

A Corpus-based Discourse-historical Study on the Corporate Identity Construction of BYD

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Abstract- Research on the discursive construction of corporate identity, as an interdisciplinary study bridging linguistics and management, demonstrates pluralistic development trends in theoretical foundations and research design. However, significant methodological divergences persist, including limited integration of management theories and a lack of comprehensive theoretical perspectives or unified analytical frameworks. This study however conducts a discourse-historical approach analysis of corporate social responsibility reports of BYD, which integrates management theories with the corpus tool Wmatrix5 to investigate *centrality*, *distinctiveness*, and *evolvability* identities character constructed by BYD from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. Furthermore, the research provides linguistic analysis and management-oriented interpretation of the underlying discursive practices and socio-historical contexts. The findings reveal that corporate social responsibility reports of BYD construct a *centrality* character as a *comprehensive compliance-focused transportation solutions provider*, a *distinctiveness* character as an *intellectual-property-driven leader in green energy supply chains* and an *evolvability* character as a *pragmatic innovator pioneering globalized operation*. These identity characters are achieved by highlighting key thematic domains such as Vehicles and transport on land (M3), Getting and possession (A9+) and Green issues (W5). Such constructions not only respond to the volatile international landscape and intensifying hyper-competitive market dynamics, but also reflect the comprehensive competence of BYD on how to build, maintain as well as adjust harmony relationships with multiple stakeholders, which leads to the improvement of corporate capabilities within this complex environment. This study offers insights into the interdisciplinary between linguistics and management science as well as diachronic dimensions of corporate identity research.

Index Terms—Corporate Social Responsibility Report, Discourse-Historical Approach, Corporate Identity Construction

I. INTRODUCTION

Research on corporate identity represents an interdisciplinary nexus integrating management science with sociology and linguistics. From the perspective of management science, corporate identity is regarded as a constituent elements of organization as well as the core concept of organizational identity theory (OIT) (Balmer, 2001). Sociologically, corporate identity research falls within the broader framework of institutional identity research. The integration of linguistics with corporate identity research emerged against the backdrop of discourse turn in identity research, where the theoretical paradigm shift from traditional to social constructionist views of identity (Goffman, 1949; Tracy & Robles, 2013). The alternation of paradigm prioritizes the dynamic nature of identity therefore leads to a research trend on the role of discourse in identity construction and negotiation (Chen, 2015). The convergence of discursive constructionism and corporate identity theory has further innovated research approaches and expanded the conceptual boundaries of organizational identity research. While existing discourse-based research on corporate identity has yielded some initial findings. The depth of interface study improves progressively with the involvement of interdisciplinary researches. Pertinent studies however demonstrate some common limitations including monotonousness of methodology, miscellaneousness of analytical frameworks and ambiguity of concept. This study adopts BYD as research case, utilizing its corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports as research corpus. We specifically examine discursive practices of identity construction within BYD CSR reports. By introducing a diachronic perspective and refining the concept of corporate identity, this research aims to achieve cross-disciplinary theoretical integration. Theoretically, it provides a consolidated framework and methodological reference for corporate identity research; practically, it offers theoretical and methodological guidance for optimizing discursive strategies of BYD.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical research on corporate identity

Theoretical research on corporate identity primarily centers on its definition and concept, addressing a fundamental question: *What constitutes corporate identity?* Current studies on corporate identity reveals persistent conceptual divergences. The definition becomes increasingly multidimensional and dynamic with the emergence of interface research (Melewar, 2003). Management

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science predominantly adopts an internally-oriented perspective, examining constituent elements of corporate identity and their intertextual relationships (Boulding, 1956; Spector, 1961; Albert & Whetten, 1985; Lambert, 1989; Gao, 1994; Balmer, 2017). Grounded in discursive constructionism, linguistic research on corporate identity proceeds from the perspective of discursive practices and organizational culture, whose analysis prove to be relatively multidimensional and dynamic (Bhatia & Lung, 2006). Based on the consideration of the measurability and comprehensiveness, this study defines corporate identity as salient self-representation in organizational language practice. The corporate identity therefore can be examined through three dimensions: *centrality*, *distinctiveness* as well as *evolvability* (Hu & Xu, 2023), which is built upon the framework of *centrality*, *distinctiveness* and *stability* initiated by Albert et Whetten (1985). The *centrality*, *distinctiveness* and *evolvability* can respond respectively such three questions: To what kind of corporation does it belong?, How does a corporation differ from others?, How does a corporation endure?

B. Applied research on corporate identity

Applied research of management science on corporate identity focuses on intertextual relationships between identity and other organizational elements as well as measurement methodologies, which aims to explore the value of managerial practice and key determinants. Theoretical frameworks for identity measurement have been established (Balmer, 2001; Schmidt & Ludlow, 2002; Melewar et al., 2005). Digital transformation has redirected scholarly attention toward identity construction in new media contexts, with recent studies analyzing the reconstruction of corporate identity governance in digital economies (Coupland & Brown, 2004; Christensen et al., 2008; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Bravo et al., 2013).

Applied linguistic research on corporate identity examines the construct through multiple analytical lenses: stance (Miao & Li, 2022), rhetorical strategies (Wu & Zhang, 2022), transmediation (Chen, 2022), grammatical features (Labrador et al., 2014; Wang & Bu, 2019), identity construction (Miao & Li, 2021), discursive tactics (Wu & Zhang, 2019), corpus-based phraseology (Hu & Zhou, 2024). This research has positioned the strategic function of linguistic symbols in corporate governance as a critical scholarly focus.

