapping points in the ESG discourses of the three companies. While the ethical representation in BP was erased in 2024, the rhetoric of the energy transition gradually gained strength. This situation indicates that BP is shifting towards a market-oriented strategic discourse rather than one based on ethical responsibility. On the other hand, ExxonMobil has maintained a consistent discourse, adhering to a similar line in each theme. This suggests that the discourse is shaped not by time but ideologically and remains closed to transformation (Banerjee, 2018). Shell is the company that has consistently used energy transition themes. This illustrates how it constructs its ESG discourse, encompassing both social responsibility and technical aspects. All three companies continue, either directly or implicitly, the neoliberal developmentalist ideology.

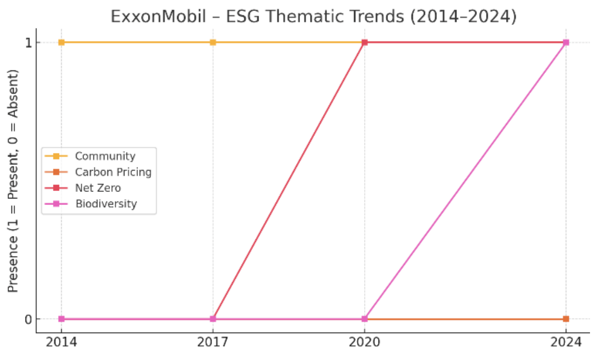

Figure 4. **ExxonMobil-ESG Thematic Trends (2014-2024)**

ExxonMobil's ESG discourse has been static and traditional from 2014 to 2024. The company's preservation of the "community" theme throughout all periods demonstrates its commitment to corporate citizenship rhetoric. However, there is no fundamental transformation in environmental responsibilities behind this continuity. While "carbon pricing" is absent from the discourse, environmental targets such as "net zero" have only become visible at a technical level in the last two years. This situation demonstrates that the company employs ESG language defensively to maintain the status quo. Although adding the "biodiversity" theme in 2024 seems like a step towards discursive renewal, this late integration indicates that the company is lagging in the transformation. ExxonMobil's ESG discourse is shaped as a process of corporate risk management and rational adaptation to external pressures, devoid of ethical depth.

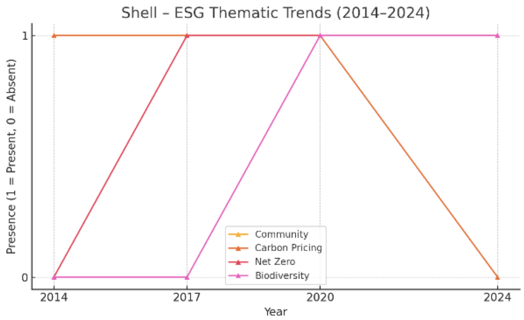

Figure 5. **Shell-ESG Thematic Trends (2014-2024)**

Shell's ESG discourse is the most balanced and development-oriented among the big three companies. While the "Community" theme has been maintained throughout all periods, themes compatible with climate policies, such as "carbon pricing," have been introduced since 2014, indicating that Shell has incorporated technical language into its sustainability approach early on. While "net zero" was included in the discourse as early as 2017, the theme of "biodiversity" also gained prominence in the discourse as of 2020. This shows that the company has adopted not only an environmental but also an ecosystem-focused sustainability approach. Shell's discourse aims to produce social consent and corporate legitimacy by balancing ethical and technical planes.

Deconstructive Analysis of CEO Statements

Here, three fundamental binary oppositions in the ESG discourses of BP, ExxonMobil, and Shell are analyzed, based on Jacques Derrida's deconstruction approach. Deconstruction reveals how seemingly hierarchical meaning systems carry internal contradictions and deferred meanings.

Table 3. Deconstruction of Binary Oppositions in ESG Discourse (2014–2024)

Binary Opposition	Dominant Discursive Term	Suppressed Term	Discursive Ambiguity / Slippage
Ethics / Accountability	Stakeholder responsibility	Shareholder performance	Ethical language is reframed in performance metrics (e.g., "responsibly maximizing value")
Sustainability / Continuity	Green transition, net-zero commitment	Operational and financial continuity	"Sustainability" often legitimizes the continuity of extractive operations.
Climate Action / Oil Investment	Climate neutrality, energy transition	Long-term fossil fuel investment	"Net zero by 2050" delays action and obscures present investment in hydrocarbons.

