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Donation Bag Programs as Multimodal Permission Structures: Selling Climate-Positive Consumerism through Digital Marketing

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Abstract: This project explores how the emergent trend of buying donation bags in exchange for store credit creates a consumerist permission structure for people who are concerned about overconsumption's environmental impacts. I analyze two forms of technical communication from a commercial donation bag program: the bags themselves and the websites that sell them. This analysis shows how these forms of communication establish a permission structure that appears to enlist audiences into a greenwashed consumerist cycle and presents unclear evidence of positive environmental impacts. I conclude by recommending digital and technical communication strategies for improving business websites' credibility and audience engagement.

Keywords: permission structures, digital marketing, website rhetoric, fast fashion, greenwashing

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Introduction

Today's fast fashion and "throwaway culture" pose pressing environmental threats. For instance, natural fibers can be resource-intensive to produce, and synthetic fibers contribute to plastic pollution. Earth.org reports that the water used to make someone a cotton T-shirt could instead provide them "with 900 days of [drinking] water," and "nearly 10% of microplastics dispersed in the ocean each year come from textiles." Worse yet, consumers are significantly increasing the amount of clothing they discard or donate each year — most of which ends up in landfills — and significantly decreasing the number of times they wear their clothing (Igini, 2023).

This project explores how consumer goods companies create permission structures that encourage climate-concerned audiences to engage in consumerism. I begin by reviewing permission structures as a rhetorical strategy. In this review, I identify three types of rhetorical permission structures that I call *procedural*, *affective*, and *third-party permission structures*, and I identify three ways in which rhetorical permission structures can restructure public culture: restructuring *public behavior*, restructuring *communication pathways*, and restructuring *social spaces*.

Next, I analyze how the emergent trend of buying donation bags in exchange for receiving store credit can structure permission for people with climate concerns to engage in a broader trend of greenwashed fast-fashion consumerism (Changing, 2023; Sierra, 2024). My analysis focuses on Trashie/For Days' Take Back Bag program.[1] First, consumers buy "Take Back Bags" from Trashie's or For Days' websites. By buying, filling, and sending back these bags to Trashie, consumers can get rid of unwanted clothing, textiles, and electronics in exchange for travel vouchers and store credit, and Trashie ostensibly recycles, repurposes, or rehomes the bags' contents. Then, consumers spend their store credit plus their own money on new items or vouchers that are sold through Trashie or For Days' websites.

My analysis focuses on two forms of technical communication that enlist audiences into the Take Back Bag program: the bags themselves and the websites that market them. For the websites, I analyze the contrasting multimodal rhetorics of For Days' and Trashie's websites. I focus particularly on Trashie's website, which visually and verbally overwhelms its audience with apparently credible yet vague supporting evidence for their claims about the program's impacts. For the bags, I consider their material composition and how this composition's marketing supports the program's environmental message. The results of this analysis suggest that the program ultimately draws audiences into an ongoing cycle of consumerism by structuring permission to feel less guilty about consumerism. The program makes ethical claims on its websites and elsewhere about the transparency of its environmental impacts, including that it "tracks the impact of these efforts in real-time, providing metrics on landfill diversion, water savings, and CO2 emission reductions" (PR Newswire, 2024). However, its online audience engagement suggests that customers perceive the program to be part of a larger trend among clothing companies of misleading climate-conscious customers into fast-fashion consumerism through greenwashing, and Trashie's website offers insufficient evidence to the contrary. Thus, I conclude this study with recommendations for how business websites can improve credibility

[1] Alden Wicker (2025) offers a detailed summary of the relationship between For Days and Trashie, including the evolution and timeline of both.

with regards to claims about their climate impacts and can better educate consumers about the broader impacts of consumerism, which could motivate larger climate action.

Permission Structures as a Rhetorical Strategy

Although permission structures stem from programming frameworks that guide users' software actions (IBM, 2021; Lanchec, 2024), political and professional communicators have taken up permission structures as a strategy for moving audiences toward actions they would otherwise resist (Katz, 2024; Lemire, 2020). This shift is often attributed to Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, which made permission structures a key campaign strategy. Obama's 2008 campaign manager David Plouffe's (2010) memoir uses "permission structure" in ways that illustrate its currently versatile usage and indicate its rhetorical potential. For instance, permission structures might refer to the logistics of motivating or taking action, like voter registration: "Republicans and independents could attend the caucuses but had to reregister as Democrats to do so—a huge barrier to participation. We'd have to find a way to create a permission structure to make this easier" (p. 29). This example suggests the possibility for *procedural permission structures* that guide audience actions in ways similar to the term's programming origins. Additionally, a rhetor's persuasive performance during a live event might create an *affective permission structure* that moves audiences to think or act differently. Discussing Ronald Reagan's persuasive performance in his presidential debate with Jimmy Carter, Plouffe quotes David Axelrod, Obama's chief campaign strategist, who explains that "'[s]trong debates will allow people to feel it's acceptable to do what they're thinking about doing, but not quite there on—vote for the new guy with the strange name and little Washington experience'" (Axelrod qtd. in Plouffe, 2010, p. 348).

Permission structures can also be *third-party permission structures*,[2] which form when a primary rhetor and/or message gets support from a secondary rhetor who the audience trusts, thus permitting the audience to support the primary rhetor and/or message, too. Here, the secondary rhetor functions as the rhetorical bridge between the primary rhetor and/or message and the audience. Axelrod refers to this permission structure as "third-party authentication," or "endorsements from respected individuals or institutions"; for example, a local newspaper's endorsement of a political candidate can sway voters toward a candidate that they might not support otherwise because they respect and trust that newspaper with regards to politics (Axelrod qtd. in Zengerle, 2008). Third-party permission structures can also form within smaller networks and more personal relationships. Plouffe (2010) explains, "We believed local people talking to their neighbors, friends, and family, to address these doubts, could create a permission structure, whereby voters rationalized, 'Well, you're supporting him enthusiastically. We think alike, live the same types of lives. You see something in him, and that's important to me'" (p. 103). Reflecting on his approach's success, Axelrod describes how the rhetorical effect of a permission structure is that voters can be released of their perhaps-too-limiting commitment to a political

[2] I identify these three types of permission structures as three of multiple possible types of permission structures. I invite identifications of other types as this research area grows. My naming of *affective permission structures* is inspired by research on affective rhetoric in live political events (i.e., Landau & Keeley-Jonker, 2018; Riddick & Shivener, 2022). My naming of *third-party permission structures* is inspired by Axelrod's phrase "third-party authentication." In addition to the term's programming origins, my naming of *procedural permission structures* is also a nod to procedural rhetoric (Bogost, 2007).

party so that they can vote for the candidate who best represents their values. Axelrod (2022) shares, "I learned that you wanted to get people to buy into, not the historic nature, but the cleansing feeling that we don't have to be constrained by divisions, that we can vote for the best person. [. . .] And I also learned, you know, that you want to appeal to the larger electorate, not just your base."

Although U.S. Democrats are often credited with establishing permission structures as a formal political strategy, Republican politicians use this strategy, too. For example, David Shaywitz (2020) discusses how the Republican party spotlights endorsements from people of color, whose communities have historically tended to vote Democrat; these endorsements can have the double effect of persuading more people of color to vote for a Republican candidate and "reassur[ing] white suburban voters" that they are not racist.

The vice presidential campaign of Sarah Palin — one of Obama's 2008 opponents — points to the potential of permission structures as a long-term rhetorical strategy (Axelrod qtd. in Kirk, 2019). David Pitofsky (2019) explains, "Racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment are not new, but used to live mostly in private spaces. To use [speechwriter David] Litt's phrase, Palin created a 'permission structure' through which those dark thoughts became dark words." Since the 2008 US presidential election, this permission structure has solidified and expanded, particularly as a result of social media (Pitofsky; Litt; Bergan and Harkavy). David Simas (2016), an advisor in the Obama administration, explains, "Until recently, religious institutions, academia, and media set out the parameters of acceptable discourse, and it ranged from the unthinkable to the radical to the acceptable to policy. The continuum has changed. [. . .] Now, through Facebook and Twitter, you can get around them" and "you can find people who agree with you, who validate these thoughts and opinions. This creates a whole new permission structure, a sense of social affirmation for what was once thought unthinkable" (Simas qtd. in Remnick, 2016). Drawing from Simas' discussion of permission structures, political communication, and social media, I identify three ways in which permission structures can rhetorically restructure public culture.