Current studies on corporate identity demonstrate pronounced disciplinary boundary. In the field of management science, analytical frameworks on how lingual elements contribute to the construction of corporate identity prove to be unsystematic and rather instrumental. Linguistic studies on identity construction however present the fragmentation of analyses, which means that lexical-syntactic examinations, discourse structural analyses and socio-functional interpretations tend to be isolated rather than integrated. Furthermore, a methodological disconnect exists between synchronic descriptions of discourse features and diachronic investigations of identity evolution. Lastly, conceptual ambiguity regarding corporate identity persists across linguistic studies. Collectively, this landscape reveals critical deficiencies in theoretical integration and underscores the imperative for more profound interdisciplinary engagement.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Research question

Functioning as a communicative medium between corporations and society, CSR reports constitute a kind of communicative practice that successively constructs corporate identity. A favorable corporate identity is fundamental for the sustainable development of corporation. We thereby focus on these following research questions:

- What *centrality*, *distinctiveness*, and *evolvability* corporate identities do CSR reports of BYD construct?
- What macro-thematic contents do CSR reports of BYD utilize to construct the corporate identity?
- What is the social causes of the corporate identities constructed by CSR reports of BYD?

B. Theoretical foundation

By situating the CSR reports of BYD within the continuum composed of language and society for identity construction analysis, this research become aligned with the paradigm of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Among diverse CDA approaches, the discourse-historical approach (DHA) demonstrates multiple conceptual affinities with our research, particularly through its emphasis on sociohistorical contextualization (Zhao, 2009). Originating in the 1990s by Ruth Wodak, DHA is a fusion of CDA, sociology, historiography, and political science. As one of the most influential approaches of CDA, DHA distinguishes itself from other paradigms by integrating historical analyses. Through discourse analysis, investigation of historical context as well as critique of social power, DHA aims to reveals how discourse participates in the construction of social reality and the reproduction of power. This kind of research approach leads to three aspects of analysis process of DHA: textual analysis, discourse practice examination, and socio-historical critique, which enables a widespread application across diverse studies on political discourse, media discourse during crisis and social movement discourse.

C. Corpus collection

The research corpus comprises BYD CSR reports spanning from 2017 to 2024, sourced directly from official website of BYD (<https://www.bydglobal.com>). As only PDF formats were available for download, format conversion and manual screening are needed for raw materials. To ensure the precision of analysis, language of less relevance including photographs and indicators were systematically excluded. This process yielded four specialized corpus:

- *BYD CSR Reports Synchronic Corpus*, from 2017-2024 CSR reports of BYD.
- *BYD CSR Reports Comparative Corpus*, from 2017-2022 CSR reports of BYD.

- *GAC CSR Reports Comparative Corpus*, from 2017-2022 CSR reports of Guangzhou Automobile Group Co., Ltd. (GAC).
- *BYD CSR Reports Diachronic Corpus*, composed by two sub-corpus: CSR reports of BYD from 2017-2020 and 2021-2024.

To begin with, *BYD CSR Reports Synchronic Corpus*, *BYD CSR Reports Comparative Corpus* and *BYD CSR Reports Diachronic Corpus* have been used respectively to investigate the *centrality*, *distinctiveness* and *evolvability* corporate identity of BYD.

Secondly, the year of 2020 has been selected as the time node of *BYD CSR Reports Diachronic Corpus* to investigate the identities evolution of BYD as it is a key milestone of Chinese electrical vehicle (EV) industry. From the perspective of national policy, the year of 2020 marked the announcement of Chinese dual-carbon policy and new energy vehicle development plans. As for the corporate strategies, BYD initiated comprehensive low-carbon transformation in 2021 to align with dual-carbon policy.

What's more, the CSR reports of GAC have been chosen as the reference corpus (*GAC CSR Reports Comparative Corpus*) to examine the thematic domains of the observed corpus (*BYD CSR Reports Comparative Corpus*) because GAC is the suitable competitor of BYD in consideration of product pricing and product type. As for the product pricing, the Aion series of GAC directly competes with *Qin* and *Song* models, which are the most popular products of BYD under the same product positioning: the medium EV market as well as the equal price range: 70,000-350,000 yuan. Regard to the product type, GAC maintains significant internal combustion engine (ICE) market share in addition to the EV. In that way, a comparison with GAC enables a parallel analysis of ICE and EV.

Last but not least, based on the update of the CSR Report on the official website of GAC, the CSR report of GAC from 2017 to 2022 have been chosen to form *GAC CSR Reports Comparative Corpus*. Meanwhile, to ensure the reliability of the research results, the same year range of CSR reports of BYD has been assigned to compose *BYD CSR Reports Comparative Corpus* to examine the construction of *distinctiveness* corporate identity of BYD.

The information of the corpus used is shown in the following table:

Tbl. 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF CORPORATE IDENTITY CORPORA OF BYD

Corpus	Tokens	Types
BYD CSR Report Synchronic Corpus	125,568	9,497
BYD CSR Report Comparable Corpus	95,937	7,819
GAC CSR Report Comparable Corpus	148,607	9,305
BYD CSR Report Diachronic Corpus	125,568	9,497
2017–2020 BYD CSR Reports Corpus	55,492	6,700
2021–2024 BYD CSR Reports Corpus	70,076	6,529

D. Corpus tool

Wmatrix5 (Rayson, 2008) has been used as the analytical tool. Beyond standard corpus functions like concordance and word frequency counts, Wmatrix5 can run the Part-of-Speech (POS) tagging to reveal grammatical distributions across texts. Crucially, it integrates the UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS), enabling automatic semantic tagging. Researchers can compare the observed corpora against reference corpora to generate ranked semantic domain lists, with statistical significance measured by Log-Likelihood (LL) and Log-Likelihood Ratio (LLR) values.

A distinctive feature involves the semantic tagging framework of USAS, which automatically categorizes words into thematic domains like Entertainment, sports, and arts (K) or Life and living things (L). This system organizes language through 21 major semantic domains, 232 subdivided categories such as Entertainment (K1), Sports (K2), Arts (K3) and polarity markers “+” or “-” indicating semantic orientation, for example, “lock” belongs to A1.7+ , “unlock” belongs to A1.7-.

