

Corporate Profiles as Public Narratives:
Exploring Quantitative and Functional Inquiries
to Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This dissertation embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the evolution of corporate narratives within the public sphere, transcending the methods of critical discourse analysis (CDA) through mixed-method analysis and quantitative methods. By examining corporate profiles from 23 Fortune 500 companies across three pivotal years—1998, 2005, and 2021—it unveils shifts in corporate communication in the face of technological advancements and changing societal expectations. Understanding the nature of public discourse is critical, given the predicted growth in public communication in the future.

The dissertation is based on the underlying theories of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and CDA, which together provide a sophisticated perspective for analyzing corporate profiles as narratives that shape and reflect societal values and expectations. SFL provides insights into language's multifunctionality, allowing for a thorough and systematic evaluation of how companies construct and embody their surrounding environments, interact with their readers, and structure their messages. CDA, on the other hand, focuses on the power dynamics inherent in discourse, emphasizing the role of language in reflecting and shaping societal structures and ideologies. The literature review investigates the transformation of the public sphere from historical gatherings to modern online comment forums. It emphasizes the changing nature of audience engagement, the impact of contemporary media on public discourse, and the need for a comprehensive approach to understanding the multifaceted nature of audience dynamics.

Corporate narratives, aimed at the public, such as annual reports and websites, are examined and revealed to be a critical part of corporate management because actual corporate efforts are invisible to outsiders, functioning as both a channel for strategic communication with stakeholders and even a reflection of society's expectations. This dissertation focuses on how corporations have adapted their

discourse strategies to engage with a larger, more empowered audience in a platformized media landscape, contributing to a better understanding of the nature of public discourse.

The dissertation provides an established, data-driven foundation for the qualitative observations traditionally examined in CDA by employing quantitative methods such as Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) for topic identification, sentiment analysis for emotional tone mapping, and readability assessments. This methodology not only uncovers the core themes but also unravels the narrative strategies within corporate discourse, highlighting how corporations craft their stories to navigate societal expectations.

The findings reveal a shift in approach toward more positive and assertive messaging, reflecting broader corporate engagement with societal values and expectations. The analysis focusing on the ideational function of language, which examines how companies linguistically represent and engage with the real world around them, revealing that corporate discourse has become more humanized and intimately oriented, supported by a strategic emphasis on action, engagement, and societal alignment. In the analysis that focuses on the interpersonal function of language, this development indicates a shift away from purely informational communication for interested audiences and toward building relationships with a diverse and global audience, emphasizing the need for corporations to balance maintaining a unique identity with aligning with societal values.

The discussion synthesizes these findings, proposing a new paradigm of interpersonal communication that addresses an undefined public audience and suggests the emergence of a new ideology characterized by mass consciousness. This new approach to discourse analysis not only challenges traditional criticisms of CDA but also introduces a holistic approach that leverages quantitative methodologies and a mixed method approach for a deeper understanding of corporate communication strategies, and of public discourse in general.

However, this dissertation acknowledges its limitations, primarily its focus on corporate discourse, and it calls for future research to extend the understanding of public discourse dynamics across different contexts and mediums. It highlights the necessity of empirical research on audience interpretation and response, aiming to enrich the discourse analysis framework and contribute to the evolving field of language, power, and society studies.

To summarize, this dissertation illuminates how corporate narratives evolve within the public sphere, revealing shifts in how corporations craft their stories in response to technological advancements and societal expectations. It highlights shifts in social norms and offers insights into the emergence of new interpersonal relationships and ideologies.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Theoretical Foundations and Research Context

This dissertation seeks to comprehend the narratives within public discourse, emerging from interactions with speakers (writers), listeners (readers), society, and the media. Public discourse has been explored in critical discourse analysis (CDA), which analyzes political discourse, media discourse, and commercial discourse from a critical perspective in light of power imbalances between senders and receivers.

CDA regards discourse as a semiotic social practice; in other words, the researchers believe that discourse reflects speakers' intents, beliefs, or social structures they belong to, and that listeners acquire information as well as the speakers' values and social structures (Fairclough, 1989, 1995a, 1995b; Hart, 2014). It helps to shape the social structures, situations, institutions, and beliefs that surround it. Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) or functional grammar, as developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) and Halliday (1978), provides an analytical framework for exposing ideology buried in discourse (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995a; Martin, 2000b). Language, according to this SFL theory, is a social semiotic and serves three types of function at the same time: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. CDA research examines how speakers verbalize their reality, establish their relationship with listeners, and construct their message in relation to its context, using the language system to reflect the three functions.

The majority of studies on public discourse focus on text and talk created by speakers, which may re(produce) certain ideology and knowledge and have an impact on listeners (Bell, 1994; Cap, 2006), and the indefiniteness of listener qualities for public discourse has not yet been investigated. However, given the current rapid and dramatic development of media, publicness is likely to have a greater influence on

discourse (Schmitz, 2014).¹ As a result, the purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate the influence of the audience in public discourse.

Many CDA studies were conducted in the late 1980s and 1990s, and while they examined public discourse, this period exhibited a binary relationship between message senders and receivers via traditional mass media. Furthermore, Bell's audience design theory (1982, 1984; Bell, 2002; Bell, 2013) emphasizes the active role of listeners, since newscasters adapt their style to their news audience expected by radio stations. This finding contributes evidence for the interactive character of media by demonstrating that even when the audience is not there, they may affect speakers. In this research, listeners are also viewed as possessing particular hegemonic characteristics. The audience design theory, however, has acknowledged the variety of listeners based on their engagement with interactions; whether listeners are addressees, auditors, overhearers, or eavesdroppers, as well as their proximity to speakers, alter their style of utterances.

The current scenario surrounding media, however, has altered considerably, resulting in a drop in the usage of mass media (Gilder, 1994; Sims, 2004), and anybody can freely access their preferred contents at any time and from any location. Some studies have attempted to consider the diversity of the audience but continue to focus on speakers' text and discourse, and as variation factors, they tend to understand speakers in reference to imagined or stereotyped listeners (Androutsopoulos, 2014; Bednarek, 2006; Coupland & Coupland, 2009; Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Fairclough, 1989, 1998; Marwick & Boyd, 2011). In addition to research that continues to focus on the binary relationship between speakers and listeners, from audience design, the concept of speaker design (Coupland, 2007; Schilling, 2013) evolved, in which speakers arrange their style based on their own purpose or desired image. The impact of an indefinite audience on public discourse has yet to be investigated. Furthermore,

¹ Schmitz (2014) focuses on the evolution of language in print or online newspapers and websites, arguing that the diversity of content has expanded while verbal passages have decreased in response to the increase in visual information.

the evolution of media has facilitated platform communication, and stereotyped audiences have vanished (Devereux, 2007; Fetzer & Weizman, 2006; Scannell, 1991). Thus, this dissertation focuses on the evolution of discourse over three years (1998, 2005, and 2021) that are characteristic of phases of growth of digital media, in order to investigate the impact of the rising diversity of audience on public discourse.

1.2. Research Aims, Methodology, and Data Sources

This dissertation elucidates a new style of interpersonal communication as well as a growing ideology in public discourse, resulting in the introduction of innovative views and approaches into the traditional public communication discussion. It reconsiders the existence of audience in public discourse by examining the process of audience growth over time, bringing the possibility of a new ideology based on mass audience to discourse analysis, which focuses on the relationship between discourse and context, as well as CDA, which has stressed the power of public institutions and argued against their power and system. Also, in terms of methodology, this study attempts to reduce the bias of selecting data and examples, which has been criticized in CDA (Hart, 2014; O'Halloran, 2006; Widdowson, 2004), by analyzing entire texts, conducting objective examination using quantitative methods, and employing a mixed method approach to the analysis of ideational or interpersonal function. The combination technique employed in this dissertation may result in the formation of a new form of discourse analysis.