1. *Permission structures can restructure public behavior*: when a rhetor publicly does something culturally established as forbidden, frowned upon, and so forth, it can grant "social permission" for audiences to behave this way, too.
2. *Permission structures can restructure communication pathways between rhetors and audiences*: a rhetor's choice of venue can enable them to bypass culturally established and credible rhetors and/or venues to communicate directly to their audience, thereby making it culturally permissible to continue communicating via this new, simplified structure.
3. *Permission structures can restructure social spaces within which public actions take place*: a venue can provide public space for audiences to take a particular action and permit each other to take such action.

As an emergent rhetorical strategy, resources and research about permission structures are relatively limited; search results generally yield discussions about Obama or online guides for professional and personal communication (e.g., Bidwai, 2024; Eblin Group, 2020; Graichen, 2024). Nevertheless, strategic communication organization ModelThinkers provides a helpful

overview, broadly defining a permission structure as a communication strategy that "provides an emotional and psychological justification that allows someone to change deeply held beliefs and/or behaviors while importantly retaining their pride and integrity"; for this strategy to work, it needs to "[help] someone move to a new point of view in a way that feels rational, justified, and consistent with their existing core values" (ModelThinkers, n.d.).

Put differently, permission structures should help audiences bridge what *already exists* and what *could exist*, rather than asking them to leap away from the former to the latter; building this bridge is important because making this leap — or even perceiving doing so — can feel like abandoning a long and/or firmly held way of thinking or feeling about the world, which could in turn feel like an abandoning a core, defining part of themselves to some extent. An effective permission structure, then, helps someone feel consistent with their beliefs and values about the world in which they live while still encouraging them to update these beliefs and values in some way, such as expanding or enriching them or applying them to new contexts. Generally, encouraging someone to expand or enrich their beliefs and values can be beneficial, such as being more open-minded or more receptive to important information and arguments. That said, rhetors may also exploit permission structures to persuade audiences to think or behave in ways that lead to negative cultural impacts—intentionally or otherwise.

A series of television advertisements from the Corn Refiners Association exemplifies permission structures in action. In one commercial called "Maze," a woman walks through a maze and says to the audience:

> **Woman 1:** If you're like me, you care about the food your family eats. I was pretty confused about everything I was hearing about high-fructose corn syrup. So, I did a little research to find out what independent experts like doctors, dietitians, and nutritionists had to say. I learned—whether it's corn sugar or cane sugar—your body can't tell the difference. Sugar is sugar. And that's one less thing to worry about (midgica, 2011a).

The audience is told directly that the character's concern about high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is motivated by concerns for her family. To assuage these concerns, "Maze" challenges an argument against HFCS: *natural foods*[3] *are healthy, and ultra-processed foods are unhealthy. HFCS is considered to be part of the ultra-processed food group* (Monteiro et al., 2019)*. Therefore, HFCS is unhealthy*. By invoking familiar, natural ingredients like "sugar" and "corn," the commercial's counterargument reframes HFCS as natural and healthy: *Natural foods are healthy, and ultra-processed foods are unhealthy. HFCS is made from a natural food (corn), and the body processes it the same as a similar natural food (sugar). Therefore, HFCS is healthy*.

In this way, "Maze" illustrates the "That doesn't apply" permission structure: "I understand that you're concerned about <main issue> and really see why. However, this case is different because . . ." (ModelThinkers, n.d.). For example, structuring permission via social proof to get a COVID-19 vaccine for a vaccine skeptic might sound like, "'You might have been concerned with x vaccine. But I've dug into the research and found that Covid vaccines are different

[3] By "natural," I am referring to minimally processed foods (FHA Food and Beverage, 2023; The Nutrition Source, 2023), not the loosely regulated usage of "natural" that companies use to label and market products (U.S. Food & Drug Administration, 2016).

because . . .'" (ModelThinkers, n.d.). "Maze" takes a nearly identical approach; Woman 1 essentially says, "You might have been concerned with HFCS. But I've dug into the research and found that HFCS is no different than sugar because . . ."

Additionally, this commercial illustrates the "social proof" permission structure: "Most people in your situation <job/demographic/belief> are now deciding" (ModelThinkers, n.d.). For example, someone using this permission structure to persuade a vaccine skeptic might say, '"I get it, I was really suspicious about vaccines too, but after seeing my uncle almost die from Covid, I decided to take another look'" (ModelThinkers, n.d.).[4] Woman 1's dialogue and tone mirrors this example; she directly addresses the audience, and she makes explicit, empathetic connections between her and them based on their identities as parents, their values regarding their family's health, and their belief that nutritious eating affects health.

The series uses the "social proof" permission structure more overtly in another commercial called "Party," which shows two women talking at a children's birthday party, implying they are mothers. As one woman pours a bright red drink, another woman approaches:

> **Woman 2:** *[pours drink]*
> **Woman 3:** Wow, you don't care what the kids eat, huh?
> **Woman 2:** Excuse me?
> **Woman 3:** That has high-fructose corn syrup in it.
> **Woman 2:** And? *[laughs dismissively]*
> **Woman 3:** And you know what they say about it.
> **Woman 2:** What?
> **Woman 3:** [*appears panicked*] It's . . .
> **Woman 2:** That it's made from corn, it's natural, and that, like sugar, it's fine in moderation.
> **Woman 3:** [*looks around, embarrassed*] Looove that top!
> **Narrator:** Get the facts. Go to sweetsurprise.com (midgica, 2011b).

Woman 3's dialogue characterizes her as a mother who has been persuaded by a vague "they" to question HFCS's nutritional value and who is foolish for being persuaded by them. "The facts," the commercial suggests, are that HFCS is healthy and "natural," and the audience is directed to learn more by visiting a website from the Corn Refiners Association.

These commercials illustrate how permission structures can persuade people to think or act differently by leveraging an existing belief or value. In "Party," Woman 3 evidently values healthy eating and believes that natural foods are healthier than ultra-processed foods with artificial ingredients. By portraying HFCS as "natural" and "made from corn" (a commonplace vegetable), the ad permits audience members who identify with Woman 3 to drink an ultra-processed sugary drink with artificial bright red coloring—and to give this drink to their families—without compromising their nutritional values and beliefs. In the following case study, I analyze how consumer goods companies' digital marketing can structure permission for

[4] I consider ModelThinkers' "social proof" permission structure to be one possible form of a third-party permission structure.

audiences to engage in consumerist behaviors by leveraging existing beliefs and values related to environmentalism.

For Days and Trashie's Take Back Bag Program

The Take Back Bag (TBB) program is a for-purchase donation bag program that facilitates recycling and reuse of unwanted clothing, textiles, and electronics: first, customers buy $20 "Take Back Bags" from For Days or Trashie; next, customers fill and send their bags to Trashie; then, Trashie decides if each item in the bag should be donated, recycled, or put in a landfill. The program was originally offered through For Days but shifted to Trashie in 2024. Kristy Caylor founded and currently runs both For Days and Trashie (Worth Magazine, n.d.).

Before analyzing the TBB program, it is worth noting how For Days' environmental goals and business practices have changed. A 2021 *Vogue* article reports that For Days launched in 2018 as "a first-of-its-kind brand premised on true circularity, offering organic cotton basics—think T-shirts, tank tops, sweatshirts, and lounge pants — that can be worn out and sent back to Caylor's team to be upcycled into new garments" (Farra, 2021). Customers paid an annual subscription fee to use the service, then a smaller fee each time they returned a used garment for a new one (Impact Alpha, 2018). However, Caylor observed that, "'Our customer is really engaged in sustainability, but we learned they had a bit of subscription fatigue, and it was actually inspiring them to overuse. It was a conflict of values, and that was really eye-opening'" (Caylor qtd. in Farra, 2021; also Wicker, 2025). Thus, "Caylor retired the subscription model [. . .]; the experience became more like a traditional e-commerce site, and customers could decide when to send their items back" — presumably through what is now called the TBB program (Farra, 2021).

