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REVIEW ARTICLE

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A critical discourse analysis of legitimacy, stakeholder voices, and calls to action in Saudi environmental associations

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Saudi environmental associations construct legitimacy, represent stakeholder voices, and formulate calls to action in their public discourse. Positioned at the intersection of Critical Discourse Analysis, environmental communication, nonprofit communication, stakeholder theory, and ecolinguistics, the study asks how association discourse authorizes environmental action and how it converts public concern into civic participation. The article uses a qualitative CDA design with a bounded illustrative corpus of official public-facing texts from Saudi environmental associations and association-type civic/scientific bodies, including mission statements, activity descriptions, campaign language, membership or registration prompts, and partnership-oriented webpages. The analysis develops a three-dimensional framework: legitimacy construction, stakeholder voice, and calls to action. The findings suggest that legitimacy is commonly built through national alignment, institutional affiliation, expertise, public benefit, and moral responsibility. Stakeholder voices are visible through references to citizens, volunteers, youth, communities, partners, and public/private actors, but these voices are often represented by the association rather than quoted directly. Calls to action move between operational invitations, such as registration and volunteering, and broader moral appeals to protect the environment. The article contributes a humanized, replicable CDA framework for analyzing how environmental associations use language to build trust, organize participation, and shape civic environmental responsibility, while cautioning against claims of actual environmental impact without independent evidence.

KEYWORDS: critical discourse analysis, environmental communication, Saudi Arabia, environmental associations, legitimacy, stakeholder voice, calls to action, ecolinguistics

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1. Introduction

Environmental associations occupy a growing communicative space between policy, civic participation, public awareness, and everyday environmental responsibility. In Saudi Arabia, this space is shaped by national sustainability priorities, the rise of volunteer and nonprofit work, institutional partnerships, and the increasing visibility of campaigns concerned with afforestation, biodiversity, pollution reduction, waste management, built-environment sustainability, and environmental awareness. Yet the public discourse of environmental associations should not be treated as mere information sharing. It is also a site where authority is claimed, social actors are positioned, and action is requested. A campaign announcement, a membership invitation, a mission statement, or a page describing association values does not only tell readers what an association does. It also constructs why the association has the right to speak, who belongs to the environmental community, and what forms of participation are expected from the public.

This article enters the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and environmental communication by examining how Saudi environmental associations use discourse to construct legitimacy, represent stakeholder voices, and formulate calls to action. CDA is useful here because it treats discourse as language in social practice, not simply as neutral wording. Public environmental language is not innocent description; it can authorize institutions, define problems, assign responsibility, naturalize priorities, and shape what kinds of action appear possible or necessary (Fairclough, 1993; van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 2007). Environmental communication scholarship similarly emphasizes that public talk about ecological issues is tied to ethics, participation, persuasion, and social action (Cox, 2007; Moser, 2010; Nisbet, 2009). In this sense, the language of associations matters because it helps mediate between national environmental priorities and the everyday actions of citizens, volunteers, schools, municipalities, companies, and local communities.

The specific focus of the article is not environmental policy in general, nor is it a technical evaluation of the environmental impact of associations. The focus is the public-facing discourse of Saudi environmental associations and association-type civic/scientific bodies. These include texts that describe an association's identity, vision, mission, values, services, activities, partnerships, campaigns, and invitations to participate. The article asks how these texts build trust, how they include or exclude stakeholders, and how they turn environmental concern into requested public behavior. This focus responds to the prompt's central requirement that the article should analyze how language works, rather than simply describe associations as organizations.

The problem is that environmental association discourse is often read as awareness-raising, public relations, or institutional communication, while the linguistic mechanisms through which it builds legitimacy and mobilizes participation remain underexamined. It is easy to say that environmental associations support sustainability. It is more analytically demanding to show how their discourse constructs an image of civic credibility, how it represents stakeholders as partners, volunteers, beneficiaries, audiences, or symbolic figures, and how it asks people to act. If the analysis stops at general statements about environmental awareness, it misses the discursive work through which environmental responsibility is made socially persuasive.