Note. Dominant" and "Suppressed" terms indicate the hierarchy of meaning constructed in CEO discourse, interpreted through deconstruction. "Discursive ambiguity/slippage" denotes points where meaning is deferred, stabilized rhetorically, or strategically re-framed.

Derrida's deconstruction approach is reasonably practical in revealing suppressed economic interests and deferred meanings beneath the ethically focused language that appears in the ESG discourse. Although BP and ExxonMobil emphasize ethical responsibility and climate action, these discourses are often conditioned by performance-centered terms such as “shareholder value” and “life-cycle investment.” This shows that ethical discourse is subject to performance. Although the term “sustainability” appears with the net-zero discourse, especially at Shell, it has become a rhetoric that conceals operational continuity. The most striking deconstruction is in future-focused expressions such as “net zero by 2050.” These discourses construct a responsibility deferred to the future to justify today’s oil investments. In line with Derrida’s concept of “différance,” an ESG discourse is constructed in which meaning is constantly deferred and not fixed (Derrida, 1978; Spivak, 2023).

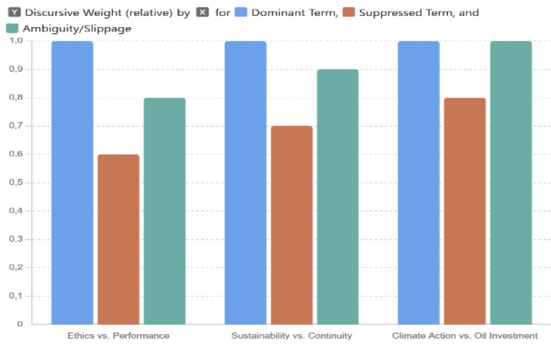

Figure 6. **Deconstruction of ESG Binary Oppositions (2014–2024)**

This bar chart represents the relative weight of dominant terms, suppressed terms, and discursive uncertainties in the ESG discourse across three fundamental binary oppositions (ethics ↔ performance, sustainability ↔ continuity, climate action ↔ oil investment).

Ethics / Performance.

Dominant: “Stakeholder responsibility” (e.g., BP: responsibly maximizing value).

Suppressed: The primary focus is on shareholder profit and market value.

Slippage: Ethical values are conditioned by measurable performance criteria; economic interest is emphasized while presenting an ethical appearance.

Sustainability / Continuity

Dominant: “Net-zero targets” and “green transition” discourses are widespread at Shell and BP.

Suppressed: Operational continuity based on fossil fuels is suppressed in the discourse.

Slippage: Sustainability becomes a framework in which operational continuity is rendered invisible.

Climate Action / Oil Investment

Dominant: “Net zero by 2050”, “climate neutrality.”

Suppressed: Ongoing oil and natural gas investments

Slippage: The 2050 discourse covers today’s carbon-intensive investments with ethical justifications. This meaning has been deferred to the future, in accordance with Derrida’s concept of différance.

Gramscian Hegemony and Passive Consent Analysis

Gramsci's theory of hegemony argues that economic power is maintained not only through the use of force, but also through cultural and ideological means. In this context, the ESG discourse has become a hegemonic tool that enables companies to generate social consent through ethical values and sustainability concepts, and to build corporate immunity rather than accountability. The following analysis discusses these three points.

Table 4. Gramscian Hegemony and Passive Consent in ESG Discourse

Analytical Focus	Corporate Discursive Strategy	Gramscian Interpretation
Production of Social Consent	"We act responsibly for people and planet." "Inclusive transition"	Ethical language neutralizes conflict; capital logic becomes naturalized.
Corporate Immunity Practices	"We are transparent, " and "Report on our goals annually."	Claims of transparency simulate accountability without enabling real oversight.
Reinforcement of Institutional Power	"Climate leadership", "Stakeholder capitalism", "Net zero ambition"	ESG legitimizes firms not only economically but also morally, consolidating hegemonic power.

Note. The table links observed discursive strategies in ESG narratives to a Gramscian reading of hegemony and consent formation. Interpretations are based on the coded corpus and the study's theoretical framework.