Despite Caylor's advocacy for climate action and efforts to position For Days and Trashie as facilitators of climate action through ethical consumerism, current online audience engagement indicates that audience members feel "scammed" by the TBB program and believe that For Days and Trashie are exploiting their environmental concerns through greenwashing. At the time of writing, top Google search results for "Trashie reviews" are Reddit posts from unhappy customers who characterize the TBB program as a "scam." Customers in these posts were surprised and frustrated when they encountered a $20 spending cap for their TrashieCash, which requires placing multiple orders and spending more of their own money to receive their rewards. Customers also evidently distrust the company because of unclear communication, such as missing and/or untraceable orders and unresponsive customer service, as well as insufficient evidence of their program's impacts. PreviousMarsupial (2024) asks,

> Has anyone been able to find any good information on how For Days actually recycles clothes and where they end up? They have this great marketing but when I did a deep dive I was unable to find any real information on how it is exactly they process the clothing/ textile to be "recycled."

IllustriousDig126 (2024), who claims to be a former employee, warns others,

> They do not recycle anything at all, or only a very very tiny percent of their clothes that they take back. Instead everything is sent to a sorting facility in TX [. . .] Then they are shipped overseas with no oversight on what happens. Some is resold, much is just landfilled in other countries.

These social media discussions about the TBB program suggest that customers believe the companies are misrepresenting the program's actual work and environmental impacts and are deceiving and preying on customers who care about the environment. ProfessionalGrab2648 writes, "Trashie seems to be a big money making machine using people's desire to protect the environment." shazzamatron (2024) summarizes the general tone of this online audience engagement: "Don't do it!! Total scam! And look how they've turned the comments off in their posts. Everyone that tries it is mad."

To better understand why audiences are responding so negatively to the TBB program, I analyze how For Days' and Trashie's websites use multimodal rhetoric and technical communication to sell TBBs and to structure permission for consumerism. In this case study, I consider the TBB program to be a technical process, or "a set of interrelated tasks that, together, transform inputs into outputs" (Martin, 2001, p. 17); the tasks of buying, filling, and donating a TBB transforms into monetary and psychological rewards. I examine how the program creates and facilitates this technical process, as well as how the program's bag and website function as technical communication that enlists audience members into the process. I also consider how the bag and website align with technical communication and social justice in terms of explaining complex processes and information in ways that "make information more usable and accessible" (Society for Technical Communication, n.d.; also Huntsman, n.d.).

The Multimodal Rhetorics of For Days 'and Trashie's Websites

Although For Days and Trashie both sell TBBs and share the same founder and CEO, their relationship is difficult to pinpoint on their websites, which can confuse customers (Jarvis, 2023). Paired with the starkly different multimodal rhetorics of each website, this ambiguity seems intended to present For Days and Trashie as two different companies (including, perhaps, with different target audiences) rather than clearly present their relationship: Trashie is a revised, rebranded, and repackaged version of For Days 'original effort to sell a recycling/upcycling clothing program (Wicker, 2025).

The bottom of For Days' website includes a "Learn" category that links to two webpages, "About For Days" and "How We Recycle." The latter takes the audience to Trashie's website, which I'll analyze shortly. The "About" webpage simply says:

> **Who** We are the dreamers, the believers, and the innovators.
> **Why** Fashion is broken and together, we are going to fix it.
> **What** Using the Take Back Bag we make recycling your clothing easy and rewarding.
> **Our Mission** To keep stuff out of the landfill.

This webpage reflects Trashie and For Days' tendency of making simplistic, broad claims to communicate their credibility and to attract customers.

Besides offering vague explanations, the websites further blur the relationship between these companies by using distinctly different multimodal rhetorics: For Days uses a muted, minimalist, and light aesthetic to portray itself as a chic, ethical online marketplace. By contrast, Trashie uses a loud, flashy, bold aesthetic to sell not just TBBs, but also the environmental value of the program itself. These contrasting aesthetics make it difficult to understand what these apparently different companies actually are: one company packaged as two to market its TBB program.

Because this case study focuses primarily on Trashie's rhetoric, let's begin with For Days' website, which repeatedly directs the audience to Trashie's TBB program and website. For Days' website resembles the minimalist aesthetic of clothing and lifestyle brands like Madewell, Everlane, and Quince (Figure 1).

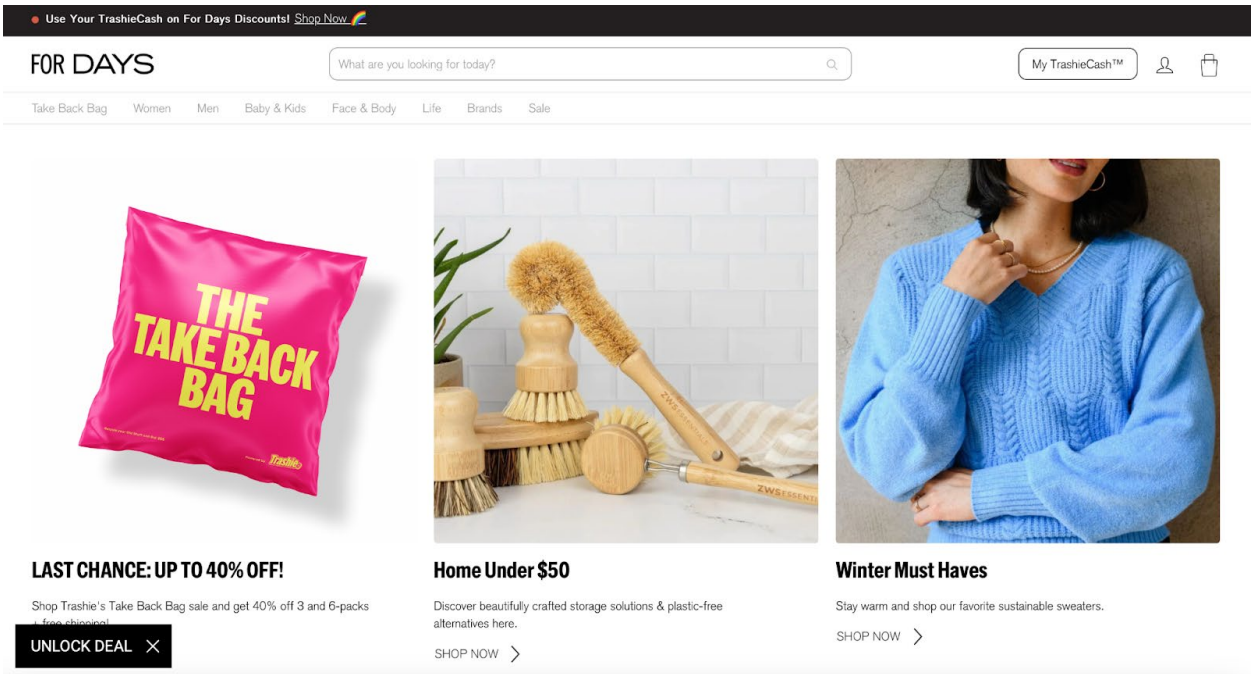

Figure 1. A screenshot of the top of For Days' homepage, which encourages customers to buy Take Back Bags, "beautifully crafted [. . .] plastic-free" products for the "Home Under $50," and "sustainable sweaters" described as "Winter Must Haves."

The homepage's background is a slightly warm off-white, displaying "FOR DAYS" in the top left corner in a dark, thin sans serif font with letters that vary in width (For Days, n.d.). Centered at the top of the page is a search bar, and to the right is a clickable button for "My TrashieCash," which leads to a log-in page. Below the logo is a horizontal menu bar that presents broad shopping categories, followed by six rows of featured shopping categories. The homepage's visual and verbal rhetoric support For Days' argument that it is an environmentally friendly marketplace. It features photographs of products like wooden cleaning tools, reusable paper towels, and biodegradable coconut kitchen scourers, which it markets with language like "sustainable" and "plastic-free alternatives."

A link to buy a TBB is presented directly beneath For Days' logo, making it the first thing the audience notices when reviewing this menu bar. This multimodal appeal is amplified beneath the menu, where the first of three suggested "Shop Now" categories features the TBB, with a caption that encourages customers to buy several bags ("Buy 5, Get the 6th Free!"). Notably, this product category is the only one to feature rapidly moving images, which immediately attracts attention. Attracting attention further is the contents of the clip: a series of photographs edited together to create a stop-action animation (Figure 2). This animation shows clothing rapidly moving into the center of the screen from all directions then disappearing, followed by two images of a TBB, thus implying what the audience should do: buy and fill a TBB with their clothing. This argument is reinforced throughout the homepage, which urges the audience to buy TBBs in ten different places on the homepage alone.