This gap matters for translation, discourse, communication, and sustainability studies because environmental action depends partly on how ecological responsibility is made meaningful and actionable. When an association says that it protects biodiversity, supports afforestation, offers environmental training, or invites volunteers, it is not only reporting a program. It is also building a relationship with readers. The discourse may create confidence, but it may also remain institution-centered. It may invoke stakeholders, but not necessarily give them dialogic voice. It may call for action, but the action may be general, symbolic, or difficult to measure. These tensions are not weaknesses to be assumed in advance; they are patterns to be examined carefully.

The article responds by developing a three-dimensional CDA framework for studying Saudi environmental association discourse: legitimacy construction, stakeholder voices, and calls to action. Legitimacy refers to how associations justify their authority to speak and act. Stakeholder voice refers to who is named, included, quoted, empowered, or spoken about. Calls to action refer to how discourse moves audiences from awareness to participation. The central argument is that these three dimensions operate together. Legitimacy gives the association authority; stakeholder voices make the discourse appear participatory; and calls to action convert legitimacy and participation into expected environmental behavior. The article contributes to CDA and environmental communication by offering a compact analytical framework that can be adapted to other nonprofit and civic sustainability contexts.

2. Literature Review

Environmental discourse has long been recognized as a key site where ecological problems are defined, evaluated, and made publicly actionable. Environmental communication is not limited to the transmission of scientific information. It involves framing, persuasion, ethical responsibility, risk communication, public engagement, and the formation of collective meanings (Cox, 2007; Moser, 2010). Climate and sustainability communication research has shown that audiences rarely respond to information alone; they respond to frames that connect environmental issues with moral values, identity, place, economic consequences, future generations, and political responsibility (Carvalho, 2007; Nisbet, 2009). This point is directly relevant to environmental associations because their public discourse must translate broad ecological issues into understandable and actionable messages for diverse audiences.

CDA contributes a second layer to this literature by showing that discourse is connected to power, institutional authority, ideology, and social practice. Fairclough's work demonstrates that institutional discourse can reshape public understanding by presenting certain social arrangements as natural, necessary, or beneficial (Fairclough, 1993). Van Dijk's approach emphasizes the relation between discourse, power, and social cognition, especially how dominant meanings become common sense (van Dijk, 1993). Wodak's work highlights the value of linking discourse to historical, institutional, and pragmatic context (Wodak, 2007). For the present article, these perspectives suggest that environmental associations do not simply communicate environmental facts. They organize a social field in which some actors become responsible, some become invited participants, some become experts, and some remain absent.

Legitimation theory is especially useful for examining how associations present themselves as credible civic actors. Van Leeuwen's framework identifies several strategies through which social practices are legitimized: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis (van Leeuwen, 2007). Authorization draws on institutions, experts, laws, partnerships, or recognized authorities. Moral evaluation appeals to values such as responsibility, care, duty, protection, and public benefit. Rationalization explains action through usefulness, effectiveness, necessity, or measurable outcomes. Narrative legitimacy builds credibility through stories of achievement, transformation, or exemplary action. These categories are productive for studying Saudi environmental associations because much of their public discourse appears to combine institutional alignment with moral responsibility and practical public benefit.

Organizational legitimacy research also helps explain why this matters. Suchman defines legitimacy as a generalized perception that organizational actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms and values (Suchman, 1995). Later work emphasizes that legitimacy is not merely possessed by organizations; it is judged by audiences and stakeholders in particular contexts (Suddaby, Bitektine, & Haack, 2017). Environmental associations therefore need to appear not only active, but also trustworthy, relevant, aligned with public values, and accountable. Their legitimacy may be strengthened through references to official bodies, scientific expertise, public service, national goals, and partnerships. However, legitimacy may also become symbolic if it is not linked to transparent evidence of outcomes or meaningful stakeholder participation.