E. Research method

The corpus-based approach and longitudinal case analysis method have been applied to be the research method.

The corpus-based approach examines words frequency, collocations and keywords to uncover semantic preferences and hidden discursive meanings. We thereby analyze mainly the macro-thematic content of CSR reports of BYD, while identifying underlying the social causes of discursive construction through Wmatrix5.

The longitudinal case method tracks the evolution of corporate identity. By focusing on dual-carbon policy, We compare the discursive identity construction of BYD before and after the policy to detect the identity evolution, which reveals socio-cultural motivations behind identity transformations within relevant management and societal contexts.

F. Analytical framework

An analytical framework, as illustrated in Fig. 1, called *Multidimensional Analytical Framework for Discursive Construction on Corporate Identity of BYD* has been initiated to examine the CSR reports of BYD from 2017-2024 through three interconnected dimensions: identity character of BYD, analysis on identity construction of BYD and interpretation on identity construction of BYD.

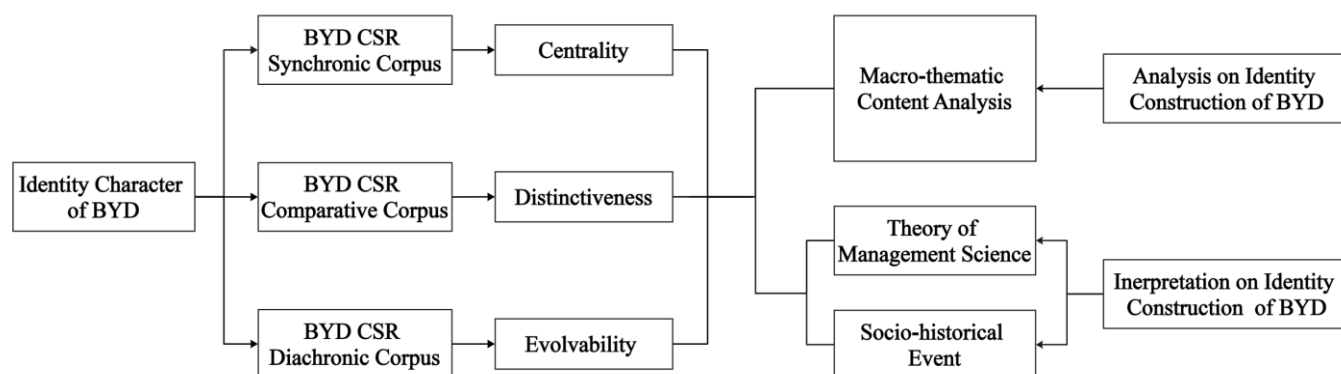


Fig. 1. Multidimensional Analytical Framework for Discursive Construction on Corporate Identity of BYD

As for the first part of the framework, Albert and Whetten's (1985) Organizational Identity Theory has been further advanced, considering that the *centrality character* and *endurance character* can be highly overlapping, and that corporations always switch business strategy in order to adapt to the changes of the times (Gioia et al., 2000; Balmer, 2001). This study therefore replaces the *endurance character* with *evolvability character*, which conducts a comprehensive analysis and examination of identity construction of BYD from three dimensions: *centrality*, *distinctiveness* and *evolvability*. Specifically, *centrality* refers to the key feature that best reflects the essence and core of corporation; *distinctiveness* is the unique attributes that distinguish a corporation from its competitors; *Evolvability* is the imprints formed in the long-term evolution of corporation, referring to the environmentally adaptive features developed by the corporation under the condition of survival of the fittest (Albert et al., 1985; Hu & Xu, 2023).

Secondly, for the part of *Analysis on Identity Construction of BYD*, the macro-thematic analysis of DHA has been applied to provide comprehensive pathways for investigating high-frequency words within key semantic domains through Wmatrix5, which can represent thematic priorities while providing corpus evidence for lexical choices.

Finally, the third part of framework is called *Interpretation on Identity Construction of BYD*. This part aims to examine how BYD constructs, maintains, and adjusts stakeholder relationships through CSR reports. We contextualize linguistic patterns within management theories and socio-historical factors, including political events, social movements and policy shifts, to reveal the underlying motivations behind linguistic choices in these documents.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Analysis of BYD's identity construction

The analytical results reveal that CSR reports of BYD construct a *centrality character* as a *comprehensive compliance-focused transportation solutions provider*, a *distinctiveness character* as an *intellectual-property-driven leader in green energy supply chains* and an *evolvability character* as a *pragmatic innovator pioneering globalized operation*. These identity characters are achieved by highlighting key thematic domains such as Vehicles and transport on land (M3), Getting and possession (A9+) and Green issues (W5).

a. Centrality character: a comprehensive compliance-focused transportation solutions provider

Centrality character represents the fundamental and enduring traits that distinguish a corporation from others of whole industry (Albert et al., 1985), which typically permeate all aspects of corporation, including product development, social responsibility, and strategic planning. To examine identity construction of *centrality character* in CSR reports of BYD, we import *BYD CSR Report Synchronic Corpus* into Wmatrix5 as the observed corpus. For the sake of statistical accuracy, the reference corpus must be limited to the industry to which the BYD belongs. In that case, one of the built-in corpus of Wmatrix5: *BNC Sampler CG Business Corpus* would be a perfection for semantic domain comparison. Table 2 reveals the macro-thematic patterns and high frequency words of *BYD CSR Report Synchronic Corpus*:

Tbl. 2. DISTRIBUTION OF TOP THREE SEMANTIC DOMAINS OF BYD CSR REPORT SYNCHRONIC CORPUS

Rank	USAS Tag	Semantic Domain	Frequency	Log-Likelihood Value ^a	Top three high-frequency word
1	M3	Vehicles and transport on land	1504	1581.97	vehicle vehicles automobile
2	G2.1	Law and order	1011	986.44	regulations laws rules
3	S7.1+	In power	2253	963.75	management control power

a. An absolute value, positively correlated with the frequency difference of the semantic domain, $p < 0.005$ with LL value of 10.65.