Figure 2. Screenshots of a stop-action animation on For Days' website that shows a pink Trashie bag being filled with clothing.

Whereas the For Days website's use of color is limited — aside from the TBB's bright colors — to the naturalistic color photographs of items it sells, every element of Trashie's website is bright, colorful, and loud. For Days' aesthetic seems aimed primarily at adults, whereas Trashie's aesthetic resembles currently popular teenage aesthetics. Trashie's homepage shows six TBBs layered atop one another in a horizontal line that mimics the color order of a rainbow: the bags shown are hot pink, orange, yellow, green, turquoise, royal blue, and lavender,[5] and each bag shows the words "THE TAKE BACK BAG" in all-caps (Figure 3). This image is presented on a pink background, with a yellow clickable button that reads "BUY A TAKE BACK BAG NOW!" This button leads to a webpage for the TBB and Tech Take Back Box.

[5] Considering the rainbows 'association with queer pride, the company could be also engaging in rainbow-washing (Establishment, 2015).

Figure 3. Screenshot of Take Back Bags on Trashie's website. The bags are displayed in a horizontal row and in a rainbow color arrangement; below the bags is a clickable yellow button that reads "BUY A TAKE BACK BAG NOW!"

The TBB options appear first in a horizontal row of clickable items. There are six bag categories, but a clickable scroller creates the feeling of more. Each option presents three quantitative claims to quickly influence the audience: *the amount they can recycle* implies the positive impact of their TBB purchase, *the amount of TrashieCash earned* presents a personal reward they will receive, and *the sale price* makes the price of paying into the program seem like a good financial deal they should act on immediately (Figure 4).[6]

[6] While writing this article, TBBs were always on sale.

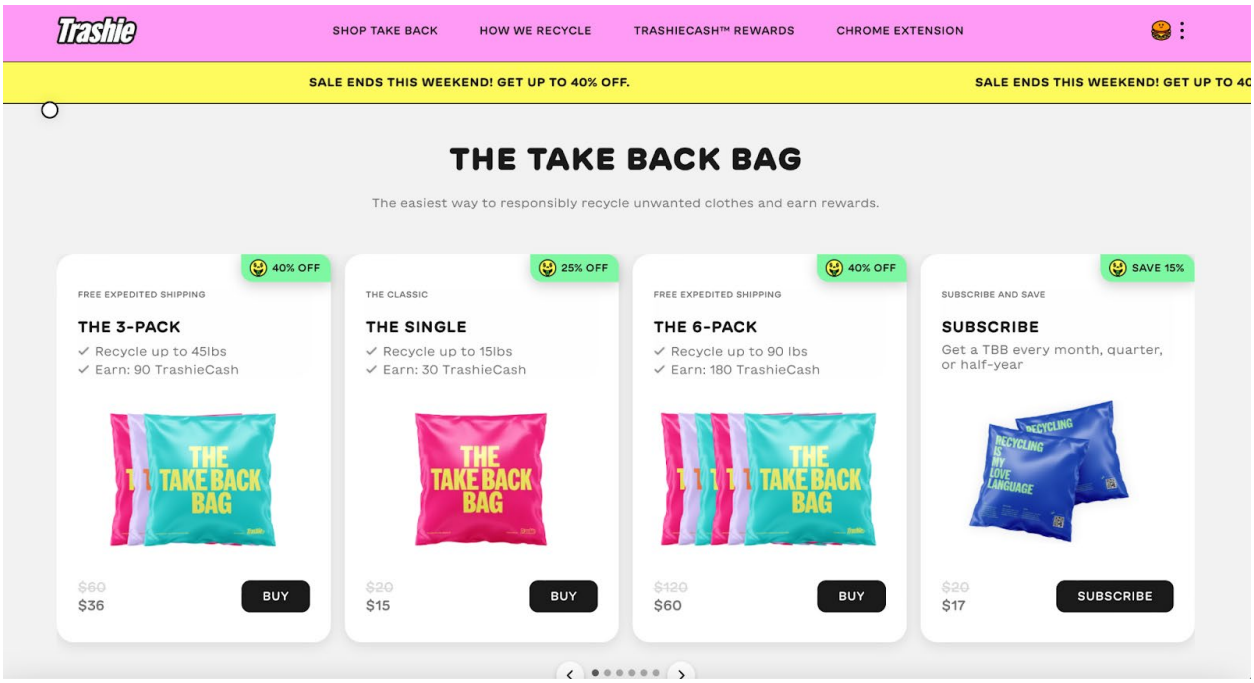

Figure 4. Screenshot of options for buying Take Back Bags on Trashie's website. Four purchasing options are shown, each featuring different prices, discounts, potential amounts recycled, and TrashieCash earned.

For example, "The Single" bag option says it will "recycle up to 15lbs" and "Earn: 30 TrashieCash" for "~~$20~~ $15."[7] Clicking on this item leads to its product page, which again argues that the bag is a good financial deal by presenting the discounted price in large font directly beneath the bag's name, as well as prominently suggesting money-saving options that actually lead to spending more money, like buying more bags to get one bag free or to get free shipping (Trashie, n.d.-b).

One of the most immediately striking pieces of Trashie's visual rhetoric is a looping clip of a landfill (Figure 5). The clip shows a landscape completely covered in discarded products, with two industrial tractors scooping and dumping clothing mounds while workers with baskets strapped to their backs sift through the mounds. Atop this clip is a light blue text box with large sans-serif black font that reads in all-caps "85% OF E-WASTE AND CLOTHING ENDS UP IN LANDFILLS"; below this message, much smaller font is used to say, "Now we can all do something about it" followed by "LEARN MORE" in all-caps on a clickable yellow button (For Days, n.d.). This clip presents brief but compelling visual evidence that consumerist waste causes significant environmental issues that need to be addressed; the visible volume of product waste is overwhelming to witness, which efficiently communicates the magnitude of the problem (Riddick, 2024, p. 978; Hawhee, 2023).

[7] Paying $15 in US "cash" to receive $30 in TrashieCash makes the reward seem more enticing because it implies that you can double your money. However, the relative value of US dollars to TrashieCash is not a one-to-one exchange rate—one is an international currency that can be spent anywhere and on anything, and one is a company's shopping rewards program. Additionally, customers report being forced to spend more of their own money than advertised in order to spend their TrashieCash, leading to a net loss.

Figure 5. Screenshot of clip of landfill sorting on Trashie's homepage. Tractors and people are visibly sorting a mound of clothing behind a text box that reads "85% OF E-WASTE AND CLOTHING ENDS UP IN LANDFILLS[.] Now we can all do something about it. LEARN MORE."

Overall, the multimodal differences between Trashie and For Days 'websites — including how these differences obscure their relationship — reflect broader credibility concerns raised by their approaches to multimodal rhetoric and technical communication, which I will discuss for the remainder of this article. These concerns include: 1) broad and simplistic claims; 2) vague evidence and explanations; 3) claims of transparency vs. evidence of transparency; and 4) greenwashed consumerism.

Credibility Concern #1: Broad and Simplistic Claims

Both websites — but especially Trashie's — present broad, simplistic claims to establish their credibility as climate-positive companies. For instance, the "Company" section of For Days' website addresses only two questions:

> **How Are We Different?** At For Days we truly embrace circularity and zero waste. With our Take Back Bag program we will take any clothing or textiles and ensure that 95% of it will go on to its best next life. What's more, we reward you with TrashieCash for recycling with us" (For Days, 2024a).
>
> **Who Are We?** We are on a mission to keep stuff out of the trash (For Days, 2024b).

In other words, For Days' website offers no useful information about the company, the environmental impacts of the TBB program, or the environmental issues the program claims to be mitigating. Instead, it presents broad claims with little to no specific support.