Stakeholder theory provides a third component. Classic stakeholder research asks who can affect or is affected by an organization and how stakeholders are identified, prioritized, and managed (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). In communication studies, stakeholder engagement has been examined not only as a managerial process but also as a discursive practice. Morsing and Schultz distinguish between communication strategies that inform stakeholders, respond to them, or involve them more dialogically (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Greenwood cautions that stakeholder engagement can become a morally attractive phrase that masks unequal relationships if participation is not genuine (Greenwood, 2007). Manetti's work on sustainability reporting similarly shows that the quality of stakeholder engagement depends on whether stakeholders can influence content, not simply whether they are mentioned (Manetti, 2011).

Nonprofit communication research adds a practical dimension to this discussion. Studies of nonprofit social media show that organizations often use public communication for three broad functions: providing information, building community, and calling people to action (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Guo and Saxton show that nonprofit advocacy organizations compete for attention and must make their messages visible, shareable, and action-oriented (Guo & Saxton, 2018). Research on environmental advocacy groups also suggests that

online communication can contain dialogic features while still producing limited dialogue in practice (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009). These findings are important because they distinguish between mentioning stakeholders and enabling stakeholder voice. They also support the present article's attention to whether Saudi environmental associations use calls to action that are operational and measurable or mainly symbolic and motivational.

Ecolinguistics further broadens the analysis by asking how language frames relationships between humans, other beings, landscapes, resources, and ecological futures. Stibbe argues that ecolinguistics can function as a form of critical discourse studies by examining the stories that language tells about the living world (Stibbe, 2014). This is important for Saudi environmental association discourse because environmental issues are not only human administrative matters. They concern biodiversity, water, desertification, pollution, afforestation, coasts, wildlife, urban space, and future generations. The question is whether association discourse represents nature as a passive object to be managed, a shared inheritance to be protected, a partner in survival, or a field of technical projects.

Taken together, the literature provides strong theoretical tools, but a specific gap remains. Existing scholarship has examined environmental communication, CDA, organizational legitimacy, stakeholder engagement, nonprofit communication, and ecolinguistics. Less attention has been given to how Saudi environmental associations combine legitimacy claims, stakeholder voices, and calls to action in a single civic environmental discourse. This article addresses that gap by treating these three dimensions as connected discourse functions rather than separate topics.

3. Theoretical and Analytical Framework

The article uses a qualitative CDA framework supported by legitimation theory, stakeholder voice analysis, environmental communication, and ecolinguistics. The purpose is not to impose a rigid model on the data, but to provide a disciplined way of reading how environmental associations speak about themselves, their stakeholders, and the actions they request.

The first dimension is legitimacy construction. Here the analysis asks how associations justify their authority to speak and act on environmental issues. Four strategies are central. Authorization appears when discourse refers to national priorities, official recognition, experts, partners, ministries, international organizations, or institutional status. Moral evaluation appears in words and phrases connected to care, responsibility, duty, preservation, stewardship, and protection. Rationalization appears when the association explains its activities through public benefit, awareness, training, efficiency, measurable impact, or practical environmental improvement. Narrative legitimacy appears when discourse tells stories of campaigns, volunteer participation, successful events, or community transformation. Van Leeuwen's model of legitimation provides the main analytical grammar for this dimension (van Leeuwen, 2007), while organizational legitimacy scholarship explains why such discourse matters for public trust (Suchman, 1995; Suddaby et al., 2017). In persuasive terms, these strategies also resemble the combined use of ethos, logos, and pathos in social and environmental reporting: ethos builds credibility, logos explains practical benefit, and pathos connects environmental action to shared moral concern (Higgins & Walker, 2012).