As an EV manufacturer, the mission of BYD constitutes the production of high-quality vehicles. To construct *a comprehensive compliance-focused transportation solutions provider*, the CSR reports mainly involve three semantic domains: Vehicles and transport on land (M3), Law and order (G2.1) and In power (S7.1+). Key words can reflect the theme of the text and then embody the thematic features as well as attitudes of the discourse (Gao & Huang, 2024). Hence, the examination of semantic domain is mainly achieved by key words analysis.

To begin with, Vehicles and transport on land (M3) is a set of words related to concept of transportation. Tbl. 2. shows that words of Vehicles and transport on land (M3) such as “vehicle (s)” and “automobile” rank high, which becomes the lexical evidence of corporation type of BYD, that is a vehicle producer.

(1) *In respect of reducing air pollution, we recommend replacing traditional fuel vehicles with electric **vehicles**, so as to reduce emission; in respect of alleviating traffic jam, we recommend BYD SkyRail, which aims at reducing heavy traffic on the ground and creating three-dimensional green traffic network, so as to resolve the stubborn traffic jam in cities.*

Example (1) centers on the positive influence of products of BYD. Language serves not merely as a tool for depicting reality, but more so as a process that shapes social meanings, power dynamics, and cognitive frameworks through word choice and syntactic structure. When it comes to word selection, first, “vehicles” is more generalized and professional than other terms referring to means of transportation. It is a broadly inclusive term that covers not just “cars” “trucks” and “buses”, but also potentially new energy vehicles or special-purpose vehicles (such as the independently developed SkyRail of BYD). In contrast to more specific terms like “car” or “bus”, the generality of “vehicles” better underscores the breadth of vehicle technology coverage and cross-domain integration capabilities of BYD. Furthermore, as a common term in the vehicle sector, “vehicles” is widely employed in international technical standards, industry reports, and cross-border cooperation documents. This term not only enables BYD to quickly integrate into the global technical discourse system but also guides the audience to connect the corporate capabilities with cutting-edge technologies, thereby further fostering the perception of it as an industry innovation leader. Thus, the use of “vehicles” highlights the extensive technical prowess and comprehensiveness of BYD in the vehicle manufacturing field, and constructs its corporate identity as a high-quality automobile producer.

Secondly, Law and order (G2.1) features high-frequency words like “regulations” and “laws”. These transform abstract compliance concepts into concrete commitments, addressing public concerns about corporate misconduct while reinforcing the compliant identity of BYD.

(2) *BYD’s board of directors exercises relevant powers and functions in accordance with **laws, regulations** and company **rules**, including but not limited to convene a general meeting of shareholders and to report to the general meeting, to formulate/execute decisions of the general meeting of shareholders, to determine the overall operation and strategic development of BYD, and to make decisions on operation and investment plans.*

Example (2) focuses on the operational mechanism of BYD’s board of directors. As a large enterprise, BYD’s operations and development are inevitably subject to multiple aspects of laws and regulations. When describing how the board of directors exercises its powers and functions, the report uses the terms “laws” and “rules” to underscore BYD’s attention to and compliance with the aforementioned specific provisions. It also reflects that while pursuing business success, the company actively ensures its operations are legal and compliant, further shaping its identity as a compliant enterprise.

Notably, “regulation” also appears frequently in Law and order (G2.1). Compared with “rules” and “laws”, this term carries a stronger connotation of standardization. In particular, its verbal form “regulate” implies that the enterprise takes the initiative to standardize employee behavior or product production, as illustrated in Example (3):

(3) *Furthermore, BYD constantly **regulates** its operations with a perspective of responsibility and sustainable development: compliance with laws and **regulations**, abiding by business ethics, strict compliance with the code of business conduct, and upholding integrity and fairness.*

Example (3) centers on the account of BYD’s compliance procedures. For consumers and stakeholders, “regulation” serves as a key indicator for judging the credibility of corporation. The frequent use of terms like “regulation”, “laws”, and “rules” turns abstract systems into concrete commitments to action, addressing the public’s potential concerns about corporate corruption and abuse of power. Among these, “regulate”—the verbal form of “regulation”—suggests that the enterprise is not merely a passive recipient of “compliance” but also a subject of self-governance. Example (3) portrays BYD as an organization that goes beyond the

minimum requirements of legal coercion and possesses inherent moral constraints. It reflects BYD's voluntary commitment to "responsibility" and "sustainable development", further solidifying "compliance" as its core corporate identity.

Lastly, most of the theme words within In power (S7.1+) are related to "power", with high-frequency words including "management" and "control". Observations of the concordances of these high-frequency words reveal that their contextual meanings are mostly about management and governance, which is similar in spirit to the thematic semantic domain of Law and order (G2.1). It not only means that BYD complies with laws and regulations but also reflects its strict standardization of employee behavior and product production within the enterprise. The high-frequency use of words like "management" and "control" in In power (S7.1+) also demonstrates BYD's professional governance system, responds to the public's doubts about the mechanism for implementing corporate responsibilities, enhances credibility, and shapes the identity of a transparent and compliant modern enterprise.

(4) *The CSR Management Committee of BYD is responsible for formulating the CSR management measures and working plan and the unified organization and management of BYD's CSR work.*

Example (4) explains the basic functions of BYD's CSR Report Management Committee. First, the repeated use of "management" is intended to explicitly transform "power" into a form of "system", indicating that the company's leadership at the top of the power pyramid has put "power" into the "cage of system". Through three repetitions of "management", BYD has essentially constructed an institutionalized power hierarchy, strengthening the core position of "management" in the operation of power. In terms of the actual context, the emergence of "management" implies that CSR work is not a spontaneous behavior but is completed under the supervision and control of an institutionalized system from top to bottom.