This trend of signaling credibility through broad, generally unsubstantiated claims continues on Trashie's website, as evidenced by its presentation of customer reviews. For example, Trashie says it has an overall rating of 5 stars, including on a standalone "Reviews" webpage (For Days, n.d.-c). Yet, this webpage's reviews section is not functional: it shows only 6 reviews (4 5-star reviews and 2 4 ½-star reviews) that were posted between June 19-29, 2024 and are "Sorted by: Most Recent," but the reviews can't be sorted any other way or expanded to show more (Figure 6).

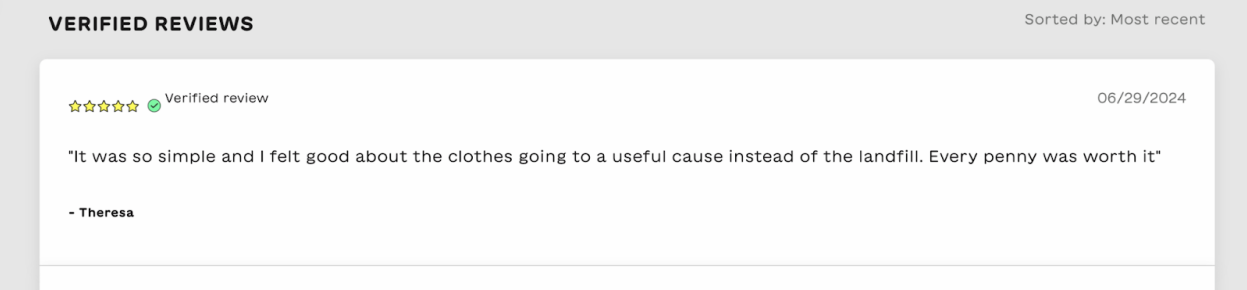

Figure 6. Screenshot of reviews section on Trashie's "Reviews" webpage. Above a five-star review from June 29, 2024, a section header reads "VERIFIED REVIEWS" in bold, all-caps black letters on the left followed by "Sorted by: Most recent" on the right; there is no option for sorting in a different way.

Such broad, simplistic claims about positive environmental intent and impact pervade both websites. For Days provides a few other explanations about its mission, operations, and environmental impact on webpages for "FAQs" and "About TrashieCash," but these webpages essentially repeat the vague answers presented on Trashie's website.

Concern #2: Vague Explanations and Evidence

The TBB program's credibility is also negatively affected by its vague explanations about its operations and its vague evidence of positive impacts. Trashie tends to rely on making logical appeals with quantitative data to quickly signal credibility, but it tends to rely on the same few pieces of data to make these appeals. It also rarely and barely explains or contextualizes this data. For example, the "Reviews" webpage presents a graphic summary of "TRASHIE IMPACT IN THE LAST YEAR" based on five pieces of quantitative evidence: "BAGS SOLD," "ITEMS DIVERTED FROM LANDFILL," "CLOTHES OUT OF THE TRASH," "WATER SAVED," and "CO2 EMISSIONS DIVERTED" (Figure 7).

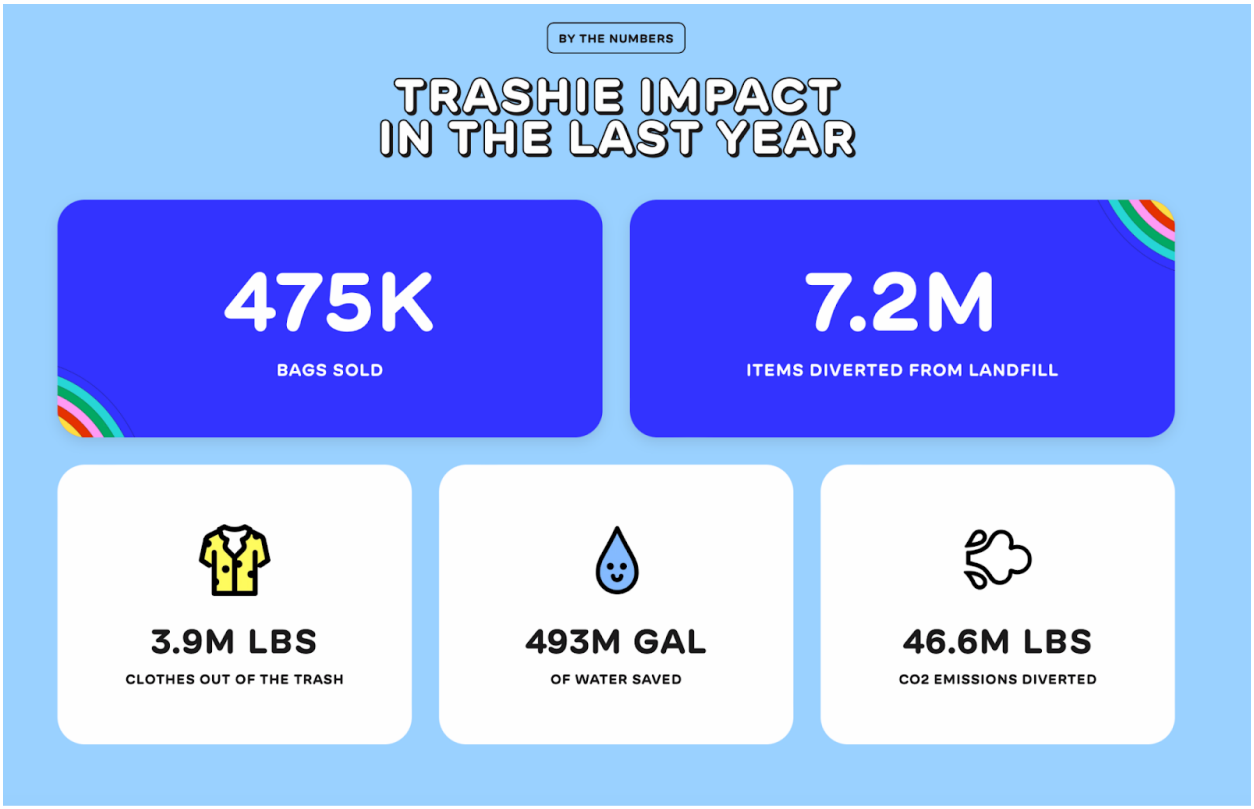

Figure 7. Screenshot of "Trashie Impact in the Last Year" graphic on Trashie's website, based on five quantitative pieces of evidence: "475K BAGS SOLD[,] 7.2M ITEMS DIVERTED FROM LANDFILL[,] 3.9M LBS CLOTHES OUT OF THE TRASH[,] 493M GAL OF WATER SAVED[,] 46.6M LBS CO2 EMISSIONS DIVERTED."

These numbers align with but don't exactly reproduce claims made elsewhere on the website. Trashie claims elsewhere that "Our 500,000 Take Back Bag users make it all possible" (Trashie, n.d.-a). *How does this number of users (500,000 users) compare with the number of bags sold "Last Year" (475,000 bags)? Which year is being summarized here?* The section does not explicitly name the year nor indicate when the webpage was last updated. This lack of detail to clarify or substantiate claims about impact occurs throughout Trashie's website, raising concerns about the claims' validity and, in turn, Trashie's credibility.

Trashie could limit — and perhaps avoid — raising these concerns by providing additional information. For instance, they could enhance their technical communication by providing additional support for their quantitative claims. To convince the audience that their program is effective, Trashie tends to present conclusive quantitative claims without providing the quantitative evidence that leads to them. This approach asks the audience to trust the mathematical result achieved without showing the formula and data inputs that led to that result.

To be fair, multiple elements of Trashie's verbal rhetoric are effective in terms of technical communication: a conversational yet professional register combined with active voice and accessible language make Trashie's claims easy to understand for non-specialist audience members and contribute positively to an overall sense of credibility. In the "Impact" graphic,

visual choices like sans-serif black font, high-contrast color combinations, minimalist graphics, plain language, and straightforward organization model effective design-centered and accessible approaches to technical communication that "enhance readability and understanding and simplify complex information" (Huntsman, n.d.); these choices also model effective user interface (UI) design principles (Hamidli, 2023).