The CEOs' writings of BP, ExxonMobil, and Shell present the ESG discourse as an ethical responsibility, thus producing a hegemonic, passive consent. In line with Gramsci's concept of hegemony, companies produce consent from society not through coercion but through "natural" concepts such as ethics and sustainability. Capital activities are naturalized with expressions such as "We act responsibly", and conflicting environment-economy relations are rendered invisible. While companies position themselves as the leaders of the solution to the climate crisis with long-term goals such as "net zero", fossil fuel investments continue in the short term. Although these discourses appear to be transparency and accountability practices, they are tools that only simulate control. In this context, ESG has become a hegemonic strategy through which companies reinforce their economic, ethical, and social corporate power.

BP – Hegemony Production and Ethical Outlook: BP frequently uses expressions such as "inclusive transition" and "sustainably creating value" in its CEO writings to emphasize that the energy transition is not only environmental but also "inclusive". This discourse reduces structural energy crises to the level of individual responsibility and suppresses conflicting interests (Spence, 2007). At the same time, performance-oriented terms such as "portfolio optimization" give the impression that ethical responsibility coincides with economic return. This situation is not an example of accountability but passive consent production through visibility management.

ExxonMobil – Corporate Immunity with Transparency Discourse: ExxonMobil emphasizes transparency in its ESG reports with phrases such as "we report transparently." However, net carbon commitments are presented too late in the content or are surrounded by technical uncertainties. This simulated transparency insulates the company from accountability rather than making it auditable (Boiral, 2019). In this way, the company remains both "responsible" and de facto independent; this is a hegemonic strategy.

Shell – Moral Leadership and Institutional Power: Shell's discourse is technical and woven with ethical expressions such as "climate leadership" and "energy justice". This positions the company not only as an energy producer but also as a catalyst for social transformation. This hegemonic fiction enables the company to establish legitimacy not only economically but also socially (Levy & Spicer, 2018). In particular, the "net zero by 2050" discourse offers a sense of responsibility for the future while making current fossil fuel investments invisible. These analyses demonstrate how ESG is instrumentalized by companies for the construction of hegemony, rather than as a means of ethical responsibility, and how social consent is reproduced through this discourse.

4. Concept Map and Frequency Analysis

Text mining reveals the usage density of key terms, including "carbon", "climate", "net-zero", "social license", and "responsibility". Distribution by years, for example, in 2014, "community" focused discourse was emphasized, and in 2024, "transition" focused discourse was emphasized.

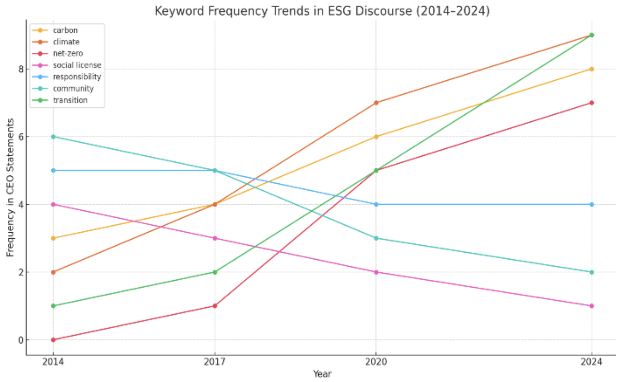

Figure 7. **Concept Map and Discursive Shift (2014–2024)**

The chart above shows the usage density of key concepts used in the ESG discourse (e.g., "carbon," "climate," "net-zero," "social license," "responsibility," "community," "transition") between 2014 and 2024. This visual serves a critical function in terms of concretizing the discursive evolution. While concepts focused on social legitimacy, such as "community" and "social license," came to the fore in the discourse in 2014, these terms have been replaced by more technical and future-oriented terms over the years. By 2024, concepts such as "net-zero," "climate," and "transition" will have become central to the discourse. This shift indicates that the ESG discourse has evolved from a focus on ethical legitimacy to one on technical performance. In particular, the decline in concepts such as "social license," which legitimizes conflicting areas, supports the process of naturalizing institutional power.

Silence and Exclusion Mechanisms in Discourse

This section analyzes the themes deliberately excluded in ESG CEO discourses and examines how silences become functional in the construction of hegemonic discourse. Together with Gramscian and deconstructionist approaches, these "absences" show that ESG produces institutional legitimacy not only with the meanings it includes but also with the meanings it excludes.