This dissertation investigates corporate communication, which is relatively neutral in comparison to other public discourse, such as newspaper and political discourse, as businesses are profit-driven and do not adopt particular stances. Furthermore, since most companies archive their public messages, the data is easily accessible. Additionally, because what businesses do does not change much, it is simple to focus on the shift in how they construe and express the same realities. In corporate language, this dissertation uses *corporate profiles* as data in annual reports. Other types of corporate discourse, such as annual reports and corporate social

responsibility (CSR) reports, focus on financial achievements or commitments to the environment, respectively (Fuoli, 2018). Instead, a corporate profile provides a general overview of the company, and the discourse is likely to reflect changes in times and media, as there are more opportunities to be seen in public. The data consists of corporate profiles for 23 companies collected during three years (1998, 2005, and 2021). In the 1990s, digital media was not widely used, and annual reports were mostly provided through print media. The use of corporate websites began in 1995, the dot-com bubble burst in 2001, and everyone can now use digital media and participate in platform communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Corporate profiles were formerly mostly found in annual reports but are now available on websites or through social media (see Appendix A). As the media used to publish corporate discourse evolves, the diversity and quantity of audiences is likely to grow. This dissertation considers the circumstances surrounding corporate profiles, conducts an objective evaluation of the information they contain, and uses qualitative analysis to investigate how their expressions change over time.

Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to propose a new style of interaction in current public discourse based on the shift in discourse shown through an analysis of corporate profiles during a three-year period that includes significant changes in media and audience. The analysis in this dissertation consistently explores all relevant data to ensure that the outcomes are unbiased. After objective characteristics of corporate profiles are examined using quantitative methods for topic modeling, sentiment analysis, and readability assessment, qualitative analysis is conducted to determine how companies construe and discursively construct their reality and establish their relationship with their audience. This dissertation contends that the findings of discursive evolution in corporate profiles indicate a new aspect of public discourse that has emerged as a result of media and audience changes.

This dissertation, through an analysis of corporate profiles, discusses a new sort of relationship that goes beyond the conventional dichotomous relationship between speaker (writer) and listener (reader) that prior research had been based on.

Furthermore, it demonstrates that the power dynamics that CDA has condemned in public discourse have reduced, with the notion of an unseen audience emerging as a new ideology that influences discourse production. Given the increasing prevalence of public communication (Entradas et al., 2020), understanding new types of interactions and ideologies can help reassess how public discourse should be delivered and received from the perspectives of producers and receivers.

However, due to the limited data in this dissertation, the analysis is unable to generalize the findings for describing the characteristics of public discourse. Also, while the qualitative coding procedure in the mixed method analysis is thoroughly examined, the author's subjective bias cannot be completely eliminated. Within the limitations mentioned above, the following studies examine business profiles over a three-year period to explicate public discourse while taking into account indefinite and large audiences.

1.3. Organization of the Dissertation

This research examines corporate profiles to reveal the relationship between public discourse and its audience, using the lenses of SFL and CDA.

This first chapter, the introduction, establishes the dissertation's goals and the importance of researching corporate discourse within the vast landscape of public communication. The second chapter, "Theoretical Foundations," goes into the approaches that underpin this study. It presents a thorough overview of SFL and CDA, explaining their importance in the critical evaluation of corporate discourse and offering a methodological framework for the analysis that follows. Chapter 3, "Public Discourse," explores the intricate relationship between language practices and the public sphere. This chapter examines the historical transitions from the emergence of public discourse to the boundless interactions of the digital age, emphasizing the pivotal role of audience dynamics in shaping public discourse. Chapter 4, "Corporate Discourse," delves into the strategic aspects of corporate discourse management. It investigates how subtle communication methods influence and affect public views

and the broader social structure. Chapter 5, “Data and Corporate Background,” details the empirical foundation of this research, meticulously describing the selection and analysis of corporate profiles from leading Fortune 500 companies. This chapter introduces a historical and technological framework, laying the groundwork for a deeper comprehension of the evolution of corporate discourse. Chapter 6, “Quantitative Analysis of Corporate Profiles,” introduces an innovative approach to examining corporate discourse, employing quantitative methods such as topic modeling, sentiment analysis, and readability assessments. This chapter explores the objective analysis of corporate profiles, revealing shifts in corporate discourse topics over time, especially towards sustainability and corporate responsibility. It further investigates the emotional tone and subjectivity within corporate communication through sentiment analysis and examines strategic moves towards more accessible communication through readability assessments. Chapter 7, “Shaping Corporate Reality in Profiles,” delves into how companies articulate their operational realities through public profiles. Applying SFL, this chapter spotlights the dynamic representations of corporate identity over time, offering insights into the strategic construction of corporate narratives. Chapter 8, “Engagement Evolution in Corporate Profiles,” examines the manner in which companies engage with their audiences. It investigates the narrative and linguistic strategies that underlie the construction of relationships between companies and their stakeholders, marking a shift towards more inclusive and engaging communication paradigms. Chapter 9, the discussion, weaves together the findings from the analytical chapters, offering a synthesis that features the evolution of corporate communication strategies. This chapter serves as a space for reflective discussion, contemplating the study’s implications for understanding the complexities of corporate narratives within the public sphere and introducing new perspectives on interpersonal communication. Chapter 10, the conclusion, summarizes the dissertation’s core contributions, reflecting on the emergent ideologies in public discourse and the paradigm shift towards a more public-centric ideology production. It underscores the theoretical and practical implications of the

study and proposes avenues for future research into the dynamic field of corporate communication and public discourse.

Through this comprehensive exploration, the dissertation aims to contribute significantly to the ongoing dialogue on language, power, and society. It stresses the importance of continuous discourse analysis in navigating the complexities of our ever-evolving communicative landscape, enriching our understanding of the strategic shifts in corporate messaging and broader discourse dynamics.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Foundations

2.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the two main theories that underpin this dissertation: critical discourse studies and systemic functional linguistics (SFL), both of which provide a foundation for exploring the narratives within corporate discourse. These two theories consider language to be a social product or practice, and text to be the consequence of speakers'/writers' (hereinafter "speakers") choice in common. The former, in particular, views discourse to be a reflection of speakers' beliefs and values and strive to demonstrate how they embed their values into their discourse and reproduce the values and social structures among the audience. The latter, which is frequently used in critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a method for revealing speakers' beliefs, offers a linguistic system, particularly grammar, for people to communicate their experiences based on their own perspectives.

This dissertation investigates public discourse, specifically corporate discourse. Corporate discourse is thought to be compatible with CDA because there is a power differential between the sender and the receiver in terms of participation in the discourse, the number of people who can transmit the discourse is limited, and the receiver cannot completely avoid being exposed to the discourse. Furthermore, when evaluating the chronology of corporate discourse, a stable categorization for comparing discourses in order to see their language selections is essential and SFL can be effective for the analysis. Thus, the following sections provide an overview of the history, concepts, and trends in previous research for each theory.

2.2. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

The general concept of discourse in contemporary linguistics began to be fixed in the field of SFL proposed by Halliday (1973; 1978). In contrast to Noam Chomsky, who focuses on the syntactic structure of a sentence, Halliday emphasizes network links between words and contends that word and sentence structure are the outcome

of selecting among other possible possibilities based on the aim of the discourse. According to this viewpoint, relative relationships that consider other options determine the meaning of language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Saito et al., 2015). Describing one language event is regarded as equivalent to linking it to other language events. Systemic functional grammar (SFG) is a language theory based on purpose and choice that links the function and structure of communication (Fowler, 1991; Halliday, 1973; Halliday, 1978; Halliday, 1994). It then holds that if the purpose or situation changes, an alternative formulation is used. According to Hart (2004), discourse is an accumulation of such diverse choices and functions that are only considered separately when conducting an analysis.

Halliday's SFG is based on his earlier "scale-and-category" grammar, which was also influenced by his supervisor J.R. Firth's system-structure notion. They take a constructivist approach to grammar and meaning, arguing that reality is not reality itself, but our construal of it, and it is language and grammar that embody (or realize) this (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999). Firth argues that the use of language depends on its context, emphasizing the concept of meaning in context (Eggins, 2005). In the concept of scale-and-category grammar, the analysis of language is considered within the context in which that language is used, divided into scale and category. Regarding the layer of analysis that is the scale, language is divided into three levels: sounds or written symbols at the bottom, grammar and lexis in the middle, and context, such as the scenario in which it is used, at the top. Grammar contains four analytical categories: unit, structure, class, and system. The unit consists of sentences, clauses, groups, and words, as well as some structures, and it can be classed according to its syntax. Classes range from the most generic to the most specific (e.g., nouns, verbs and adjectives), and the system reflects paradigmatic relationships between groups of attributes and networks of choices for speakers to express meanings in specific contexts. SFG emphasizes the system as the primary category of grammar, encompassing all levels and ranks (Brown, 2009).