However, the website repeatedly stops short of supporting its claims with specific explanations and evidence. According to Trashie (2024b), "Each Take Back Bag [. . .] Saves 15 pounds of landfill waste[,] Reduces CO2 emissions by 151 units from the atmosphere[,] [and] Conserves 1,596 gallons of freshwater" but no additional information is provided to explain how this occurs or to prove it actually does occur. The multimodal rhetorics of Trashie's website demonstrate an awareness of webpages' capacities to present technical information in understandable and engaging ways. Why, then, is the impact page so sparse?

To make a stronger case for the bag's positive impacts, this webpage could explain how shipping and processing the bag contributes to a net reduction of "151 units" of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere (also, *is this a good amount?*). Going further, Trashie could offer a graphic that efficiently visualizes this process. Additionally, Trashie could provide more access to the data itself, such as linking to a publicly accessible report of the data that leads to these claims — something other clothing companies are increasingly offering (Parisi, 2023).

Trashie could also explain the environmental impacts of the bag itself. According to Trashie (2025d), "Our Take Back Bags are made of 50% post-consumer recycled content, they are fully recyclable, and we recycle 100% of Take Back Bags that are sent back to us." These points support Trashie's message that their program minimizes environmental harms: first, the bags are *partially* a product of recycling, a process widely believed to be positive environmental action, including among audiences who are less concerned with climate change; second, the bags can be *totally* recycled, which suggests a further reduction in environmental harm; and third, Trashie recycles *all* bags they receive, which bolsters the second point by swiftly moving it from possibility to reality. In this way, the bag functions as a multimodal form of technical communication that reinforces its program's permission structure. However, no additional information is provided, which leaves more questions unanswered.

For instance, *what are the environmental production costs of TBBs? What would a life-cycle analysis show*? Many options are available that purport to minimize the environmental harms of a mailer bag's life cycle, such as paper mailers or recycled poly mailers. Given how complicated the life-cycle costs are for each type of mailer (e.g., Cho, 2020; Zimmerman and Bliken, 2020; Zhou et al, 2024), the TBB's composition of "100% recycled, 50% post consumer" mailer *may* be less harmful overall than other types of bags or packaging, just as its program *may* be as environmentally beneficial as it claims. The concern here is the same raised by the rest of Trashie's website: by not taking up opportunities to explain *how* this program and bag achieves these outcomes, the audience is expected to take broad claims at face value, and they learn nothing more about the topic at hand. Trashie dedicates over fifty separate webpages to answering questions about its program and its bag. If Trashie were to explain what a life-cycle analysis does and perhaps also analyze the TBB, it would explicitly support Trashie's relatively implicit claims of the bag's positive impact. Moreover, it would deepen audience members'

understanding of how *many* elements of consumerism affect the environment, which could inspire more impactful climate action. For example, the shopping bag depicted in Figure 8 concisely explains the "Resource Consumption for 1 T-shirt."

Figure 8. A photograph of a paper shopping bag from HUMANA Secondhand & Vintage that explains the "Resource Consumption for 1 T-Shirt."

The bag explains that a new T-shirt "'costs 'resources equal to the weight of an elephant," whereas a used T-shirt's resource cost equals a mouse. The bag illustrates this message with the following combination of images and words: "[T-shirt image] 1 T-SHIRT [elephant image] MADE NEW: 4,000 kg [mouse image] SECOND HAND: 30 g." By using straightforward language to explain the resource cost of new vs. used T-shirts, by listing resources that contribute to a T-shirt's resource "cost" (i.e., water, oil, fertilizer, pesticides, bleach, and colorants), and by translating these costs into familiar examples (i.e., the weight of a mouse vs. an elephant), the bag makes these costs and the components that factor into them easier to understand in a brief amount of space and gives the audience a sense of *scale* for how their consumption choices affect the environment. By pairing images of these examples with the relative resource-consumption weight of new vs. used T-shirts, the bag gives a sense of *magnitude* to these differences (Riddick, 2024, p. 978; Hawhee, 2023).

This bag demonstrates how physical objects, like a shopping bag, can use technical communication strategies to support social justice. As Sherena Huntsman (n.d.) explains, "Technical communicators have the opportunity to make information and knowledge accessible

and understandable, and to choose not to do so is not only oppressive but also prevents unheard voices from taking our progress a step further." The TBB program presents its mission as working toward climate justice, which intersects with social justice. To contribute more significantly to these goals, Trashie's website — including its infographics — and the TBB bag itself could more effectively use technical communication strategies to motivate broader climate action (i.e., buying less new clothing).

Credibility Concern #3: Claims about Transparency vs. Evidence of Transparency

One of the most notable ways in which the TBB program tries to establish credibility is by claiming to be "transparent" without providing sufficient supporting evidence. For example, Trashie's "How We Recycle" webpage explains the program's 5-step process of "Collection," "Secure In-House Sorting and Grading," "Redistribution or Responsible Recycling," "Regulatory Compliance," and "Reporting and Impact Measurement." Next, the webpage explains four qualities of Trashie's program, which helps establish credibility with a climate-concerned audience:

1. "Onshore Precision Sorting" appeals to those concerned with the additional carbon footprint of shipping their bags around the world and/or impacts of outsourcing jobs and labor.
2. "Maximising Reuse" suggests their approach is "as efficient and effective as possible" (Trashie, n.d.- a).
3. "Transparency" reflects the now-standard rhetorical shorthand for "I'm not lying or hiding things from you, therefore you can trust me."
4. "Continuous Improvement through Innovation" implies Trashie is actively leading the way on climate action in its industry and is actively invested in continuing to do so. Phrases throughout this page support these arguments, such as "best-in-class" and "state-of-the-art" (Trashie, n.d.-a).

Of these qualities, "Transparency" is the most contestable based on the supporting explanations and evidence Trashie does(n't) provide. "We are committed to building trust through clear, accountable processes," Trashie explains, yet its website lacks clarity and accountability. Trashie (2024a) repeatedly mentions its "highly efficient grading process that sorts into over 250 grades. We isolate quality, category, seasonality, makers, and materials," but it provides no additional information. *How are the broad categories of quality, category, seasonality, makers, and materials broken down into 250+ subcategories? Which categories are valued more highly?*

When asked in an interview, "What makes Trashie a better alternative to donating clothes in a used clothing bin in a parking lot or garage," Trashie's CEO repeats this vague argument about Trashie's transparency and implied trustworthiness: "we have full transparency about where the clothes go. We share the process over video" (TAU, 2024). However, the only video on Trashie's website is an embedded YouTube video of a *Good Morning America* segment about programs like Trashie. In the five-minute video, Trashie is featured for only one minute, with its sorting process only shown and described for ten seconds. The video shows a reporter visiting Trashie's sorting facility in "El Paso to see the process," followed by clips of employees dumping clothing onto conveyor belts and tossing items into piles. As one employee gestures for

permission to toss an item somewhere, Caylor nods and explains, "So she's gonna put the towel in the linens, shoes in the shoes. A*nd so when we talk about sorting and grading, that really is the process* for figuring out what's in your bag, what has value, where it can go, what can be reused, what can be recycled" (Good Morning, 2024, emphasis added). But *what exactly is the process?* The video offers no more visual or verbal specificity than this ten-second clip; all that the clip makes transparent is that Trashie receives and sorts through massive amounts of donations in a warehouse, but its process and results are not shown or explained.

It is understandable that Trashie may not want to publicly share the exact details of its proprietary sorting process. However, they could help audiences better understand this process by providing an example. For instance, *what might happen to a 100% cotton shirt with signs of light wear from Target compared to a 100% synthetic-fibers shirt with signs of light wear from a high-fashion and/or currently popular brand?* Or, Trashie might provide a general example of how they value *one* of the broad sorting categories, such as materials. *How might the sorting process value natural fibers vs. synthetic fibers in general, regardless of quality, category, seasonality, and makers?*

Trashie might also increase transparency by sharing the results of its sorting process. The audience may not need to know exactly *how* their bags are sorted, but they would likely appreciate the opportunity to know *where* the bags' contents went.[8] The audience is told that Trashie "get[s] over 95% of the unwanted clothing we collect to the next right place," which resulted "last year" in keeping "3.9M LBS CLOTHES OUT OF THE TRASH" (Trashie, n.d.-c). They also generally describe the avenues for doing so, like sending clothing to specific regions around the world during specific seasons, as well as "pull[ing] the right materials out for recycling and send[ing] them to downcycling and fiber-to-fiber partners in the US, Central America and Europe" to create items like "industrial rags, industrial insulation, carpet padding, pet bed filling, punching bag filling" (Trashie, n.d.-a).