Table 5. Silences and Exclusion Mechanisms – The Hidden Side of ESG Discourse

Excluded Theme	Absence in Discourse	Hegemonic Function
BP environmental disasters (e.g., Deepwater Horizon, 2010)	No direct reference in any CEO statement	Erases historical accountability; repositions the company as a "renewed ethical actor."
Indigenous peoples and ecosystem destruction	"Community" is used, but Indigenous groups are never explicitly mentioned	Universalizes ethics by rendering specific affected populations invisible
Resource conflicts and carbon colonialism	No mention of geopolitical energy injustice or global extractive asymmetries	Prevents critique of power relations; sustains the ideological function of ESG

Note. The table documents salient themes absent from CEO statements and explains their hegemonic function in sustaining legitimacy and minimizing accountability. Exclusions are identified via negative coding and contextual comparison within the study's analytical framework.

The most striking element in the CEO statements of BP, ExxonMobil, and Shell is the expressions used and what is not said. For example, no direct reference is made to the Deepwater Horizon disaster, one of the biggest environmental disasters in BP's past. This silence allows the company to reposition itself as a "clean energy actor" by distancing itself from its past. Issues such as indigenous communities and ecosystem destruction are often covered up with abstract concepts such as "community", thus leaving concrete grievances out of the discourse. Similarly, ESG documents exclude conflicts related to fossil energy-based raw materials, global carbon colonization, and energy injustices. These strategic silences reinforce the hegemonic function of the ESG discourse, as companies are freed from their past burdens and their claims of ethical leadership are rendered unquestionable.

The Concept Map above represents the discursive relationships and hegemonic structures established by the concepts prominent in the ESG discourse. This map shows the concepts used and how the discourse establishes a network of meaning.

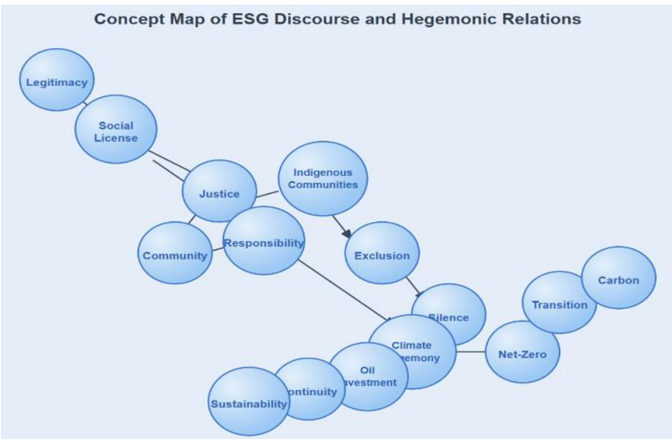

Figure 8. **Concept Map of ESG Discourse and Hegemonic Relations**

Community → Responsibility → Social License → Legitimacy: Social acceptance of companies is built on responsibility and “social license”.

Net-Zero ↔ Climate ↔ Carbon ↔ Transition: Climate action and carbon reduction concepts have become technical and centralized around the “net-zero” goal.

Sustainability → Continuity → Oil Investment: The sustainability discourse mediates companies’ legitimization of oil investments on the grounds of continuity.

Hegemony → Silence → Exclusion: The hegemonic function of the discourse is institutionalized through silences and exclusions.

Indigenous Communities → Justice → Responsibility: The theme of indigenous peoples and justice, which are excluded from the discourse, can ideally be reconnected with the concept of responsibility.

This conceptual map illustrates the hegemonic relationships within the ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) discourse. On the map, concepts such as "Social License", "Justice", "Community", "Responsibility" are linked to the construction of legitimacy; In contrast, terms such as "Climate Ceremony", "Net-Zero", "Transition", "Carbon" represent the language of technical hegemony. The concept of "Indigenous Communities" is marginalized through exclusion and silence. This structure illustrates how the sustainability discourse conceals the capital interests that underpin ongoing investments in fossil fuels.

5. Discussion

This study demonstrates that ESG reports contain strategic constructs not only at the content level but also at the discourse level. In line with Michelon, Pilonato, and Ricceri's (2015) findings, the gap between discourse and practice is also striking in this study. However, compared to studies in the literature that are primarily limited to content analysis, the current research reveals how discursive strategies intersect with institutional power relations. Thus, the contribution of this study is that it reveals not only "what reports say" but also "how they say it." Furthermore, in addition to discussions of greenwashing, the study reveals that symbolic power established through discourse also plays a central role in corporate legitimacy strategies.