Discourse is the product of multiple meaning selections, which are implemented in two areas: functional meaning from the extra-linguistic semantic system and formal meaning from the intra-linguistic semantic system. Functional meaning selection, for example, involves identifying the interlocutor and selecting procedural aspects from the start to the end of the conversation flow. On the other hand, formal meaning selection is the process of linking semantic decisions made outside of the language system to grammatical, lexical, and phonological embodiments. The two selections and linguistic realizations are implemented simultaneously. Language action is the complex selection of meaning, and vice versa (Halliday, 1978; Matsunami et al., 1983).

In the grammar, language action is defined as the selection of meaning in context from a system of various meaning potentials (Eggins, 2005; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The semantic system in which paradigmatic relations are maintained is a fundamental component of language, and text is a configuration of meanings from the semantic system based on context, including interpersonal factors. These are the semantics of the situation and are systematically linked to functional meanings (Halliday, 1978). The context is known as controlling factors and can be classified into three types: field, tenor, and mode. The term “field” refers to the activity and subject matter of the text, and it is divided into two levels: one for interpersonal characteristics and one for the topic matter. *Tenor* refers to role relationship and interactive patterns in the field, and it can be divided into two dimensions: social relationships (e.g., teacher and student, parent and child) determined regardless of language, and dialogic relationships defined in the interaction (e.g., questioner and responder). Mode indicates the medium of linguistic activity, which consists of a more direct one that includes sound and letter, as well as a way of expression such as the rhetorical channel. These regulating factors and their combination produce a variety of texts, which result in discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999; Hasan, 1978; Matsunami et al., 1983).

2.2.1. Three Meta-Functions in SFL

The formal meaning selection system is classified into three categories based on the functions it performs: ideational component, interpersonal component, and textual component. The ideational component is separated into two parts: experiential and logical. In the former, speakers organize and express their experiences, which encompass both external and internal experiences that constitute mental reactions, cognition, and perceptions. In terms of the latter, speakers incorporate logical relationships derived from real-world phenomena into language structure via a combination of words. The logical components define complex units, also known as clause complexes, which include coordination, apposition, and modification (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Matsunami et al., 1983).

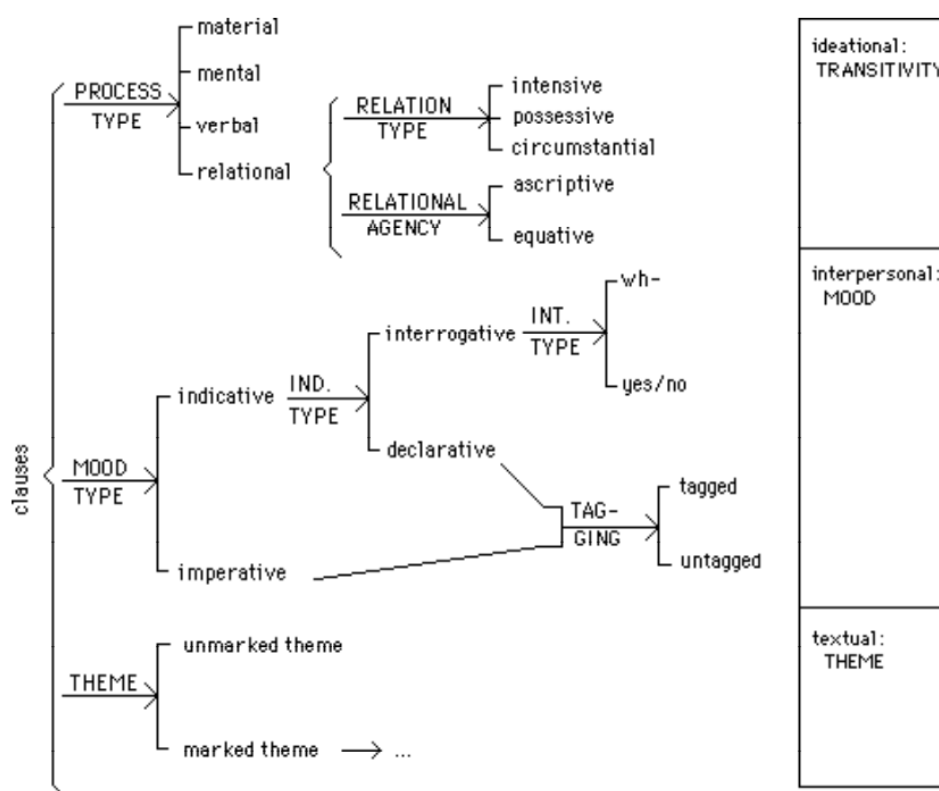
In addition to expressing their personal experiences, speakers also engage in negotiation with listeners/readers (henceforth “listeners”) and enact personal and social relationships with those around them. This element is referred to as interpersonal because it involves speakers building a relationship with the listeners through sharing their opinions, evaluations, and personal views about realized experiences: those that are constructed by naming the real or imagined world and the mental world. In other words, the interpersonal component brings subjectivity to the objective ideational world. Expressing their subjective positions demonstrates the speakers’ social identity and interpersonal relationships, as well as aligning with and leading listeners from their perspectives. Regarding this interpersonal component, the implementation of it is influenced by the social relationships between the interlocutors or by their roles in the linguistic activity (Teruya, 2022; Thompson, 2013).

The meaning determined from the ideational and interpersonal parts of the event is finally put into context by determining the textual components. The language and situational context of the text must be connected, and this can be achieved by coherent devices, theme-rheme relations, and new-given relations, among other things. How this component is achieved is primarily determined by the mode used or the purpose of the text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999).

Matthiessen and Halliday (2009) visualized a system-network of semantic choices comprised of the three components in Figure 1. Visual representation as a system network is critical in this theory. This network of meta-functions reveals a plethora of patterns that cannot be captured simply by examining word connections (Matthiessen et al., 2022).

Figure 1

System Network of Three Components in Clauses



Note. This figure is extracted from Matthiessen and Halliday (2009, p. 14).

Subsequent sections will explore how the three functions are linguistically realized within clauses. In Figure 1, the ideational component is realized as process type, the interpersonal component as mood type, and the textual component as theme. The term “system” is critical to understanding the theory of systematic functional linguistics,

and Figure 1 depicts how text is viewed as a system that can be identified by considering a broader and more external environment. The idea that text demonstrates a specific language system (Tatsuki, 2006) is quite different from the traditional linguistics concept, in which language is isolated from the outside world and the system in language is pursued. Discussing language requires exploration of possibilities that language can be expressed in multiple ways, rather than solely through the actual embodiments that suggest a one-to-one correspondence between language and its expression. Figure 1 also provides other possibilities via variations in process type (material, mental, verbal, and relational), mood (indicative or imperative) and theme (unmarked or marked).

According to Halliday (1994), grammar facilitates or achieves the three purposes of language (ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions), particularly representation, evaluation, or legitimation (Hart, 2014). Ideational function is also known as the “content function of language” (Halliday, 2007, p.183), and speakers communicate while also constructing reality. Interpersonal function is related to a grammar for evaluation; speakers comment on reality by expressing attitudes and opinions. Textual function, along with contexts, organizes the text to maintain discourse coherence (Hart, 2014) and facilitates the exchange of ideational and interpersonal components as information (Matthiessen & Halliday, 2009).

2.2.2. Ideational Function

Speakers embody their experience of the phenomenon of the real world through ideational function. The real world comprises *things* such as people, places, and entities, as well as *events* that show what the things do and *circumstances* that show how they happen. These three components, which cover what can happen in general in the real world, enable us to organize our experiences, whether it is inside or outside experience. They are realized through words, and the combination of these words generate clauses, in which what speakers do (event) is defined through *verbs*, as well as who does it and what they do (things). The verbal realization in the

ideational function is known as *process realization*. In the process, the three components above are described as *Process*², *participant*, and *circumstance*, and each has its own typical pattern of realization, as shown in Table 1 (Tatsuki, 2006).