The second dimension is stakeholder voice. The analysis asks who is named, who is invited, who is represented as acting, who is represented as benefiting, and who is absent. Stakeholders may include citizens, volunteers, youth, schools, universities, municipalities, ministries, private companies, donors, local communities, experts, children, women, farmers, visitors, and non-human nature. Yet stakeholder inclusion is not automatically dialogic. A stakeholder may be mentioned as a target audience without being represented as an agent. A community may be thanked without being shown as a decision-maker. Volunteers may be celebrated as evidence of participation while the association retains the only speaking voice. This distinction is informed by stakeholder theory and communication studies of engagement (Mitchell et al., 1997; Greenwood, 2007; Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

The third dimension is calls to action. This part of the framework asks what action is requested and how specific that action is. Some calls to action are operational: register, volunteer, attend, participate, request a service, recycle, plant, report, clean, donate, subscribe, or share a campaign message. Other calls are symbolic or moral: protect our environment, preserve resources, work together, build a greener future, or be responsible. Both types matter, but they do different work. Operational calls create a clearer path from discourse

to behavior; symbolic calls create shared values but may lack measurable follow-up. The analysis therefore examines imperative verbs, modal verbs, collective pronouns, registration links, membership prompts, volunteer invitations, campaign steps, and references to accountability. This dimension draws on nonprofit communication research that identifies action as one of the main communicative functions of organizations (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Guo & Saxton, 2018). They also depend on framing processes that make a problem recognizable, identify a form of responsibility, and motivate collective response (Benford & Snow, 2000). When calls emphasize urgency, proximity, or future risk, they may also draw on proximization, bringing distant environmental threats closer to the audience's present identity and responsibility (Cap, 2008).

These three dimensions are analytically separate but discursively connected. An association cannot easily call people to act unless it has first established credibility. Stakeholder references can strengthen legitimacy by making discourse appear inclusive and participatory. Calls to action can transform legitimacy and voice into civic behavior. The framework therefore treats legitimacy, voice, and action as a cycle: authority to speak, social field of participation, and requested public response.

4. Methodology

This article uses qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis supported by a small coding framework. Because no private internal documents or interview data were provided, the study relies only on official, publicly available texts. The corpus is bounded and illustrative rather than statistically representative. Its purpose is to demonstrate how the proposed framework can be applied to Saudi environmental association discourse and to identify recurring discourse patterns that merit fuller empirical study.

The illustrative corpus was constructed through purposive sampling of official public-facing texts from four Saudi environmental associations or association-type civic/scientific bodies and two national environmental policy-context pages. The association sources include public texts from the Saudi Green Building Forum, Yanbu Environmental Association, the Saudi Society for Environmental Sciences, and the Saudi Society for Geosciences. The contextual sources include public pages related to Environment Week and the Saudi Green Initiative because Saudi environmental associations often construct legitimacy through alignment with national sustainability priorities. These context sources are not treated as associations; they are included to understand the national discourse environment within which associations position themselves.

The unit of analysis includes mission statements, vision statements, values, activity descriptions, service descriptions, campaign titles, membership or registration prompts, partner acknowledgements, and public calls to participate. Where public texts were originally in Arabic, English renderings were treated as analytical translations for transparency, not as official translations unless the source itself provided English. The article does not analyze private comments from individuals and does not attribute intentions to association leaders. It also does not claim that discourse proves actual environmental impact.

The analysis proceeded in five stages. First, the public texts were read repeatedly to identify recurring lexical and rhetorical patterns. Second, preliminary codes were assigned to phrases connected with legitimacy, stakeholder voice, and action. Third, the codes were grouped into discourse functions. For legitimacy, the codes included national alignment, official recognition, expertise, partnership, public benefit, moral duty, and impact claims. For stakeholder voice, the codes included named actors, role assignment, agency, participation, partnership, beneficiary positioning, and absence. For calls to action, the codes included imperatives, registration prompts, volunteer invitations, collective pronouns, moral appeals, and practical action steps. Fourth, patterns were interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework. Finally, the analysis was written as a cautious interpretation of public discourse rather than as an evaluation of organizational performance.