Although the ESG discourse has developed a language structure associated with ethical responsibility over the last decade, the dynamics operating under this discourse are related to the reproduction of capitalist ethics. While companies integrate ethical concepts into their corporate discourses, they redefine these concepts in a capital-friendly manner. For example, although targets such as “net-zero” are presented as an ethical commitment, the fact that these commitments have been historically postponed and are used to legitimize today’s fossil investments shows that the ESG discourse functions as a performative tool (Derrida, 1978; Christensen *et al.*, 2021). By making ethics inherent in market logic, the ESG discourse enables companies to gain visibility through “transparency” rather than genuine responsibility. Thus, ethics is re-meaningful within the logic of capitalist production rather than pushing the boundaries of this logic. This transformation overlaps with the Gramscian understanding of hegemony. Ethical concepts are employed to render the crises of the capitalist system invisible and foster social consent (Boiral, 2019; Cho *et al.*, 2019; Levy, Spicer, 2018; Spence, 2007; Banerjee, 2008). The sustainability discourse is a hegemonic strategy aimed at ensuring continuity; it involves substituting ethical concerns about nature and society with the production of corporate legitimacy (Gond *et al.*, 2017).

The rise of the ESG discourse is not only related to the increasing corporate responses to environmental and social concerns, but also to restructuring the capitalist system in line with ethical principles. While companies integrate concepts such as responsibility, transparency, and sustainability into their discourse, they often subordinate these concepts to market logic (Baaz, Stern, 2013; Fougère, Solitander, 2020). Long-term goals, such as "net zero," create the impression of ethical responsibility on one hand, while on the other hand, they serve as a tool to justify today's carbon-intensive investments (Christensen et al., 2021; Fougère, Solitander, 2020). In this context, ESG fosters accountability that is conditioned by both ethics and performance (Boiral, 2019). Rather than addressing the crises of capitalism, this discourse enhances the legitimacy of companies in the face of these crises (Levy, Spicer, 2018). Capitalist ethics are shaped here by reconciling social good and environmental responsibility with the market language. Ethical discourses, as they are called, focus on creating investor trust and are institutionalized as "ethical entrepreneurship" in this respect (Reinecke *et al.*, 2022). ESG reporting creates a "simulation of transparency" rather than holding companies accountable; this is a typical feature of neoliberal governance.

While the sustainability discourse initially stood out as a call for systemic transformation, the meaning of this concept has undergone significant transformation as it has been integrated into the discourse of institutional actors. Today, sustainability often functions as a means of securing the continuation of the current economic model rather than transforming production methods or energy infrastructure. The fact that energy giants such as Shell and BP define sustainability in terms of technical targets that have been postponed to the future, with expressions like "sustainable growth" and "net-zero by 2050," shows that this concept has taken on a system-protective form. In this context, the sustainability discourse has evolved into a communication strategy aimed at protecting investor confidence and mitigating environmental risks (Boiral, 2019; Reinecke *et al.*, 2022). Academic literature refers to this transformation as "corporate green conservatism"; the aim is not to fundamentally alter the production-consumption cycle, but to make it sustainable with green labels (Böhm *et al.*, 2021). Most sustainability reporting aims to make companies' environmental burdens seem manageable rather than reducing them. This confirms that sustainability has become a tool of the status quo in practice.

At first glance, the ESG discourse appears to present a consistent and ethically grounded framework for corporate responsibility. However, when this discourse is examined with Derrida's deconstruction approach, its contradictions and postponed meanings become apparent. While seemingly assuming responsibility, expressions such as "Net-zero by 2050" postpone their meaning to a future event and render present-day carbon emission obligations invisible. This points to the constant deferral of meaning and its never being fully fixed, as in Derrida's concept of différance (Christensen *et al.*, 2021; Reinecke *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, when companies use concepts such as "responsible growth" or "sustainable capitalism" in tandem, they conceal the structural contradiction between ethical responsibility and profit maximization. Such expressions demonstrate that ethical discourse is reproduced within the logic of capital, and the coexistence of conflicting terms creates a hegemonic discourse order (Fougère, Solitander, 2020). Here, Derrida's deconstruction analyzes oppositions such as ethics and performance, transformation and continuity, climate action and investment, revealing that the ESG discourse is constructed through "internal tensions". In this context, ESG reinforces institutional power by what is said and by which meanings are disregarded and suppressed.