Table 1

Elements and Realizations in Ideational Function

Element	Realization
Process	verbal group
participant	nominal group
circumstance	adverbial group or prepositional phrase

Note. This table is created based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 177) and Tatsuki (2006, p. 39).

Process is a main element in a process and is realized through a verb or verb group, *participant* refers to the doer of the process and is expressed through a noun or noun group, and *circumstance* describes a situation or context around the process and is realized through an adverb group or prepositional phrase. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), *birds are flying in the sky*, is a possible example of organizing experience: *are flying* is a Process, *birds* are participants, and *in the sky* is a circumstantial element (p. 175). Furthermore, the system that includes these components is known as *transitivity*, which depicts the process of speakers representing. It is equal to a “semanticization” of words and clauses, demonstrating the semantic structure of a clause.

The process can be classified into several types, including representing a specific action, thinking, and feeling. Each of these process types requires its own set

² To differentiate from process, which represents a process, capitalized “Process” is used to describe elements that are expressed as verb groups.

of participants. Texts can be analyzed only in terms of subject and verb from a traditional grammatical standpoint, but from the perspective of transitivity, texts can be clearly analyzed in terms of meaning as the embodiment of different participating elements and the core of the process Process.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) recognized six process types in transitivity realized mainly through verbs³ and demonstrate the system network as shown in Figure 2 and Table 2.

Figure 2

System Network of Process Types



Note. This figure is adopted from Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 172).

Figure 2's circle shape demonstrates that the six process types do not exist independently and have no clear border between them. The areas accompanied with

³ In English, verbs that play the role of Process are frequently accompanied by an auxiliary verb, so verb groups containing such auxiliary verbs (e.g., will wing, can sing, could sing, have sung, could be sung) can be classified as Process (Tatsuki, 2006, p. 42).

the name of the process types written on the outside of the circle are the core areas, and within each region, typical verbs that embody them when realized are listed. In the following sections, each process type will be explained using examples, detailing the typical participants of each.

2.2.2.1. Material Process

The material process is realized when a change in the flow of events is interpreted as some actions taking place with the input of energy (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The material clauses define an event as a series of concrete changes in which the source of the energy is a participant Actor and the consequence or ones who suffer or undergo the process is Goal. As (1a) shows, *the lion* is construed as doing something and unfolds the process of catching the tourist. The Goal *tourist* is realized as the entity towards which the process is directed, through the direct object of the transitive verb. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) suggested that the following questions can be raised regarding this process; “What did the lion do?, What did the lion do to the tourist?” (p. 181) or, if instead of ‘doing,’ the event is viewed as ‘happening,’ “What happened to the tourist?” (p. 181). These participants cannot be changed even if the sentence is written in passive voice just like (1b), unlike grammatical structure.

(1)

a.

The lion	caught	the tourist.
Actor	Process: material	Goal
nominal group	verbal group	nominal group

(Extracted from Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 180)⁴

⁴ While there are other example sentences that explain process types (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999), this paper primarily uses the well-organized examples from Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) and Tatsuki (2006).

b.

The tourist	was caught	by the lion.
Goal	Process: material	Actor

(Extracted from Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 181)

If the sentence includes an indirect object, it is realized as a participant Beneficiary, which is further divided into Recipient and Client. The former is someone who receives the result of a process, as shown in (2a), whereas the latter is someone for whom an Actor performs a process, as can be seen in (2b).

(2)

a.

The magician	brought	a beautiful rose	to the princess.
Actor	Process: material	Goal	Beneficiary: Recipient

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 45)

b.

The magician	picked	a pretty violet	for the princess.
Actor	Process: material	Goal	Beneficiary: Client

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 45)

Furthermore, in the material process, when there is something which does not influence a process, it is realized as Range, just like *a steep mountain* in (3).

(3)

The dragon	is climbing	a steep mountain
Actor	Process: material	Range

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 45)

Material processes exhibit both tangible and abstract behaviors (Chen, 2018): *springing* and *catching* are concrete, while *combining* and *evolving* are unseen and abstract (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 196). And this process is realized by a main participant Actor, who performs and, depending on the influence caused by a process, other participants such as Goal, Recipient, Client, and Range.

2.2.2.2. Behavioral Process

Realizing physiological or mental phenomena is a behavioral process that uses verbs such as “breath, dream, snore, smile, hiccup, look, watch, listen” as examples (Tatsuki, 2006, p. 46). This process is situated between *material* and *mental* processes, which realize the outer representations of inner functions such as *laugh* and *sleep* (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The main participant who is “behaving” is Behavior and Circumstance, which describes place and manner, or Range, are sometimes realized together. However, the clause mostly consists of Behavior and Process only such as in “Don’t breathe!” or “No one’s listening” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 251). In (4), *the unicorn*, which is conscious of doing something, takes on the role of Behavior and *a steep mountain* refers to the Range that encompasses the process.

(4)

The princess	watched	the beautiful sunset.
Behavior	Process: behavioral	Range

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 46)

2.2.2.3. Mental Process

The term *mental process* refers to our experience of the world of our own consciousness, which means it is a sensory process that is classified into three types: affective (*like, dislike*), perceptive (*see, hear*), and cognitive (*think, know, understand*). It is similar to the behavioral process because it focuses on the subject’s conscious, but the mental process is quite different in that it focuses on human mental behavior

that is not visible to the outside world. Furthermore, mental processes such as *see*, *hear*, and *know* cannot be used in progressive form, whereas behavioral processes such as *watch*, *listen*, and *learn* can.

In this process, there is always a participant who is human, and this is a main participant *Senser*, who senses something, and the *Phenomenon*, which is sensed such as wanted or perceived. *Mary* is a *Senser* in (11a), (11b) and *the wizard* is a *Senser* in (12), but when it comes to the *Phenomenon*, the latter is realized in connection with a *that*-clause, which is known as a *projected clause*, implying indirectly what is perceived.

(11)

a.

Mary	liked	the gift.
Senser	Process: mental	Phenomenon
nominal group	verbal group	nominal group

(Extracted from Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 199)

b.

The gift	pleased	Mary.
Phenomenon	Process: mental	Senser
nominal group	verbal group	nominal group

(Extracted from Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 199)

(12)

The wizard	thought	(that) the unicorn was very old.
Senser	Process: mental	Phenomenon: Projected clause

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 47)

Example (12) also demonstrates that a participant is not always represented as a nominal group. The verb-centered process (*was*) is visible in the content of the Projected clause and, as such, can be examined.

2.2.2.4. Verbal Process

The action of saying is realized as a verbal process, with the main participants being Sayer and Verviage, which represents what Sayer said. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) argued that this process type contributes to the construction of narrative by showing dialogic passages “x said, then y said.” On the other hand, Verviage, like a phenomenon of mental process, is commonly realized as a projected clause, as shown in (13).

(13)

The unicorn	asked	‘do you know what I am, butterfly?’
Sayer	Process: verbal	Verviage: Projected clause

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 49)

If the hearer is explicitly described, it is realized as Receiver, as can be seen in (14).

(14)

The magician	told	the princess	a story of the old unicorn.
Sayer	Process: verbal	Receiver	Verviage

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 49)

This process type can also be apparent in academic speech when some research is mentioned or the writer’s perspective is conveyed by the words *point out*, *suggest*, *claim*, or *assert* (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 253).

2.2.2.5. Relational Process

The relational process characterizes and identifies the relationship between people and objects, as well as the ownership relationship between the two concepts. by demonstrating existence and possession. The Process is realized through the verb *be*, and it serves two purposes: to display the participant's attributes and to demonstrate that one participant is identified by another. They can be distinguished easily by observing whether two participants can switch places. When explaining participant attributes, the process is irreversible, with the Carrier and Attribute serving as the primary participants as shown in (15). However, in cases where participants are reversible due to their identification relationship, the main participants become the Identifier and Identified⁵ as shown in (16).