It is worth noting that although stakeholder participation is required in the process of corporate governance, and the achievements of corporate governance are closely related to the rights and interests of stakeholders, when discussing corporate governance rules, BYD does not use words such as "stakeholder" and "engagement". The absence of the above-mentioned words and the recurrence of "management" form a certain discursive tension, which reflects that the leadership regards corporate governance as an obligatory duty of corporate operation, and further highlights the institutional and spontaneous nature of BYD's corporate governance.

Therefore, by combining the semantic domains In power (S7.1+) and Law and order (G2.1), this study finds that BYD complies with laws and regulations externally and strictly standardizes employee behavior and commodity production internally, thus constructing an corporate identity of "comprehensive compliance-focused".

b. Distinctiveness character: an intellectual-property-driven leader in green energy supply chains

Distinctiveness character are what enables a company to stand out in a competitive landscape. They act as key markers that set an enterprise apart from its peers, and are closely tied to its core competitiveness and market positioning (Albert & Whetten, 1985). To explore how BYD constructs its *distinctiveness* identity in its CSR reports, this section takes the *BYD CSR Report Comparative Corpus* as the observed corpus and then selects the *GAC CSR Report Comparative Corpus* as the reference corpus. Both corpora are imported into Wmatrix5 for semantic domain coding, with the aim of identifying the high-frequency thematic semantic domains in the *BYD CSR Report Comparative Corpus* and thus revealing the *distinctiveness* corporate identity BYD has constructed.

Following the same principle for extracting semantic domains as applied in the analysis of *centrality* corporate identity, this section focuses on the top three of semantic domains to examine BYD's *distinctiveness* corporate identity. After manual correction of the USAS semantic coding, the relevant details are presented in the table below:

Tbl. 3. DISTRIBUTION OF TOP THREE SEMANTIC DOMAINS OF BYD CSR REPORT COMPARATIVE CORPUS

Rank	USAS Tag	Semantic Domain	Frequency	Log-Likelihood Value	Top three high-frequency word
1	A9+	Getting and possession	1232	154.39	procurement storage property
2	X2	Mental actions and processes	135	132.15	intellectual
3	O3	Electricity and electrical equipment	609	123.89	battery electric

Distinctiveness character refers to those who differentiate an corporation from its competitors, functioning as its salient symbolic representation and cognitive anchor within the peer group (Albert et al., 1985). The analysis of Tbl. 3. indicates that the prominent semantic domains in BYD's comparative corpus encompass Getting and possession (A9+), Mental actions and processes (X2) and Electricity and electrical equipment (O3). To further investigate the construction of BYD's *Distinctiveness* corporate identity as reflected in the *BYD CSR Report Comparative Corpus*, this section will examine the word frequency lists of high-frequency terms within these three thematic semantic domains (see Tbl. 3.).

First, regarding the Getting and possession (A9+), the high-frequency words include "procurement", "storage" and "property". It is easy to find that these all revolve around the industrial chain. Procurement and storage are both important links in the industrial chain: "procurement" mainly refers to the procurement of raw materials; "storage" refers to the storage of raw materials and commodities; and "property" includes both fixed assets and intangible assets represented by high-tech.

(5) *BYD always insists on green **procurement** in the supply chain and **procurement** of raw materials. As for the way of **procurement**, BYD extensively uses various ways such as bidding, electronic confidential quotation and price comparison.*

Example (5) clarifies BYD's procurement rules. First, compared with the everyday terms "purchasing" or "sourcing", "procurement" carries a stronger sense of institutionalization and professionalism. It is commonly used in international normative texts, and this is actually a manifestation of BYD's effort to align with international practices through discourse, which helps dispel the stereotype that Chinese enterprises have poor overseas expansion capabilities. Second, although the procurement process requires human involvement, the use of the abstract concept "procurement" transforms specific procurement actions into an institutionalized process. This weakens the influence of individual decision-making and highlights the compliance of the enterprise's procurement behaviors. Finally, as the starting link of the supply chain, procurement plays a crucial role in the quality of the enterprise's products. The repeated emphasis on this supply chain link not only underscores BYD's attention to the supply chain but also reflects its ability to control the quality of the industrial chain, thus constructing a unique corporate identity as a leader of the entire supply chain. The high frequency of Getting and possession (A9+) highlights BYD's emphasis on supply chain construction, indicating that it is continuously reducing supply chain risks and constructing a *distinctiveness* identity as a dominant leader in supply chain.

As for Mental actions and processes (X2), there is only one high-frequency word in this domain: intellectual. In *BYD CSR comparative corpus*, "intellectual" often appear together with "property", that is "intellectual property".

(6) *In addition to protecting its own **intellectual properties**, BYD's system of recognizing **intellectual properties** also respect the **intellectual properties** of other parties.*

Example (6) elaborates on BYD's stance regarding intellectual property. The term "intellectual" is repeatedly referenced in the statement; its recurrence is by no means an accidental semantic choice. Instead, through the symbolic functioning of this technical term, it not only underscores BYD's focus on intellectual property but also constructs a legitimate narrative of the enterprise's technological ethics and global power relations. This characteristic can be deconstructed hierarchically from the following two dimensions.

On one hand, "intellectual property" serves as a knowledge-based symbol of an enterprise's technological advancement, as well as society's institutional recognition and protection of innovative achievements. Through the recurrence of this term in its CSR reports, BYD essentially constructs a distinct intellectual property-driven corporate identity. On the other hand, "intellectual", with its metaphorical connotation of "intellectual labor", elevates the legal concept of property rights to the moral high ground of knowledge production. It obscures the capital-based nature of "property" through the high-tech aura of the signifier, transforming impersonal capital-based property into a pursuit of technological development. In essence, this reflects the enterprise's utilization of the ethical legitimacy of "knowledge" to convert commercial competition into a practice of civilizational advancement.