These claims suggest positive outcomes, but they offer no additional information or answers. *How much of that 3.9 million pounds of clothing was sent to other countries for wear? To which (kinds of) international partners did they send this category? Are these partners commercial clothing merchants? Charity shops that accept donations? Do these partners know in advance everything that they are accepting, or do they need to re-sort the bags themselves (which may result, ultimately, in more clothing ending up in landfills than Trashie claims)? How much of the 3.9 million pounds of clothing were sent to Trashie's partners to be downcycled? How many "right materials" did Trashie first "pull for recycling" from this clothing, given the challenges and limitations of fiber-to-fiber recycling?*[9]

[8] Trashie (n.d.-a) says, "We provide detailed reporting on where items go, how they're reused or recycled, and the environmental impact achieved," but I was unable to find this information, even after creating an account. It may be the case that Trashie provides this information after processing a customer's bag; if so, clearly explaining on the website when and where customers will receive this information would be helpful.

[9] Most contemporary clothing is difficult to recycle because of their "problematic blends of natural yarns, man-made filaments, plastics and metals" (Beall, 2020), and the process itself is expensive, time-intensive, and labor-intensive (Sustainable Fashion Forum, 2024).

Overall, this combination of claiming positive environmental impacts and presenting unclear evidence risks coming across as a greenwashed "That doesn't apply here" permission structure that supports the program's larger permission structure (ModelThinkers, n.d.). Trashie's website uses multimodal rhetoric and technical communication strategies to acknowledge the environmental impacts of fast fashion and consumerism and to distance their own facilitation of these behaviors (i.e., the TBB program) from these impacts. The website's vague explanations—technical and otherwise—of the TBB program's process and impacts is essentially a series of multimodal messages that say, "I understand that you're concerned about <the effects of fast fashion and consumerism> and really see why. However, <participating in the TBB program> is different because . . ."

Concern #4: Structuring Permission for Greenwashed Consumerism

The concerns discussed thus far contribute to a fourth concern: the public perception that the TBB program is selling greenwashed consumerism. Here, we should examine another environmental argument that the companies make. Both companies claim they are "building a circular economy" by selling and processing TBBs; rewarding customers with "TrashieCash"; and selling goods, travel credits, and in-person experiences that can be purchased with TrashieCash and actual money. However, this circularity has notable limitations:

> We do not allow TrashieCash to be used on Take Back Bags. In building a circular economy, we want you to use your TrashieCash credit towards circular items - from apparel, to socks & underwear, or face & body products - close the loop with us! (For Days, 2024d).

This answer seems positive and straightforward, but important details are softened or obscured. Customers must spend their own money to buy TBBs, and they must use their TrashieCash on goods and vouchers sold by For Days or Trashie. Fair enough, considering that For Days and Trashie aren't nonprofits and need to generate revenue to provide the TBB program. However, it is unclear how (much) the items they sell qualify as "circular items," considering these items are mostly new, which encourages more consumption.

For example, some companies now have resale sections where they sell used items, buy back their items in exchange for store credit, or facilitate customer-to-customer sales of used items (Hirsh, 2024). Besides including secondhand clothing company ThredUp in the TrashieCash Rewards program, neither company provides these options; instead, customers must buy new clothing and other goods. Here, it is notable that For Days and Trashie don't make a straightforward appeal on their websites about the environmental benefits of *not* buying new items, which they could easily do. For instance, even influential fashion company Levi's begins its website's secondhand section with a prominent message to customers: "If everybody bought one used item this year, instead of buying new, it would save 449 million pounds of waste" (Levi's, n.d.).

Likewise, the constraints of TrashieCash seem to lock customers into a consumerist cycle. TrashieCash applies to multiple spending categories: buying new "items on For Days, where you'll find a variety of cool stuff from eco-conscious brands," buying shopping "rewards" (i.e.,

discounts) for various stores and vendors, and buying travel credit (Trashie, 2024c). This is the program's current basic math: One TBB costs $20, which results in 30 TrashieCash, and this amount can buy a wide range of rewards. For example, based on the rewards available on January 7, 2025, 25 of the 30 TrashieCash could be used to buy $25 in hotel travel credit, and the remaining 5 TrashieCash could be used to purchase specific discounts on consumer goods or experiences (e.g., 10% off clothing from Harvest & Mill, 15% off plants at Plants.com, or 5% off Ticket Savings).

As these examples illustrate, many of the rewards options appear to support Trashie's ethical and environmental mission, such as spending TrashieCash on natural goods (e.g., plants), in-person experiences (e.g., activities and events), and consumer goods companies that advertise eco-conscious practices (e.g., Harvest & Mill). However, some of the choices in rewards partnerships are questionable, such as encouraging people to "earn" TrashieCash by shopping at Wal-Mart, Old Navy, and Petco—each of whom have raised prominent public concerns about unethical business practices (Karma Wallet 2023; Environmental Protection Agency, 2024; Silverstein, n.d.; Sparke, n.d.). Trashie also offers $10 off an order of $50+ at fast-fashion brand Forever 21, who consistently receives low scores from organizations that evaluate the sustainability and ethics of fashion and beauty brands (Benton-Collins, 2023; also Chomsky, 2024; Commons, n.d.).

In short, the program requires customers to buy new products because the currency of TrashieCash has no value beyond Trashie and For Days 'websites and because the products these companies sell are almost entirely new. Furthermore, many customers have shared on social media that they only discovered *after* they had already spent money on TBBs that there are considerable restrictions in how they can spend their TrashieCash and that this spending is further restricted by spending caps for TrashieCash that are not clearly explained upfront (For Days, 2024c). So, customers must primarily use their own money to make multiple purchases (which increases shipping emissions) of new goods (which increases production emissions) to redeem the program's rewards.

Similarly questionable is how Trashie promotes travel via its travel credit reward. Mentions of travel credit are rare and take the same form each time: $25 or $75 in hotel travel credit, advertised, respectively, with a photograph of a street in a city center and a photograph of a pool. The architecture and signage indicate that the street photograph was taken in Stockholm, Sweden, but even without recognizing these details, an audience member could likely infer from them that the location is not based in the US. Thus, Trashie visually advocates for international travel and tourism, despite its environmental costs (Sustainable Travel International, n.d.). This implicit argument is worse with the pool photograph (Figure 9). Based on the several large, natural-fiber umbrellas installed in the pool and the palm trees blowing behind them, the pool appears to be part of a luxury resort in a tropical location, which encourages a form of international travel and tourism that is arguably more harmful than touring an international city (Ewing-Chow, 2019).

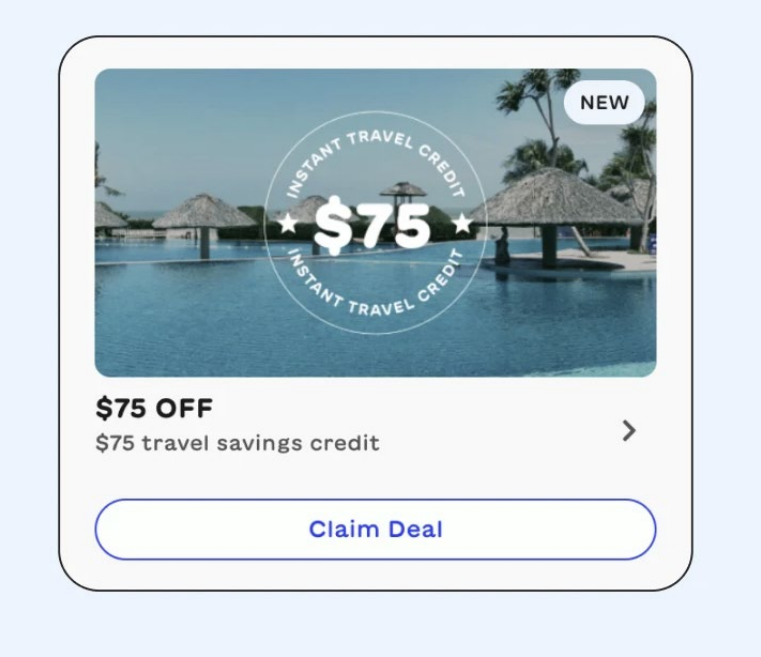

Figure 9. Screenshot of $75 travel credit on Trashie's website that appears to promote tropical resorts.