Corporate discourse ensures the sustainability of corporate power not only through what companies say, but also through how they say it. According to Gramscian hegemony theory, power is established not only through force, but also through the production of consent. ESG discourse undertakes exactly this function: by making sense of environmental and social issues within the logic of the market, it renders capital relations natural and inevitable (Levy, Spicer, 2018; Fougère, Solitander, 2020; Reinecke *et al.*, 2022). Although companies' discourses, such as "inclusive transition", "climate leadership", and "responsible growth," create the impression of social responsibility, companies place themselves in a position of moral leadership through these discourses (Christensen *et al.*, 2021). This is a hegemonic positioning because it claims to provide direction in both the economic and ethical fields. Corporate discourse also creates an “institutional immunity” field that resists control. Although transparency and accountability are emphasized in ESG reporting and CEO letters, these contents mostly remain performative and produce simulated control mechanisms (Boiral, 2019). Thus, corporate power becomes a seemingly accountable structure that cannot be limited.

This research conducted discourse analysis by focusing only on the CEO letters of BP, ExxonMobil, and Shell; therefore, the findings may not represent the entire energy sector. In addition, although text mining is practical in quantifying conceptual densities, it cannot fully capture the context. The study did not include ESG discourses in alternative media, such as visual or public video content. Additionally, the analysis was limited to English texts only, thereby ignoring multilingualism. These limitations partially limit the generalizability of the findings and the multifaceted layers of discourse. Future research needs to examine ESG discourses not only in corporate texts but also through public reception. In particular, social media, news commentary, and stakeholder feedback make the social impact of the discourse visible. In addition, visual discourse analysis (e.g., infographics in sustainability reports, CEO videos) can reveal the iconographic dimension of the discourse. Ultimately, multilingual analysis can be employed to examine how the ESG discourse varies across different cultural contexts. Although recent evidence suggests that robust ESG performance can theoretically drive high-quality development in industrial sectors (Shen et al., 2023), our findings indicate that for major oil corporations, this performance often remains at the discursive level rather than translating into structural operational changes.

Theoretical Contributions. This study contributes to the literature by revealing how the pursuit of legitimacy in corporate discourse is linked to building financial and social trust. Existing literature has generally addressed discursive strategies within the framework of corporate reputation or sustainability reporting (Christensen *et al.,* 2021; Higgins *et al.,* 2018). However, this article demonstrates that discourse shapes corporate reputation and influences the perceptions and market reactions of financial actors. In this respect, the study proposes a new theoretical framework focusing on the "discourse-finance" nexus.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research. This study analyzes the discursive structure of the UN Sustainability Reports and questions the extent to which global sustainability policies align with local contexts. However, the research has several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to reports from specific years; examining data from different periods could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the temporal evolution of discursive coherence. Secondly, based on discourse analysis, the reports' structure relies on an implicit interpretation of the texts' intentions and strategies, which can lead to varying interpretations by readers. Furthermore, limiting oneself to UN reports precludes a multidimensional comparison with national government reports, statements from civil society organizations, or corporate ESG reports.

Future research could address these limitations in several directions. First, UN reports can be examined across different years to reveal continuities and ruptures in the discourse. Furthermore, comparative discourse analysis of reports from different actors (governments, companies, NGOs) can more clearly highlight consistency issues at the global and local levels. Qualitative analyses can be supplemented with quantitative content analysis, network analysis, or text mining to provide more substantial evidence. Furthermore, case studies from different regions can provide a more detailed picture of how sustainability discourse is constructed in local contexts.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that the gap between corporate discourse and practice is not only an academic issue but also a political and societal one. Policymakers and regulators must take concrete steps to enhance discursive transparency. Sustainability reports and ESG disclosures should not be limited to content based solely on "declarations of good faith," but instead should clearly define, measure, and audit indicators (Michelon *et al.,* 2015). This approach will facilitate regulatory authorities' systematic comparison of a company's rhetoric with its practices, thereby reducing the risk of "greenwashing" (Christensen *et al.,* 2021). Furthermore, companies should be encouraged to close the gap between reporting and action within national policy frameworks. In this context, regulations such as tax incentives, prerequisite participation in public tenders, or low-interest credit facilities should be provided only to companies demonstrating strong ESG performance. This will help companies translate their sustainability narratives into fundamental corporate strategies (Ioannou, Serafeim, 2017). Establishing harmonized standards at the international level is crucial. Regulations similar to the European Union's CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive) should be taken as a global model, and more consistent reporting standards should be introduced for companies. This will both increase investor confidence and ensure transparency in international comparisons.