The use of this term is intended to emphasize BYD's patent barriers in fields such as batteries, motors, and electronic controls, as well as its efforts and achievements in striving for technological autonomy, thus constructing its *distinctiveness* identity as an "intellectual-property-driven" automobile manufacturer.

Finally, the high-frequency words in Electricity and electrical equipment (O3) include "battery" and "electric". In the new energy vehicle industrial chain, battery technology has always been a key area of international competition; meanwhile, "electric" is also closely related to the electric motors and electronic control systems of electric vehicles. Moreover, for consumers, battery safety and range are the primary considerations when purchasing new energy vehicles. BYD does not avoid this issue in its report, which reflects its emphasis on battery technology, highlights its control over the entire industrial chain technology of battery production, and further consolidates its *distinctiveness* corporate identity as a "leader in green energy".

(7) *For energy storage technologies, BYD's **battery** energy storage stations, relying on advanced iron-phosphate **battery** technology, have effectively solved the worldwide problem of energy storage and have strong advantages in stabilizing the output power.*

Example (7) introduces BYD's energy storage technology in detail. First, while "battery" refers to the physical energy storage device, it is elevated to the core of energy transition in discursive practice, reducing the complex energy system to a simplified "battery technology determinism" narrative. BYD has long maintained high revenue: besides accurate market and product positioning, technological innovations in batteries, motors, and components have driven its sales growth. Among these, battery technology is the top priority, directly determining new energy vehicles' performance and range (Zhang & Chen, 2023). Its independently developed "Blade Battery" is an industry model for battery innovation. Through repeated references to "battery", BYD has built a *distinctiveness* identity as a green energy leader.

c. *Evolvability character: a pragmatic innovator pioneering globalized operation*

Evolvability character are the unique imprints formed by enterprises in their long-term evolution, referring to the environmentally adaptive features developed by enterprises under the condition of survival of the fittest (Hu & Xu, 2023). To examine the *evolvability* identity construction in BYD's CSR reports, this section takes "*BYD CSR Report 2017-2020 Corpus*" (marked as the first stage) and "*BYD CSR Report 2021-2024 Corpus*" (marked as the second stage) as the observed corpora, and imports the "*BNC Sampler CG Business Corpus*" as the reference corpus into Wmatrix 5.0 for semantic domain encoding. This process yields the macro thematic contents of BYD's CSR reports in the two stages. Then, the top 5% of high-frequency semantic domains from each of the two corpora are selected to compare and summarize the ranking changes of the common semantic

domains and the unique semantic domains between the first and second stages, so as to analyze the types of *evolvability* identity constructed in BYD's CSR reports.

When examining the *evolvability* identity, this study follows the principle of being based on the present. By comparing the usage of thematic semantic domains, it focuses on examining the semantic domains and word frequency distribution in the period of 2021-2024, that is, the second stage, so as to present the *evolvability* character of the enterprise. It is worth mentioning that this section does not completely follow the investigation path of core and unique identities, and the specific reasons are as follows:

The corpora of the two periods are both derived from BYD's CSR reports, there is a large range of overlap in the involved thematic semantic domains. Corporate identity dispose of both *evolvability* and *endurance* character, and it is relatively stable within a certain period (Albert et Whetten, 1985). This means that although the enterprise's attention to the same topic varies in different stages, the difference is not significant. Therefore, through the ranking changes of the common thematic domains and the unique thematic domains, a comprehensive analysis of the thematic preferences in BYD's CSR reports in different periods can be conducted.

Based on the corpus comparison method described above, the common semantic domains and ranking changes between the first and second stages are shown in Tbl. 4. Here, “-” indicates that the ranking remains unchanged, “↑” means that the ranking of the semantic domain has risen in the second stage, and “↓” denotes that the ranking of the semantic domain has fallen in the second stage.

Tbl. 4. COMMON SEMANTIC DOMAINS AND RANKING CHANGES OF BYD'S CORPORA IN THE FIRST AND SECOND STAGES

USAS Tag	Semantic domain	Rank and changes		
		Rank in first stage	Rank in second stage	Rank changes
M3	Vehicles and transport on land	1	1	-
G2.1	Law and order	2	2	-
W5	Green issues	3	6	↓3
S7.1+	In power	4	3	↑1
S8+	Helping	5	4	↑1
O3	Electricity and electrical equipment	6	5	↑1
I2.2	Business: Selling	7	12	↓5
I2.1	Business: Generally	8	8	-
A1.1.1	General actions / making	9	16	↓7
I4	Industry	10	11	↓1
T3-	Time: New and young	12	7	↑5
A15+	Safe	13	10	↑3
O2	Objects generally	14	17	↓3
A5.1	Evaluation: Good/bad	15	15	-
A1.8+	Inclusion	19	9	↑10
Y1	Science and technology in general	20	14	↑6

As can be observed from Tbl. 4., there exists a relatively large number of common semantic domains between the first and second stages, which, indirectly reflects the *centrality* and *endurance* character of the corporate identity. Although 16 semantic domains are common among the top 5% (20 in total) high-frequency semantic domains in the CSR reports of the two stages, notable changes have occurred in the rankings of some semantic domains. For example, Inclusion (A1.8+) has ascended from the 19th position to the 9th, marking a substantial rise of 10 places. Additionally, considerable fluctuations have been witnessed in such semantic domains as General actions / making (A1.1.1), Business: Selling (I2.2), Time: New and young (T3-), and Science and technology in general (Y1). Grounded in the nature of the diachronic comparative study within this section, when investigating the *evolvability* corporate identity, it is imperative to comprehensively take into account both the fluctuations in the rankings of the common semantic domains and the distribution of specific semantic domains in the two distinct stages. The specific semantic domains of BYD CSR reports in the first and second stages, along with their ranking conditions, are presented in Tbl. 5.:

Tbl. 5. SPECIFIC SEMANTIC DOMAINS AND RANKING OF THE FIRST AND SECOND STAGES OF BYD CSR REPORTS

First stage			Second stage		
USAS Tag	Semantic domain	Rank	USAS Tag	Semantic domain	Rank
X2.4	Investigate, examine, test, search	11	X9.1+	Able/intelligent	13
P1	Education in general	16	W3	Geographical terms	18
O1	Substances and materials generally	17	A2.1+	Change	19
A15-	Danger	18	A9-	Giving	20

Firstly, in terms of the part of “pragmatic”, the common semantic domains that contribute to constructing this part of *evolvability* character include: Business: Selling (I2.2) which has dropped by 5 positions, Green issues (W5) which has decreased by 3 positions, and Safe (A15+) which has risen by 3 positions. Then regarding the “innovator” part, the common semantic domains involved in building this *evolvability* character are as follows: General actions / making (A1.1.1) has fallen by 7 positions, Time: New and young (T3-) has increased by 5 positions, Science and technology in general (Y1) has gone up by 6 positions, and Inclusion (A1.8+) has risen by 10 positions. Moreover, the specific semantic domain contributing to this part includes Able/intelligent (X9.1+) in the second stage. Lastly, with respect to the “globalized operation” part, the specific semantic domain

that constructs this part is Geographical terms (W3). The list of high-frequency words for the above semantic domains is shown in Tbl. 6.:

Tbl. 6. HIGH-FREQUENCY WORD LIST OF SEMANTIC DOMAIN INVOLVED IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF EVOLVABILITY CHARACTER

USAS TAG	Semantic domain	word	frequency
I2.2+	Business: Selling	suppliers	118
		sales	112
		customers	103
W5	Green issues	environmental	103
A15+	Safe	safety	211
A1.1.1	General actions / making	production	109
		process	88
		activities	88
T3-	Time: New and young	new	253
		innovation	109
Y1	Science and technology in general	technology	131
		technological	66
		including	86
A1.8+	Inclusion	comprehensive	82
		integrated	29
X9.1+	Able/intelligent	intelligent	65
		efficiency	52
W3	Geographical terms	global	65
		worldwide	14

Adhering to the principle of focusing on the contemporary era, this section will take 2021-2024 BYD CSR Report Corpus as the research focus, with an emphasis on examining the specific linguistic practices of high-frequency words in semantic domains within this period. Regarding the principle for capturing semantic domains, while investigating the ranking changes of high-frequency semantic domains between the first and second stages, special attention will be paid to the newly added semantic domains in the second stage. Through analysis, it is concluded that safe (A15+), Time: New and young (T3-) and Geographical terms (W3) are key anchors in the process of constructing BYD's evolvability identity. The following will take these terms as examples to analyze the specific linguistic practices in constructing BYD's evolvability identity.

First, "safety" falls under the semantic domain Safe (A15+) and appears 211 times in the corpus of the second stage. Compared with fuel-powered vehicles, safety is the primary consideration for customers when purchasing new energy vehicles. Example (8) will analyze this term in combination with specific contexts:

(8) *We constantly improve the occupational health management system and emergency management system, enhance the level of **safety** management, standardize corporate behavior in compliance with laws and regulations, realize the standardized management, solidly perform the **safety** production management, and establish a long-term mechanism to guarantee the occupational health and **safety** of employees.*

Example (8) is BYD's account of its corporate safety management. Safety appears three times, referring to management safety, production safety, and employee safety respectively. Through the collocation of "safety" and "management", the term places the institutionalized corporate management system under safety standards, reflecting the enterprise's emphasis on safety issues and its ability to precisely control the management system. Moreover, "safety" is anchored as a quantifiable and improvable management object through expressions like "enhance the level of safety management" and "safety production management", implying that the enterprise can achieve control over safety through institutional optimization. This simplifies complex structural safety issues into corporate management issues; while highlighting the enterprise's commitment to comprehensive safety production requirements, it also shifts public attention to safety issues toward corporate management, further constructing the evolvability corporate identity of being "pragmatic".

Second, "innovation" falls under the semantic domain Time: New and Young (T3-) and appears 109 times in the second stage. Example (9) will analyze the use of this term in the context of specific situations:

(9) *BYD insists on independent **innovation** and has mastered the core technologies for the whole industry chain of new energy vehicles in terms of battery, motor, electrical control and chip.*

With the semantic coupling of technological breakthroughs and independence, the term frames BYD's technological R&D activities as independent innovative practices, highlighting BYD's capacity for technological upgrading and independent innovation. Moreover, the statement's claim that the company has mastered the core technologies actually presupposes "innovation" as an inevitable prerequisite for technological breakthroughs, implying that its innovative activities directly drive technological upgrading across the entire industrial chain. This positions the enterprise at the center of the evolution of the new energy industry, making "innovation" a moral benchmark for measuring the enterprise's technological leadership. Finally, framing the enterprise's technological practices as "innovation" aligns with its underlying appeal to compete for the right to define and interpret within the global new energy vehicle industry landscape, further constructing its evolvability identity as an innovative enterprise.

Third, “global” belongs to the semantic domain Geographical terms (W3) and appears 65 times, being a newly added high-frequency semantic domain in the second stage. Example (10) will analyze the use of this term in combination with the specific context:

(10) *At present, BYD Energy Storage has successfully entered many **global** markets such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Japan, Canada, and Australia, and has provided nearly 100 industrial-grade energy storage solutions for **global** partners, with a total **global** sales volume of 2.6GWh.*

Example (10) introduces the global market expansion of BYD’s energy storage technology. “Global” is not merely a simple geographical description in the context but also a core tool for the enterprise to construct its global identity. First, through the spatial narrative centered on “global”, this example transforms BYD’s market expansion into evidence of technological superiority, shaping the corporate identity as a global technology exporter rather than a follower. Second, the use of “global” deliberately downplays the regulatory role of geopolitics in technological flow, depicting the enterprise’s international expansion as a value-neutral choice driven by commercial rationality. This not only obscures the potential technological power relations in the discourse but also portrays the enterprise as a global entity transcending geographical limitations, further serving the discursive construction of its *evolvability* identity.