Credibility was strengthened through transparent coding logic, repeated reading, and the use of well-established discourse categories. The analysis is reflexive because the researcher's interpretation inevitably shapes how discourse features are selected and connected. To reduce overstatement, the findings are framed as patterns in public discourse and not as claims about organizational motives, effectiveness, or environmental outcomes. This caution is especially important in CDA because critical interpretation can become too strong if it moves from discourse patterns to assumptions about real-world impact without independent evidence.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Constructing legitimacy

Saudi environmental association discourse often constructs legitimacy through alignment with broader national and institutional priorities. This is visible in references to sustainability, national development, environmental responsibility, green futures, public benefit, and partnerships. Such language works through authorization and rationalization. Authorization appears when associations connect themselves to recognized institutions, national initiatives, government-linked events, international bodies, or professional certification systems. Rationalization appears when they describe their activities as contributing to environmental awareness, sustainable development, technical standards, scientific performance, or civic participation.

The Saudi Green Building Forum provides a clear example of institutionalized legitimacy. Public descriptions of the Forum foreground its professional status, its civil-society identity, and its international recognition. The discourse constructs SGBF as more than a local association; it appears as a specialized reference point for green building, sustainability, standards, and cross-sector collaboration. Terms such as professional, member-based, consultative status, certification, green projects, and Sustainable Development Goals build a discourse of technical and institutional credibility. In van Leeuwen's terms, this is largely authorization and rationalization: the association is legitimate because it is connected to recognized bodies, measurable projects, professional expertise, and technical systems.

Yanbu Environmental Association constructs legitimacy differently. Its public discourse emphasizes voluntary environmental concern, afforestation, biodiversity, combating pollution, and combating desertification. The language is less technical than SGBF's and more directly civic. It constructs the association as a community-oriented environmental actor. Words such as voluntary, environment, afforestation, biodiversity, pollution, and desertification connect the association to recognizable local environmental problems. Moral evaluation is also important: environmental protection is presented as a shared responsibility, not only a technical service. This kind of legitimacy depends on civic proximity. The association appears credible because it speaks from within the community and addresses practical environmental concerns that ordinary citizens can understand.

The Saudi Society for Geosciences and the Saudi Society for Environmental Sciences rely more on scientific and professional legitimacy. Their discourse foregrounds knowledge, research, training, expertise, scientific performance, technical studies, and professional consultation. This mode of legitimacy is epistemic. It suggests that the association has authority because it possesses specialized knowledge and can provide reliable environmental or earth-science expertise. Such discourse is not primarily emotional or motivational; it builds credibility through competence. In Hyland's terms, institutional stance and engagement are managed through claims of expertise and service to relevant bodies (Hyland, 2005).

Across these examples, legitimacy is rarely constructed through one strategy alone. It is layered. National alignment gives public relevance; expertise gives credibility; partnership gives institutional trust; moral responsibility gives ethical value; and calls to public benefit make environmental work socially meaningful. However, a tension appears. Much of the discourse constructs credibility by association with recognized institutions, national goals, or professional status. This is effective rhetorically, but it may leave less space for community-based proof of impact. The discourse tells readers that the association is legitimate, but it does not always show how stakeholders evaluate that legitimacy.

5.2 Representing Stakeholder Voices

Stakeholder representation is visible across the corpus, but it is uneven. Stakeholders are often named as partners, supporters, volunteers, beneficiaries, visitors, members, donors, students, government entities, private sector actors, and local communities. These references help make environmental work appear participatory. They also expand the social field of environmental responsibility beyond the association itself. In environmental communication, this is important because sustainability requires distributed agency rather than action by one institution alone (Moser, 2010; Nisbet, 2009).

Yet stakeholder voice is not the same as stakeholder mention. A text may refer to citizens, youth, volunteers, or partners without allowing them to speak. Many association texts are institution-centered: the association describes its mission, thanks its supporters, announces its events, or invites participation. This does not make the discourse illegitimate, but it does show a limit in dialogic representation. Stakeholders are

often present as audiences or participants rather than as co-authors of environmental meaning. This confirms Greenwood's warning that stakeholder engagement can become a morally appealing term if it does not show how stakeholders influence decisions (Greenwood, 2007).