(15)

The unicorn	is	very old.
Carrier	Process: Relational (attributive)	Attribute

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 50)

(16)

The unicorn	is	the symbol of fantasy.
Identified	Process: Relational (identifying)	Identifier

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 51)

Relational processes are classified into three subcategories: intensive, possessive, and circumstantial, as shown in Table 3 and each has two distinct modes of being attributive or identifying. The intensive clause refers to identification or characterization centered on the word *be*, possessive clauses tie parts (*piano*) to the whole (*Peter*), and circumstantial clauses describe the spatial extension of specific

⁵ Identified and Identifier are also known as Token and Value.

smaller body parts (*the fair*) in relation to bigger ones (*on a Tuesday*). The Process is not always realized using the verb *be*. The attribution process can also be realized using the verbs *appear*, *seem*, *need*, *look*, and *belong to*, while the identifying process uses the verbs *become*, *represent*, *resemble*, and *stand for* (Tatsuki, 2006, p. 51).

Table 2

Three Categories of Relational Process

Type	Attributive 'a is an attribute of x'	Identifying 'a is the identity of x'
Intensive	Sarah is wise	Sarah is the leader; the leader is Sarah
Possessive	Peter has a piano	the piano is Peter's; Peter's is the piano
Circumstantial	the fair is on a Tuesday	Tomorrow is the 10th; the 10th is tomorrow

Note. This table was created from Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 216).

2.2.2.6. Existential Process

Existential process emerges only to demonstrate that there is something, so it has only one participant: Existent. This type of clause is uncommon in discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). A typical form of this process begins with *there*, as shown in (18), and is frequently found at the beginning of the text.

(18)

There	was	no sound	in the Carnival after she was gone.
	Process: existential	Existent	Circumstance

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 52)

The existential process contributes to some particular types of texts. For example, in narrative, they play an important role introducing central participants in the setting or orientation stage at the beginning of story (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

2.2.2.7. Circumstance

There are three types of participants in each process type: Process, participant, and circumstance. Circumstance describes how a process occurs, including when, where, why, with whom, and in what ways, and it is frequently expressed mainly as a prepositional phrase and adverbial group. It gives the listeners sufficient information according to speakers' purposes (Butt et al., 2003). Table 4 depicts various types of circumstances and introduces each example by answering questions.

Table 3

Types and Examples of Circumstance

Type of Circumstance	Wh-item	Examples of Realization
extent	how long?	<i>for two hours</i>
	how far?	<i>for two miles</i>
	how many times?	<i>five times a week</i>
location	where?	<i>in the yard</i>
	when?	<i>after dinner</i>
contingency	if what?	<i>in case of rain</i>
		<i>in spite of rain</i>
		<i>in the absence of fine weather</i>
cause	why?	<i>because of the rain</i>
	what for?	<i>for a rest</i>
accompaniment	with whom?	<i>with a friend</i>
	and who else?	<i>as well as Henry</i>
	but not who?	<i>instead of Michael</i>

matter	what about?	<i>about</i> suffering
role	what as?	<i>as</i> a clown
manner	how?	<i>by</i> car
means	what with?	<i>with</i> a stick
quality	how?	<i>quietly</i>
comparison	what like?	<i>like</i> a trooper
angle	according to whom?	<i>to</i> Mary
		<i>according to</i> Luke

Note. This table was created based on Butt et al. (2003, p. 65) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, pp. 262–263). The markers evoking Circumstance are italicized.

Circumstances are more mobile than fellow participants Process and participant, but their placement is determined by purpose, which will be discussed in the textual function section (Butt et al., 2003).

2.2.2.8. Transitive Interpretation or Ergative Interpretation

Although each process has its own grammar, when examined from a higher level of perspective, these processes can be understood within an *ergative model* rather than a transitive model. Unlike the transitive model, which is built on the conjunction of Actor and Process, the ergative model focuses on the Medium through which the process is carried out. The cause is then referred to as the Agent.

In (19), for example, analyzed using the transitive model of process types, *the boat* can be interpreted as the Actor in (19a) and Goal in (19b), respectively.

(19)

a.

the boat	sailed
Actor	Process: material

b.

Mary	sailed	the boat
Actor	Process: material	Goal

(Extracted from Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 289)

However, it can be interpreted that someone who sailed the boat is the Agent, and *the boat* is the Medium, which refers to the action caused by the Agent. This method of interpretation is known as ergative interpretation, and from this viewpoint, (19) can be reinterpreted in (20).

(20)

a.

The boat	sailed
Medium	Process: ergative

b.

Mary	sailed	the boat
Agent	Process: ergative	Medium

(Extracted from Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 216)

In (20a) and (20b), *the boat* is represented as Medium, demonstrating that the same semantic process can be explained with the same participants. Furthermore, this ergative interpretation can remove the awkwardness of treating the inanimate object, *the boat*, as an Actor, as shown in (19a). It is thought that when combined with the previous transitive interpretation, this can lead to a better understanding of the semantic interpretation of clauses. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), the ergative mode is foregrounded in several registers of contemporary English and has become systemic.

Ideational function in language is realized through a clause composed of noun, verb, and adverbial groups, as well as prepositional phrases expressing experiential meaning. The process of realization is referred to as transitivity. A transitivity-based analysis can aid understanding of speakers' views or intentions based on the system semantics of the text's lexical and grammatical elements (Chen, 2018).

2.2.3. Interpersonal Function

In addition to experiential meaning, language expresses the relationship between speakers and listeners. When speakers communicate with listeners, they have certain intentions for the interaction, such as making a statement and asking a question. When asking a question, for example, the speaker assumes the role of information seeker, while the listener must assume the role of information supplier. This is the second meta-function of language, known as the interpersonal function, which refers to meaning associated with speakers' attitudes toward listeners and the clause organizes the interactive event.

2.2.3.1. Mood and Speech Function

The semantics of interpersonal functions occur at the same time as the other functions. When analyzed in terms of transitivity, all the examples in (21) result in evoking the same process: material process (Tatsuki, 2006).

(21)

- a. Karen picked beautiful roses.
- b. Karen picked beautiful roses, didn't she?
- c. Did Karen pick beautiful roses?
- d. What Karen pick?
- e. What beautiful roses Karen picked!
- f. Pick beautiful roses!

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 62)

Traditional grammatical interpretation explains these based on forms and their clause types: declarative, tagged declarative, Yes-No interrogative, Wh-interrogative, exclamative, and imperative. In SFL, each grammatical structure represents an individual speaker's intentions and exchange of interactions with listeners, in which giving implies receiving and demanding implies giving. The function realized through grammatical clauses is known as "mood," and mood types in (21) can be identified in Table 4.

Table 4

Mood Types, Meaning and Examples in SFL

Mood Type	Meaning	Example
declarative	giving information	Karen picked beautiful roses.
tagged declarative	requesting consent/confirmation	Karen picked beautiful roses, didn't she?
yes-no interrogative	requesting yes/no	Did Karen pick beautiful roses?
wh- interrogative	specifying the entity the questioner wishes to have supplied.	What Karen pick?
exclamative	showing exclamation	What beautiful roses Karen picked!
imperative	giving a command	Pick beautiful roses!

Note. This table was created based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) and Tatsuki (2006).

The appropriate expression is chosen based on the purpose, and the speaker conveys to the listener his/her attitude toward what he/she wishes to do through utterance. Specifically, "what" refers to information or goods-and-services. The next

parameter is whether to give or request; and the meaning of the utterance produced by the combination of these is referred to as *speech function*⁶ (Halliday, 1994). Table 5 depicts the most common combinations of speech functions: statement, question, offer, and command.

Table 5

Primary Speech Function

Role in Exchange	Commodity exchanged	
	Information	Goods-and-services
giving	‘statement’	‘offer’
	He’s giving her the teapot	Would you like this teapot?
demanding	‘question’	‘command’
	What is he giving her?	Give me that teapot!

Note. This table was created based on Halliday & Matthiessen (2004, p. 107).

Halliday (1994) refers to what is exchanged as “commodity exchanged” and whether the commodity is requested or given as a “role in exchange.”

When language is used for exchanging information, the clause appears as a *proposition* that can be acknowledged or rejected, questioned, insisted upon, regretted, and so on. On the other hand, in the exchange of goods and services, since goods and services cannot be affirmed or rejected, the clause can be referred to as a *proposal* rather than a proposition (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

⁶ Halliday (1994) refers to what is exchanged as ‘commodity exchanged’ and whether the commodity is requested or given as a ‘role in exchange.’