B. Interpretation of BYD’s identity construction

a. Interpretation of centrality identity

BYD has constructed its *centrality* corporate identity as “a comprehensive compliance-focused transportation solutions provider” in two dimensions: compliance governance and diversified transportation ecosystem.

In terms of “compliance”, BYD practices the concept of “comprehensive compliance” through dual internal and external constraints. Under the influence of normative isomorphism and coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), it has optimized its quality management system based on industry and national standards, internalizing compliance into a systematic competitive advantage. In constructing the identity of “transportation solution provider”, BYD has integrated battery technology, intelligent driving, and shared mobility resources to form full-scenario solutions covering passenger vehicles, SkyRail, SkyShuttle, electric heavy trucks, etc., creating economies of scope and reducing transaction costs (Williamson, 1993; Teece et al., 1997; Liu & Liu, 2018). Meanwhile, BYD practices the differentiation strategy theory (Porter, 2008), adopting a “electrification + intelligence + sharing” three-dimensional layout to break through homogeneous competition and build technical barriers and brand premium.

This strategic transformation not only aligns with the orientation of the national planning outline on transportation, but also exports China’s paradigm of transportation electrification through urban pilot projects. Through the dual-track strategy of institutional compliance and innovative breakthroughs, BYD has converted compliance governance into market trust assets and upgraded technical accumulation into ecosystem-level solutions, demonstrating the role transition of Chinese automakers from rule adapters to standard-setters.

b. Interpretation of distinctiveness identity

BYD has constructed its distinctive corporate identity as an “an intellectual-property-driven leader in green energy supply chains” forging a three-in-one competitive edge encompassing technology, ecology, and supply chain.

As for the identity of “intellectual-property-driven”, BYD has achieved the transition from a technology follower to a rule-setter through efforts such as patent layout for its Blade Battery, technological breakthroughs in salt lake lithium extraction, and leading the formulation of international standards. In the “green energy” dimension, it has addressed reliance on traditional energy sources with hybrid technology; amid the energy crisis triggered by the major conflict around the world, it accelerated its overseas expansion, converting geopolitical pressures into advantages in green technology export. Regarding the “supply chain leader” aspect, based on the dynamic capability theory (Teece et al., 1997), BYD reduced reliance on key links amid the China-US rivalry and chip crisis, transforming supply chain resilience into a strategic asset.

This strategic framework has not only helped the company break free from the bottleneck predicament but also, through the export of technical standards and the implementation of green solutions, aided China’s evolution from a participant to a leader in the global new energy industry.

c. Interpretation of evolvability identity

BYD has built multi-dimensional competitive advantages for itself by constructing the *evolvability* corporate identity of “a pragmatic innovator pioneering globalized operation”.

On the “pragmatic” front, BYD achieves value co-creation based on the stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010), forming a threefold guarantee for its development: government support, capital stability, and market recognition. In the “innovator” dimension, relying on the endogenous growth theory, BYD opens up patents to accelerate knowledge sharing, reversing the law of diminishing marginal returns in traditional manufacturing. As for the “globalized operation” dimension, based on the theories of global value chain governance (Dunning, 2000; Gereffi, 2014) and eclectic theory of international production, BYD vertically integrates battery-related technologies to lead the internationalization of charging standards, establishes factories in places like Mexico to avoid tariff risks, and restructures the value chain’s power structure through the export of technical standards—thus achieving a leap from product export to rule-making.

This identity represents a profound corporate discursive practice of BYD's transition from the market participant to the maker of global industrial rules.

V. CONCLUSION

This study centers on BYD's CSR reports as its analytical focus. Drawing on organizational identity theory and DHA, it systematically examines the multi-dimensional construction and dynamic evolution of BYD's corporate identity across three dimensions: *centrality*, *distinctiveness* and *evolvability*. Employing the Wmatrix5, the research adopts synchronic, comparative, and diachronic corpus analyses, integrating insights from high-frequency semantic domain, to clarify how BYD constructs differentiated identity narratives through its CSR reports and to elaborate on the socio-historical drivers behind the corporate identity it has built.

On one hand, the study identifies that BYD's *centrality* identity is "a comprehensive compliance-focused transportation solutions provider". Through high-frequency terms such as "vehicles", "regulations" and "management" within the high-frequency semantic domains Vehicles and transport order on land (M3), Law and order (G2.1), and In power (S7.1+), BYD has elevated its positioning from that of a traditional automobile manufacturer to a cross-domain integrated transportation solution provider. It has further reinforced its compliance-oriented image via intertextual narratives that link legal compliance with internal governance. Its distinctive identity is characterized as "an intellectual-property-driven leader in green energy supply chains". Comparative analysis reveals that BYD makes prominent use of terms like "procurement", "intellectual" and "battery" in the semantic domains Getting and possession (A9+), Mental actions and processes (X2) and Electricity and electrical equipment (O3); through intellectual property protection, vertical supply chain integration, and battery technology innovation, it has forged a differentiated competitive edge. The *evolvability* identity, meanwhile, centers on "a pragmatic innovator pioneering globalized operation". Diachronic analysis demonstrates that BYD has accomplished its strategic transformation from local deep cultivation to international expansion: it has done so by downplaying the commercial sales discourse within the semantic domain Business: Selling (I2.2), strengthening the semantic domains Safe (A15+) and Time: New and Young (T3-), and introducing the narrative of Geographical terms (W3).

On the other hand, through a socio-cultural and historical contextual interpretation of BYD's corporate identity construction, the study finds that the motivations underlying BYD's construction of this identity lie in the complex global environment, political landscape, and domestic economic conditions. Simultaneously, this identity construction also constitutes a strategic expression of BYD's endeavors to enhance its comprehensive competitiveness and achieve high-quality, sustainable development.

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