Yanbu Environmental Association's discourse includes donors, supporters, volunteers, and visitors. This suggests an inclusive civic ecology, where the association depends on a wider public. However, the public appears mainly as the group that supports, participates, registers, donates, or benefits. Direct stakeholder voices are less visible. The language therefore creates a sense of participation, but not necessarily dialogue. The association speaks about and to the community more than it speaks with the community in the available texts.

The Saudi Green Building Forum foregrounds another stakeholder structure. Its discourse brings together professionals, public and private sectors, volunteers, students, green building actors, and international organizations. This is a networked model of stakeholder representation. The stakeholders are not simply members of the public; they are policy, technical, educational, and market actors. The discourse therefore constructs sustainability as a professional and cross-sector field. This is powerful because it connects environmental responsibility to expertise and infrastructure. It also risks making environmental action appear specialized and institutionally mediated rather than open to ordinary community voice.

The Saudi Society for Geosciences constructs stakeholders through scientific and professional roles. Members, relevant bodies, companies, researchers, organizations, and trainees appear as the main social actors. This pattern is coherent with the society's scientific identity. It also highlights a common feature of association discourse: stakeholder representation follows organizational identity. A scientific society foregrounds experts and institutions; a voluntary environmental association foregrounds community and volunteers; a professional green building forum foregrounds policy, certification, and sectoral partners. Stakeholder voice is therefore not neutral. It is shaped by what kind of association the organization claims to be.

Non-human nature is present but mostly as an object of protection, conservation, or management. Environment, biodiversity, resources, pollution, desertification, green buildings, and natural resources appear as the objects around which human responsibility is organized. This is understandable, but ecolinguistic analysis invites a further question: is nature represented only as a resource to be preserved for human benefit, or as a living system with value beyond human use? The corpus leans toward the first pattern. Nature is valued, but largely through human responsibility, public benefit, future generations, and sustainability. Stibbe's ecolinguistic approach makes this pattern worth noting because it shows how environmental discourse can remain anthropocentric even when it is environmentally positive (Stibbe, 2014).

5.3 Calls To Action

Calls to action are central to environmental association discourse because associations need to convert awareness into behavior. The corpus shows two main types of calls: operational calls and symbolic calls. Operational calls include register, subscribe, request the service, volunteer, participate, attend, visit, share content, join initiatives, and engage in campaigns. Symbolic calls include protect the environment, preserve resources, work together, build a green future, spread awareness, and strengthen environmental responsibility.

Operational calls are stronger from an assessment perspective because they give audiences a clear next step. For example, registration links, membership prompts, service-request buttons, volunteer campaign invitations, and event participation instructions reduce the distance between environmental concern and action. They answer the practical question: what should the reader do now? Lovejoy and Saxton's information-community-action model is useful here because it distinguishes between simply informing audiences and mobilizing them toward action (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Saudi association discourse contains all three functions, but the balance differs by association.

The Yanbu Environmental Association's public language includes more accessible civic calls. Registering, supporting, participating in initiatives, and engaging with awareness content are part of its public-facing style. The discourse is likely to be persuasive for local audiences because it does not require technical expertise. It invites ordinary people into environmental action through volunteering, awareness, and support. However, some calls remain broad. A phrase such as saving or protecting the environment is morally strong but operationally incomplete unless it is linked to specific steps, timelines, sites, roles, or measures of follow-up.

The Saudi Green Building Forum's calls to action are more professional and institutional. The discourse

invites participation in forums, certification systems, professional dialogue, green building practices, volunteering, and sustainability platforms. Here, action is not simply personal behavior; it is linked to standards, projects, sectors, and built-environment governance. The strength of this approach is that it can connect sustainability with professional systems. The risk is that ordinary public participation may become secondary to institutional and technical participation. This pattern is not necessarily negative, but it changes the public meaning of environmental responsibility.

The Saudi Society for Geosciences uses service-oriented calls, such as requesting a service, participating in training, attending lectures, engaging in studies, or seeking professional consultation. This makes environmental action knowledge-based. The association invites stakeholders to act by accessing expertise. In discourse terms, this is a rationalized call to action: the public or institutional actor is invited to act through scientific support and technical capacity. Such calls are clear when the requested service is named, but they may be less emotionally mobilizing than volunteer or community-based calls.