2.2.3.2. Mood Structure

Interpersonal components, including primary speech function, are realized as clauses, just like ideational components. SFL discusses clauses, which are made up of words and phrases, and how each element works together to demonstrate interpersonal aspects. This clause structure is referred to as *mood structure*. In the mood structure, Mood refers to the element that determines the mood of the clause, while Residue refers to the remaining parts. Identifying the elements of Mood is crucial to understanding them from the perspective of interpersonal functions. Mood is divided into Subject, which is embodied in the noun group, and Finite, which is represented by the verb group as shown in (22).

(22)

The duke	has	given that teapot away
Subject	Finite	Residue
Mood		

(Extracted from Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 115)

Subject also corresponds to the grammatical subject and is always in a fixed position, is a central element of the proposition⁷ and a reference point of which proposition can be affirmed or denied. Finite, on the other hand, makes the proposition finite and embeds the position of whether the proposition is about the past or the present, as well as the extent to which the speaker believes the proposition is true. It associates proposition with its context in the speech event. In (22), it seems the Finite *has* implies positive polarity and present time, while the Subject, *the duke*, demonstrates the entity to which the assertion is stated to be valid.

⁷ In this section, the distinction between *proposition* and *proposal* is not made, and both are explained using the term “proposition.”

The change in Finite's position causes a shift from grammatical declarative to interrogative, as well as a shift in the semantic interpretation of the speech function from giving to requesting. For this reason, Finite is also known as Operator. In (23), for example, *smiled* has two functions: one is finite, indicating that the proposition is in the past, and the other is *predicator*, demonstrating an ideational process (in this example, behavioral process). Furthermore, modal verbs, as seen in (24), are Operators that express the proposition's probability, obligation, willingness, and ability, and Predicator is accompanied by Complement, which refers to the object of Process *cut*. These are referred to as "modality" and are discussed in detail in the following section.

(23)

Sarah	smiled.	
Subject	Finite	Predicator
Mood		Residue

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 74)

(24)

Sarah	might	have been cutting	Mike's hair.
Subject	Finite: modality	Predicator	Complement

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 74)

2.2.3.3. Modality

Modality is used to realize an intermediate degree of the choice between yes and no toward the proposition, and it is classified as *modalization* or *modulation* based on the speech function. The former refers to how speakers assess the information described in the proposition, in which the meaning of the positive and negative pole is asserting ("it is so") and denying ("it is not so"). There are two kinds

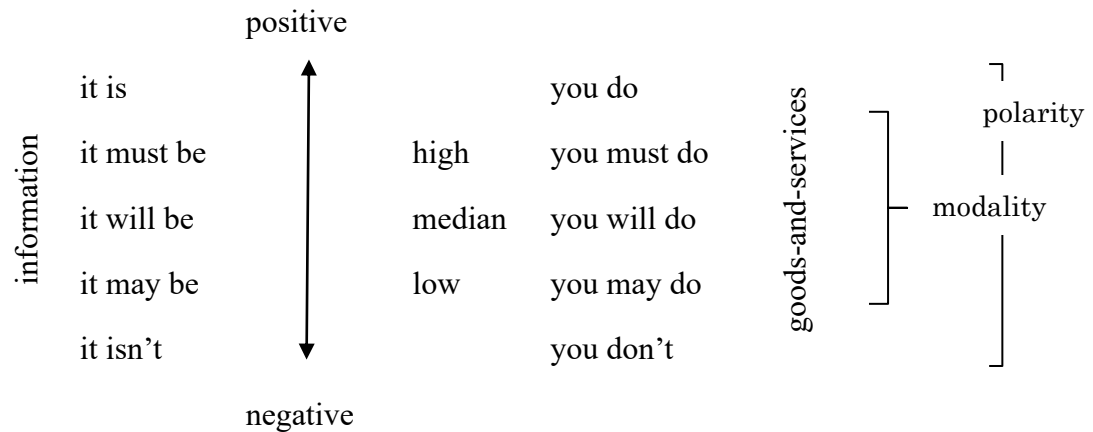
of intermediate possibilities in modalization: probability (*possibly, probably, certainly*) and usuality (*sometimes, usually, always*). They can be realized in the three ways: 1) a modal verb in the verbal group (*that will be John*), 2) a modal Adjunct (*that's probably John*), and 3) both together (*that'll probably be John*) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 147).

The other type of modality, modulation, is concerned with the proposal of exchanging products and services, in which the meaning of the positive and negative poles is prescribing (“do it”) and proscribing (“don’t do it”). The intermediate possibility of the proposal can also be realized in two ways: *inclination* when products and services are provided, and *obligation* when they are requested. These are mainly expressed in either of the two ways or both ways together: 1) a modal verb (*you should know that*), and 2) an expansion of the Predicator by a passive verb (*you're supposed to know that*) or an adjective (e.g., *I'm anxious to help them*) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.147).

Speakers can use modality to communicate the proposition's probability or proposal's inclination, which are classified into three levels: high, medium, and low. These levels are collectively referred to as Value. Figure 3 shows how the realization of the interpersonal component through modality in polarity can be interpreted together. The highest value is assigned to a clause written in the present or past tense as a fact. It is higher than a clause that includes the modality of demonstrating probability and obligation. In contrast, the lowest one is a negated proposition or proposal. This polarity graph also demonstrates that modality is located in the middle of this polarity.

Figure 3

Polarity and Value of Modality



Note. This figure was recreated based on Tatsuki (2006, p. 77).

2.2.3.4. Adjunct

The Adjunct component is used in conjunction with other main elements to realize a proposition/proposal, such as the Subject, Finite, Predicator, and Complement. This is primarily realized through adverbial and prepositional phrases, which are divided into three categories based on each meta-function, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Classification of Adjunct

Type of Adjunct	Meta-function	Location in Mood Structure
circumstantial Adjunct	ideational	Residue
modal Adjunct	interpersonal	Mood
conjunctive Adjunct	textual	not in mood structure

Note. This table was creased based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 125) and Tatsuki (2006, p. 44).

Circumstantial Adjuncts refer to the information of situation in each process type, such as time and location (e.g., *yesterday* and *here*), and from the interpersonal viewpoints of the proposition, they are placed in the Residue of the modal structure, which is unrelated to the mood of the proposition. The Adjunct that realizes interpersonal components is modal Adjunct, as *in my opinion*, *generally*, and *fortunately*, in the Mood. Finally, conjunctive Adjunct is not present in mood structure but is associated with the textual function of the clause, such as *and* and *next*. Table 7 shows subcategories representing the type of subcategory and examples.

Table 7

Types of Adjuncts

Type of Adjunct	Type	Example
circumstantial	temporal	<i>on the next day, today, soon, now, in 2004</i>
	location	<i>at the corner, here, in front of the building</i>
	manner: quality	<i>well, fast, together, all, both, skillfully</i>
	manner: degree	<i>much, little, greatly, considerably</i>
	manner:	<i>differently</i>
	comparison	
modal	manner: means	<i>microscopically, telescopically</i>
	mood	<i>perhaps, in my opinion, very likely, usually</i>
	polarity	<i>yes, yeah, no</i>
	comment	<i>fortunately, surprisingly, miraculously, kindly, admittedly, supposedly</i>
conjunctive	conjunctive	<i>and, by the way, however, next, besides ...</i>
	continuity	<i>well, oh, you know ...</i>

Note. This table was created based on Tatsuki (2006, p. 80) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 355).

This section focuses on the function of exchanging their roles between speakers and listeners and shows how this interpersonal component is represented in the clauses. Speech function, which refers to the speaker's intention toward the listener, is realized in mood structure, particularly Subject and Finite, and other elements such as Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct.

2.2.4. Textual Function

The arrangement of a clause is crucial for presenting ideational and interpersonal information as a message and constructing a text in its environment; this function of language is known as "textual function." The following examples in (27a) to (27d) are considered similar in ideational and interpersonal aspects, material process, and declarative mood related to information-giving.

(27)

- a. The dragon chased a unicorn in the sky garden.
- b. In the sky garden the dragon chased a unicorn.
- c. A unicorn was chased by the dragon.
- d. By the dragon a unicorn was chased in the sky garden.