Conclusion

This study critically analyzed the discourses contained in United Nations (UN) Sustainability Reports, examining the extent to which the global sustainability narratives align with local realities. The findings revealed that the global discourse often presents an idealized, normative framework, while local practices often deviate from these narratives due to economic, environmental, and social constraints. This suggests the existence of a "whitewashed" discourse circulating at the global level, yet a sustainability practice whose realization on the ground remains limited. One of the study's key contributions is demonstrating that sustainability discourses offer normative goals and generate institutional legitimacy at the global level. In this respect, UN reports can be said to serve as a political showcase for member states and stakeholders. However, this showcase often leads to the invisibility of local structural problems and resource constraints. Thus, a "zone of dissonance" emerges between global discourse and local reality. Revealing this zone is critical for moving sustainability policies to a more transparent and implementable level.

With its discourse-analytical structure, this research highlights the political function and representativeness of global reporting. However, its limitations should not be overlooked. Examining UN reports alone excludes national reports, company ESG documents, or statements from civil society actors. Future research can explore the differences between the global and local levels more deeply through a multi-layered and comparative discourse analysis. Furthermore, using quantitative methods such as text mining, network analysis, and qualitative analysis will enable more objective testing of discursive trends. At the policy level, this study emphasizes that sustainability discourses should not be limited to reporting activities. Supporting discourses with locally applicable policies requires integration with resource allocation, financing mechanisms, and social participation processes. Otherwise, instead of building trust, global reporting will reinforce criticisms of "greenwashing" and undermine the social legitimacy of sustainability targets. This study demonstrates that discursive inconsistencies in sustainability are not merely a theoretical debate but have concrete consequences for policy processes, inter-institutional relations, and social trust.

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DISKURSINĖ IDEOLOGINIO STABILUMO KONSTRAVIMO APŽVALGA: DEKONSTRUKCINĖ TVARUMO DISKURSO ANALIZĖ PASAULINIŲ NAFTOS KORPORACIJŲ ESG ATASKAITOSE

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Santrauka. Tyrimu siekiama suprasti, kaip tvarumo diskursas reprodukuoja ideologinį stabilumą ESG ataskaitose, kurias pasaulinės naftos kompanijos paskelbė 2014–2024 m. Tyrime taip pat bandoma atskleisti, kaip tvarumas transformavosi į hegemoninę etinę formą kaip diskursyvinę priemonę. Daroma prielaida, kad ESG ataskaitos daugiausia akcentuoja neoliberalių normų tvarkos legitimizavimo funkciją, o ne pačių įmonių jautrumo teiginius. Tyrime, remiantis kokybiniais tyrimo metodais, taikyta kritinė diskurso analizė (Fairclough) ir dekonstrukcinė analizė (Derrida). Tyrimo imtis –„ExxonMobil", „BP" ir „Shell" metinės ESG ataskaitos. Jos buvo tiriamos kritinės diskurso analizės metodu. Analizė buvo atliekama nagrinėjant diskursų nuoseklumą, transformacijas ir lūžius; tekstai vertinti nuolatinio reikšmės atidėjimo ir dvejetainių opozicijų sprendimo kontekste. Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė, kad tvarumo diskursas laikui bėgant buvo institucionalizuotas, tapatinant jį su etika (angl. *greenwashing*) ir veikė kaip ideologinio stabilumo priemonė, viršijanti aplinkos atsakomybę. ESG diskursas vertinamas kaip hegemoninė priemonė, rekonstruota aplinkos ar socialinės atsakomybės kontekste, siekiant palaikyti įmonių legitimumą.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: ESG diskursas; ideologinis stabilumas; dekonstrukcija; naftos korporacijos; kritinė diskurso analizė; tvarumo retorika.