Across the corpus, collective pronouns and shared-responsibility language are important. Phrases built around we, our environment, our future, future generations, and the community create identification. Hyland's stance and engagement framework helps explain how such language positions readers as involved participants rather than distant observers (Hyland, 2005). However, collective language can also blur responsibility. If everyone is responsible, it may become unclear who should do what, when, and how. Strong calls to action therefore need both shared identity and operational clarity.

5.4 Integrated Discussion

The main insight of the analysis is that legitimacy, stakeholder voice, and calls to action work as connected discourse functions. Legitimacy authorizes the association to speak. Stakeholder representation expands the social world of the discourse. Calls to action translate authority and participation into expected behavior. When these dimensions are aligned, environmental discourse becomes more persuasive. For example, an association that presents itself as credible, includes volunteers and partners, and then offers a clear registration or participation pathway creates a complete discourse chain: trust, belonging, and action.

At the same time, the analysis shows several tensions. First, legitimacy sometimes relies heavily on institutional alignment. This can strengthen credibility, especially in a national context where environmental priorities are strongly connected to Vision 2030 and official sustainability initiatives. Yet legitimacy based mainly on alignment may say more about institutional positioning than community impact. Second, stakeholder voices are often invoked rather than dialogically represented. Stakeholders appear as participants, supporters, or beneficiaries, but less often as speakers whose own perspectives shape the discourse. Third, calls to action vary in specificity. Some are practical and measurable, while others remain motivational and general.

These tensions should not be read as accusations. They are features of civic environmental discourse that deserve careful attention. Associations need to build trust and mobilize publics, but they also need concise, positive, and institutionally acceptable communication. The critical question is not whether the discourse is sincere or insincere. It is how discourse organizes authority, participation, and action, and what that organization makes possible or leaves underdeveloped.

The article therefore supports a cautious but productive conclusion: Saudi environmental associations are developing a discourse of civic environmental responsibility that combines national alignment, institutional credibility, public participation, and moral action. This discourse is socially valuable, but it can be strengthened by more dialogic stakeholder representation, clearer operational calls to action, and more transparent links between campaigns and reported outcomes.

6. Implications

The analytical framework has several implications. For environmental associations, the first implication is that legitimacy should be supported by more than institutional alignment. References to national priorities, partnerships, and expertise remain important, but they should be accompanied by transparent accounts of outcomes, follow-up, and stakeholder participation. Short public reports, campaign dashboards, volunteer stories, and accessible summaries of impact could make legitimacy more evidential and less symbolic.

The second implication concerns stakeholder voice. Associations can strengthen public trust by moving

from stakeholder mention to stakeholder dialogue. This may include quoting volunteers, publishing community feedback, showing how local needs shaped a campaign, or allowing schools, youth groups, municipalities, and local residents to speak in their own terms. Dialogic representation does not require long documents; even brief first-person reflections, community questions, or participatory captions can change the discourse from institution-centered announcement to shared environmental storytelling.

The third implication concerns calls to action. Public environmental discourse should distinguish between motivational language and operational guidance. Moral slogans are useful, but they become more effective when paired with specific steps: where to register, when to attend, what to bring, how to volunteer, what behavior to change, and how outcomes will be reported. This is especially important for associations that aim to mobilize youth, schools, volunteers, or local communities.

For researchers, the framework offers a way to study nonprofit environmental discourse without reducing it to public relations or greenwashing. It provides a disciplined approach for examining how credibility, participation, and action are linguistically constructed. The framework can be extended to social media posts, campaign videos, annual reports, environmental education materials, and multimodal discourse.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This article has several limitations. The corpus is bounded, illustrative, and based on official public texts. It does not include interviews with association staff, private planning documents, internal evaluations, donor reports, audience reception data, or independent environmental impact evidence. Therefore, the analysis cannot determine the actual effectiveness of associations or the real outcomes of their campaigns. It can only examine how public discourse constructs legitimacy, stakeholder voice, and calls to action.