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 86)

However, in (27), the word arrangements differ from one another. The location, (*in the sky garden*) or the voice (passive or active) has changed. In SFL, this variation in arrangement is a manifestation of speakers' intentions in the context, and the meaning that results from the configuration is regarded as *textual meaning*. For example, in (27b), the location where the dragon chased a unicorn is important, whereas in (27c), the focus is on what happened to the unicorn rather than what the dragon did.

2.2.4.1. Theme and Rheme

The beginning of the clause is what speakers want to communicate most, as shown in (27). Halliday (1994) divided a clause into two elements: the Theme and the Rheme. The Theme acts as the clause's starting point, effectively locating, and orienting it within its context, while the Rheme expands on the subject, detailing and elaborating the message conveyed. (28) shows the Themes and Rhemes of (27).

(28)

The dragon	chased the unicorn in the sky garden.
The unicorn	was chased by the dragon in the sky garden.
Theme	Rheme

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 88)

As (28) demonstrates, the Theme (e.g., *the dragon*, *the unicorn*) is always found at the beginning of the sentence and serves to set the tone throughout the clause. It makes it easier for listeners to notice the topic being developed.

2.2.4.2. Types of Theme and Their Realizations

This section focuses on the structure of Theme and Rheme and how speakers can effectively communicate what they want to say to listeners. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) divided Theme into three categories based on the metafunction of language: topical theme, interpersonal theme, and textual theme. Theme is located at the beginning of a clause and serves as the starting point for what speakers intend to express, making it a part of the ideational component. The ideational component consists of process, participant, and circumstance, all of which can become Theme, as seen in (28). This type of Theme is referred to as a *topical Theme*.

(28)

Topical Theme	Rheme
The dragon	chased a unicorn in the sky garden.
In the sky garden	the dragon chased a unicorn.
Suddenly	the dragon appears in front of a unicorn.
On a clear day of the Fantasy Land	a unicorn took a stroll near the lake.

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 89)

If (28) is described in an interrogative manner, the Themes do not have an ideational component, but rather an interpersonal component. The examples (29) below show how *interpersonal Theme* is achieved through finite verbal operator (in yes/no interrogative), modal verb, and their combination. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) suggested modal or comment Adjunct, and vocative can also become interpersonal Theme.

(29)

Interpersonal Theme	Rheme
Did the dragon	chased a unicorn in the sky garden?
Could the unicorn	run away from the dragon safely?
Is this	the gate of the fantasy land?

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 89)

The transition between texts is also evident in the position of Theme, and it is critical to maintain coherence between previous and current texts. This is a *textual Theme*, and conjunctions like *and*, *but*, *however*, and *so* are part of it, indicating the relationship to the previous text. In the examples below, (30b) and (30c) are topically connected to (30a) and (30b), respectively.

(30)

Textual Theme	Rheme
The dragon	found a unicorn in the sky garden.
and the dragon	chased the unicorn.
but the unicorn	ran away so quickly that the dragon could not catch her.

(Extracted from Tatsuki, 2006, p. 90)

These three types of Theme are not always realized individually. Actually, in (29a) and (29b), *did* and *could* are interpersonal themes, while *the dragon* and *the unicorn* can be topical themes. In (30b) and (30c), *and* and *but* are textual themes, whereas the dragon and unicorn are topical themes. Theme extends from the beginning of a clause to the first element in transitivity, and other types of Themes can be realized in the same Theme, resulting in a *multiple Theme*, as shown in (31).

(31)

well	but	then	surely	Jean	wouldn't	the best idea	be to join in
Theme							Rheme

(Extracted from Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 81)

2.2.5. As an Analytical Tool for CDA

Grammars play an indispensable role in discourse analysis, with a particularly important function in CDA. The relationship between grammars and discourse is not static, but interdependent and dynamic. Hart (2004) emphasized this point, claiming that grammar must evolve alongside the discourse it wants to describe. Among several grammatical models, the most well-known framework appropriated in CDA is Halliday's SFG, delineated in his seminal works (1985, 1994). SFG emerges as a beneficial tool for CDA for a variety of fundamental reasons.

SFG and CDA are united by their view of language as a primary social resource, emphasizing that both the forms and contents of language carry significant meaning. This shared perspective foregrounds the dialectical relationship between language and social contexts, suggesting that linguistic choices—reflected through register—are influenced by, and in turn, shape the communicative situation and genre, including the interpersonal relationships among participants. This alignment between SFG and CDA showcases their common ground, distinctly separating them from other linguistic theories such as generative grammar, which do not prioritize the social functions of language to the same extent (Young & Harrison, 2004).⁸

The compatibility of SFG with CDA is further elucidated through its conceptualization of grammar as the outcome of purposeful choice, thereby rendering the selection of one grammatical framework over another an ideological act. Such a perspective on grammar as a tool for navigating ideological choices in discourse facilitates a nuanced analysis of representation, encompassing not only what is articulated but also what is omitted, and exploring the underlying motivations for these discursive decisions. Fowler (1991) contributed to this discourse by focusing on transitivity as a fundamental element of representation, arguing that certain possibilities are deliberately suppressed to prioritize interpretations that align with the speaker's viewpoint. Moreover, Halliday (1984) identified the use of metaphor as inherently motivated by ideological considerations, given its capacity to introduce incongruence into discourse, thereby calling attention to the ideologically laden nature of linguistic choices.

In summary, SFG's alignment with the objectives of CDA establishes grammar not merely as a structural component of language but as a critical lens

⁸ Young and Harrison (2004) also distinguish between CDA and SFL in terms of purpose; SFL investigates the functions of language in a variety of contexts, whereas CDA investigates the relationship between language and power to reveal the structure of domination and the manner in which power is carried, maintained, and reproduced. Furthermore, CDA's analysis is not bound to a specific grammatical theory in order to achieve its goal.

through which the ideological underpinnings of discourse can be examined and understood. This approach reaffirms the centrality of grammar in the analytical toolkit of CDA, capable of unveiling the intricate interplay between language, ideology, and social context.

2.3. Critiques of SFL

While recognized as a potent analytical framework for discourse analysis and extensively employed in scholarly research, SFL has encountered criticism related to its predominant focus on clause-level analysis, perceived theoretical exclusivity, the ambiguity of its categorization frameworks, and its obvious omission of cognitive dimensions in analysis.

Within SFL, language meanings and functions are principally delineated through clause semantics, prompting discourse analysts to advocate for the recognition of cognitive structures that transcend individual clauses. Martin (2014) critiqued the practice of integrating SFL into text analysis without critically engaging with its broader implications. Additionally, the nature of discourse extends beyond mere aggregations of lexicogrammatical elements, necessitating a nuanced recontextualization of cohesion—conceptualized by Halliday and Hasan (1989)—within the textual meta-function of language, thereby enriching the understanding of discourse semantics.

Concerning the categorization challenges inherent in SFL, Miller and Bayley (2016) underscored the vagueness and classification difficulties, particularly with respect to behavioral processes in the typology of process types. Moreover, despite the infrequent acknowledgment of hybridity within SFL, Miller and Bayley (2016) proposed an SFL-informed methodology to navigate discourse shifts, or the blending of genres and styles, thereby addressing some of the framework's limitations.

Van Dijk (2008) articulated concerns regarding the SFL paradigm, noting its predominant focus on grammatical structures as opposed to a holistic consideration of language. This emphasis, he argues, renders the theoretical lexicon of SFL misaligned

with the broader linguistic landscape. Moreover, Van Dijk observes a theoretical insularity within SFL, citing its minimal evolution over nearly four decades and its limited integration of insights from adjacent disciplines or linguistic approaches. Despite SFL's foundation in social semiotic theory, which ostensibly situates language within a matrix of contextual and interpretive variables, Van Dijk points out a notable gap in the exploration of the dynamic interplay between linguistic expressions and their contextual underpinnings, including the interpretative processes and socio-cultural backgrounds that shape discourse.

Crucially, Van Dijk underlines the absence of a framework within SFL for accounting for the influence of language users' cognitive architectures—comprising mental representations, knowledge bases, and belief systems—on the production and comprehension of discourse. This gap indicates a discrepancy between the theoretical constructs of SFL and the experiential reality of language use.