An alternative approach Trashie could use is encouraging its audience to travel more locally, including by briefly explaining how climate change is affected by various travel and tourism choices and perhaps also linking to resources that provide more information. They could also use this digital space to promote local or regional opportunities for travel and recreational experiences (e.g., facilitate local sales through their website; provide links to external websites).

Overall, by setting up its rewards system in these ways, the TBB structures permission to engage in forms of consumerism that have demonstrably negative environmental effects (e.g., buying new products; air travel). For example, the program's reward system structures permission to engage in clothing-based consumerism according to the following logical chain:

> *I care about the environment and how my individual actions impact it → I feel something negative (e.g., guilt) when my individual actions negatively impact the environment → The positive environmental impacts of some individual actions can (help) offset the negative environmental impacts of other individual actions → Donating clothing has positive environmental impacts (i.e., reusing, recycling, downcycling), and throwing away clothing has negative environmental impacts → The positive environmental impact of donating my unwanted clothing to be recycled, downcycled, and/or reused can offset the negative environmental impacts of me buying new clothing → If I buy a TBB, I can donate my unwanted clothing to be recycled, downcycled, and/or reused and therefore feel less negatively when I buy new clothing.*

The program structures this permission through TBB sales; to obtain permission to relieve their feelings of climate guilt and anxiety, customers need to buy it. As Dion Terrelonge puts it, the TBB program offers "moral offsetting" that "absolves the person from engaging in these

behaviors that are not the most moral or ethical [. . .] They can tell themselves [shopping is] OK because they're shopping with Trashie" (Terrelonge qtd. in Benson, 2024). Although customers can immediately receive the program's psychological reward of feeling better about their consumerism once they've filled and sent back a TBB, they are incentivized, and in some ways compelled, to spend more money and to engage in consumerist behaviors in order to receive the program's monetary rewards—rewards that beg the question of how much the full process of participating in this program actually benefits the environment.

Additionally, social media influencers are extending the reach of the program's permission structure by adding layers of social proof and third-party authentication. Promoting the TBB program is currently profitable for influencers (Brand U, 2025), given growing public concerns about the environmental impacts of fast fashion and overconsumption. By widely promoting TBBs as "a get-out-of-jail-free card for overconsumption," influencers structure permission for audiences who trust them to perceive that they are receiving the same ethical reward for participating in the program.

Conclusion

This case study analyzed the multimodal rhetorics and technical communication of the Take Back Bag commercial donation program. Based on a rhetorical analysis of the program's two websites — For Days and Trashie — and the donation bag itself, I identified four primary concerns that may undermine the audience's trust in the program and in the companies that operate it. Both websites often make broad, simplistic claims and offer little or no support for these claims. Both brands also try to establish credibility and trustworthiness by repeatedly making claims about the TBB program's transparency, yet the explanations and evidence they offer for the program's operations and environmental impact are opaque. These concerns lead to another: the program may not actually be facilitating a circular economy but instead may be manipulating environmentally conscious consumers into a consumerist cycle through greenwashing.

In sum, the TBB program's multimodal rhetorics and technical communication seem to create a contradictory and at times incoherent permission structure to persuade environmentally conscious audience members to continue their habits of consumerism *and* to feel positively about doing so because they believe they are to some extent offsetting their habits' harms. Consumers must purchase a TBB in exchange for spending credit, which encourages them to feel good about spending money on new clothes and other goods. Yet, despite making many engaging, visually appealing, often quantitative claims about the positive impacts of this program on its websites and in other forms of media, the program does not offer sustainability reports or other forms of evidence to substantiate these claims. Accordingly, it is difficult to say how this program is facilitating a climate-positive circular economy. Instead, the circular economy seems to be a greenwashed consumerist cycle: *Buy new items → No longer want items → Donate items to feel less guilty about negative effects of consumerism → Receive financial incentive to buy new items → Buy new items*.

This process subtly restructures public culture regarding climate action by restructuring the public behavior of consumerism as a form of climate action. As I argued earlier, when rhetors

encourage and/or engage in culturally discouraged behaviors, they structure social permission for audiences to engage in this behavior, too. Climate-concerned audience members likely recognize the environmental harms caused by consumerism, including how their individual consumerist behaviors contribute to it. Given Trashie's current public reach (e.g., magazine articles about it; approximately 370,000 Instagram followers), the program has the potential to restructure public behavior and culture toward engaging in less consumerism. Yet, it makes little effort to educate its customers about the environmental costs of consumerist behaviors. Instead, it glosses over these educational opportunities and enlists customers into a complicated, limited monetary "rewards" system that heavily relies on the production and sales of new products. In short, this process effectively structures permission to continue engaging in consumerism while feeling less climate guilt about it.

Perhaps a commercial donation bag program like TBB's truly can create net-positive environmental effects; perhaps the TBB program already is doing so. Likewise, perhaps other climate-focused commercial programs could charge customers for other types of net-positive products and services, too. However, it is essential that such programs avoid creating through their digital marketing and technical communication the impression of capitalizing on audience members' climate values through greenwashing. To establish and maintain credibility with their audience members, I recommend the following for business websites that aim to motivate and facilitate climate action:

1. *Use rhetorical informational architecture strategies to provide specific evidence and explanations to support claims, particularly about environmental impacts*. Websites offer capacious spatial and organizational opportunities (i.e., "site structure, page relationships and navigation, and page layout and design") to substantiate businesses 'claims about their impacts (Honeycutt et al., 2005). For example, Trashie could more effectively use its website to support its claims by providing easy-to-find reports in its "FAQs" section or somewhere else that indicate the percentage of items that were sorted into each possible distribution category each year (i.e., donation, recycling, landfill) as well as where specifically each distribution category went in the world. They could also provide evidence of the program's climate impacts, such as a life-cycle analysis of the TBB or an analysis of the carbon footprint or other impacts of the program (e.g., producing bags, sending and receiving bags, processing bags, distributing bags' contents).

2. *Use multimodal rhetoric and technical communication strategies to provide specific, accessible, educational information about the environmental impacts of consumerism*. Websites facilitate engaging, multimodal communication (e.g., images, infographics, videos), and businesses should balance style with substance when deciding which types of information to foreground in these ways. For example, Trashie could expand upon its multimodal approaches (e.g., the "Impact" infographic) to also explain the environmental impacts of producing and transporting new articles of clothing. It could also provide life-cycle analyses of popular types of clothing, like fast-fashion clothing that is overproduced, quickly consumed, and difficult to recycle or reuse. Additionally, they could better explain what a circular economy entails. Ideally, this effort would include clearly and accurately explaining how the TBB program contributes to a circular economy, as well as how (much) buying new goods from For Days or Trashie contributes

to a circular economy. Obviously, these contributions to a circular economy — especially For Days' — may be limited, but explaining these contributions would significantly enhance the companies' claims about transparency and their overall credibility. It would also meaningfully contribute to efforts to educate audiences about their personal impacts on the environment and perhaps motivate widespread behavioral changes that could create more sizable positive impacts.

3. *Use websites 'multimodal and hyperlinking features to provide multiple avenues for creating a circular economy*. For example, Trashie could create a webpage or website section that encourages customers to repair their clothing and that offers resources for doing so, such as guides for mending and repairs. On this webpage, they could also facilitate mending and repair services, ideally from local businesses. Additionally, they could use their website to facilitate a marketplace for customers to sell used goods to one another (Reconomy, 2024), and/or to upcycle and sell textile donations that aren't suitable for reuse into new garments and goods. In this way, the program's website would provide a procedural permission structure that could more significantly restructure public culture toward behaviors that align with climate action.

Again, the TBB program may be as climate-positive as it claims. However, its websites' current approaches to multimodal technical communication suggest otherwise, creating the appearance of a permission structure that manipulates audiences concerned about climate change and social justice into a greenwashed consumerist cycle. By adjusting its approaches to technical communication and multimodal rhetorics, the program could substantially clarify its impacts, enhance its credibility, and encourage people to assess and adjust their consumption habits to be more climate-positive overall.

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