A second limitation is linguistic and translational. Some Saudi environmental association texts are published in Arabic, some in English, and some in mixed or translated formats. When Arabic texts are discussed through English renderings, interpretive nuance may shift. Future studies should conduct bilingual analysis and compare Arabic and English versions where both exist.

Future research could expand the corpus to include social media posts, images, comments, campaign videos, annual reports, and event documentation across a defined period. It could also compare different types of environmental associations: voluntary local associations, scientific societies, professional sustainability forums, and wildlife or biodiversity groups. Audience studies would be especially useful. Interviews, surveys, or focus groups could examine whether citizens and volunteers experience association discourse as genuinely participatory or mainly promotional. Finally, future work could integrate CDA with multimodal analysis to examine how images of nature, volunteers, national symbols, and green futures support or complicate the language of environmental legitimacy.

8. Conclusion

This article has examined Saudi environmental association discourse through three connected dimensions: legitimacy, stakeholder voices, and calls to action. It argued that associations do not simply communicate environmental information. They use language to authorize themselves as credible civic actors, to position stakeholders within environmental responsibility, and to invite public participation. The analysis showed that legitimacy is commonly constructed through national alignment, institutional affiliation, expertise, moral responsibility, and public benefit. Stakeholder voices are visible but often mediated by the association, with citizens, volunteers, partners, experts, and local communities more often represented than directly heard. Calls to action range from practical invitations to register, volunteer, request services, or participate in campaigns to broader moral appeals to protect the environment.

The article's main contribution is a three-part CDA framework that can be applied to nonprofit and civic environmental communication beyond the Saudi context. It shows that legitimacy, voice, and action should not be studied separately. Together, they explain how environmental discourse becomes persuasive: legitimacy builds trust, stakeholder voice widens participation, and calls to action translate environmental concern into expected behavior. At the same time, the framework helps identify tensions between symbolic and operational discourse, institutional alignment and community impact, and stakeholder mention and stakeholder dialogue.

The conclusion is not that Saudi environmental association discourse is weak or purely symbolic. Rather, it

is that such discourse performs important civic work and can become stronger when it makes participation more dialogic, action more specific, and impact more transparent. In a national context increasingly shaped by sustainability priorities, such communicative refinement is not cosmetic. It is part of building environmental responsibility as a shared civic practice.

Corpus Sources

The following official public sources were used as corpus sources rather than scholarly references. They do not have DOI numbers because they are webpages or organizational pages, not peer-reviewed journal references. They are listed separately so that every scholarly reference entry in the reference list can include a DOI, as required.

Code	Source	Genre	Analytical Use	URL
CS1	Saudi Green Building Forum	Official website and GlobalABC member profile	Mission/status, expertise, certification, partnerships, green building and sustainability discourse	https://www.sgbf.sa/ ; https://globalabc.org/members/our-members/saudi-green-building-forum
CS2	Yanbu Environmental Association	Official website	Voluntary association identity, afforestation, biodiversity, pollution, desertification, registration and community participation	https://yanbu-environmental.sa/?lang=en
CS3	Saudi Society for Environmental Sciences	Administration of Scientific Societies listing	Association identity within scientific-society infrastructure	https://www.aicss.org/BrowseCommitteesEN.asp?CommitteeID=65
CS4	Saudi Society for Geosciences	Official website	Scientific/professional association discourse, services, research, studies, training and environmental activities	https://geoscience.org.sa/en/
CS5	Environment Week	Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture public page	National environmental awareness, sustainability, volunteer campaigns, public participation	https://www.mewa.gov.sa/en/Ministry/Agencies/EnvironmentAgency/Pages/e-week.aspx
CS6	Saudi and Middle East Green Initiatives	Official public website	National sustainability vision, whole-of-society participation, climate action framing	https://www.sgi.gov.sa/

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