Furthermore, Van Dijk challenges the SFL conception of context, criticizing its characterization as an arbitrary constellation of variables with linguistic manifestations. He points to the delineation of three meta-functions within SFL, arguing for the recognition of a broader spectrum of functional dimensions that extend beyond the proposed model. These include cultural functions, societal and social functions, and a range of evaluative, normative, ideological, emotional, and intrapersonal functions, thus creating a more expansive understanding of the relationship between language and its multifaceted contexts (p. 42).

2.4. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

This section delineates the framework of CDA, positing it as a lens through which public discourse—the primary subject of investigation in this dissertation—is examined as a construct reflective of speakers' beliefs and attitudes. Subsequent sections will furnish a detailed account of CDA's historical development and its theoretical and methodological intersections with SFL, elucidating the foundational

principles and analytical approaches that underpin the effective relationship between CDA and SFL in the analysis of discourse.

2.4.1. Foundations and Evolutions of CDA

CDA emerges as an interdisciplinary endeavor, integrating theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches from linguistics, sociology, psychology, and cultural anthropology. This synthesis is grounded in the foundational principles of critical linguistics (CL), with the overarching aim to elucidate the intricate dynamics between language and power as manifested within discourse. This exploration is particularly pertinent to understanding societal phenomena and the perpetuation of structures of domination and oppression. Okamoto (2018) pointed out the significance of this relationship in the context of social issues.

As noted by Wodak et al. (2010), the genesis of this form of text analysis, which critically acknowledges the role of language in shaping societal power relations, can be traced back to the 1970s. The ambit of CL encompasses the identification of misrepresentation and discrimination within public discourse, employing a detailed grammatical analysis that includes, but is not limited to, the examination of ideational functions, nominalization,⁹ and passivization through the lens of ideological stances (Caldas-Coulthard & Coulthard, 1996; Fowler, 1991; Fowler et al., 1979; Hart, 2014) and underscores the critical examination of language as a medium for ideological expression.

A focal point of CL research has been the analysis of ideology within news media, positing that the narratives disseminated are not mere reflections of reality, but constructions mediated by the linguistic strategies of the mass media. The production of news is inherently influenced by the corporate characteristics of newspaper

⁹ Nominalization is treated as a grammatical metaphor in SFG, and its ideological functions include the ability to conceal the agent (Fairclough, 2013; Fowler, 1991), materialize the process, and discard information such as participants and circumstances (Hart 2014).

companies, including their bureaucratic and economic dimensions, as well as their interrelations with other media outlets, companies, governmental bodies, and political organizations (Inoue, 1995). CL research focuses on the complex interplay between language, ideology, and power, framing discourse as a pivotal site for the reproduction and contestation of societal norms and power relations.

Many studies have been devoted to examining news discourse, with a particular focus on how issues pertaining to social order are represented, and it has been argued that news representations seldom challenge dominant power structures, instead often serving to reinforce the existing social hierarchy (Fowler 1991, Montgomery 1986, & Trew 1979). This observation calls attention to a critical aspect of media studies: the tendency of news media to perpetuate the status quo through selective representations of social realities. CL, with its foundational reliance on SFG, plays a pivotal role in dissecting the layers of misrepresentation and discrimination manifest in public discourse. By employing a detailed grammatical analysis, CL scholars seek to unveil the ideational functions—such as nominalization, passivization, and transitivity selection—embedded within discourse, interpreting these linguistic features through distinct ideological frameworks. Such an approach not only illuminates the subtle mechanisms of language that may obscure or distort social realities but also offers insights into the ways discourse can be mobilized to sustain or challenge societal norms.

Van Leeuwen (1996) advanced this discourse-analytical endeavor by proposing a model for the analysis of social actors¹⁰ and the grammatical

¹⁰ The social actor model examines whether the social actor in an event is activated or passive, and if so, what transitivity choices are made (Hart, 2014). Furthermore, van Leeuwen (1996) extends the SFG to describe how social actors are described, as well as a detailed description and systematization of their classification. It includes a broad sociological classification, rather than just a linguistic one. Van Leeuwen (1996) systematically recognizes and describes agency in the possessive case *our* (“our intake of migrants”) and prepositional phrases (“from neighbors and coworkers”), which have not been captured by traditional grammatical analysis (p. 32–33).

characteristics of their representation within media texts. Focusing on an immigration news article, Van Leeuwen's framework provides a methodological tool for dissecting how social actors are linguistically constructed and positioned within the narrative, thereby shedding light on the broader socio-political implications of language use in media discourse. This model further enriches the analytical repertoire of CL by offering a lens through which to examine the interplay between language, ideology, and social power within the context of news reporting.

CL extensively engages in the analysis of mystification, scrutinizing how linguistic expressions such as the passive voice or nominalization serve to veil the responsibilities of state power. Trew's seminal work in 1979 provides a meticulous examination of the lexical and grammatical strategies employed in the headlines and introductory segments of articles in two British newspapers—*The Guardian* and *The Times*—concerning civil unrest in Zimbabwe prior to its independence. This analysis elucidates how each newspaper's use of grammatical devices like transitivity and voice subtly influences reader perception, with *The Guardian* attributing agency directly ("Riot police shot and killed 11 African demonstrators"), whereas *The Times* employs passive constructions to shift focus onto the victims ("Eleven Africans were shot dead and 15 wounded when Rhodesian police opened fire on a rioting crowd"), thereby illustrating the inherent lack of neutrality in text and the underlying political orientations that guide narrative construction (Inoue, 1995; Montgomery, 2008; Van Leeuwen, 2009).

Schrøder (2001) contributed to this analytical framework by offering an analytical tool derived from SFL designed to decode textual ideology. This toolkit encompasses features such as transitivity, modality, transformations, classification/lexicalization, and coherence, facilitating a comprehensive dissection of the syntactic and lexical dimensions of texts.

As the 1980s progressed, CL evolved into a more robust and interdisciplinary paradigm, paving the way for the emergence of CDA. This evolution marks a

significant milestone in the field's capacity to conduct nuanced, specialized analyses that not only interrogate the linguistic construction of social realities but also critically examine the ideological underpinnings of discourse (Nashima, 2018). Since its foundational symposium in January 1991, CDA has been recognized as a paradigmatic shift in linguistic studies, transcending its origins to encompass a critical perspective on discourse analysis. This distinction is further emphasized by the adoption of critical discourse studies (CDS) as a term to encapsulate the critical examination of discourse beyond conventional analysis, underlining the field's commitment to uncovering the complex interrelations between language, power, and society (Nashima, 2018; Van Dijk, 2010).

2.5. Language, Ideology, and Power

Norman Fairclough, a pioneer of CDA, posits that language serves not only as a mirror reflecting social structures but also as a mechanism through which these structures are either perpetuated or transformed. According to Fairclough, the act of language use is inherently social, possessing the capacity to either maintain the status quo or instigate change within society and culture (Fairclough, 1989, 1995a, 1995b).

This dissertation aligns with the perspective that CDA should be considered not merely as a methodological approach but as a critical stance towards the analysis of discourse. From this viewpoint, both textual and verbal communications are instrumental in sustaining and legitimizing social disparities, injustice, and oppression (Van Leeuwen, 2009). CDA's analytical focus on the mechanisms of power abuse and perpetuation of dominance aims to elucidate the intricate dynamics between discourse and social structure, thereby empowering marginalized groups to contest and challenge prevailing inequalities. Central to the understanding of CDA is the notion of ideology, which this dissertation defines as a set of normative values and beliefs that constitute a worldview (Hart, 2014). Ideology influences social behavior by presenting a particular perspective on the world.

Hart (2014) further delineated the contemporary objective of CDA as the exposition of social values and persuasive efforts embedded within discourses, which may otherwise remain unrecognized by the audience. The transformative potential of discourse is significant, with implications for knowledge, social relationships, and identity (Fairclough, 1992). Reisigl and Wodak (2005) characterized CDA's endeavor to foster critical awareness as efforts to "denaturalize" and "demystify" social norms and values, underlining the pivotal role of discourse and its analysis in the construction and deconstruction of societal frameworks (Hart, 2014). This comprehensive approach underscores the importance of CDA in unveiling the underlying ideologies that shape societal structures and interactions.

CDA represents an evolution from its predecessor, CL, by incorporating an analysis of extratextual contexts into its framework. Fairclough stresses the significance of interdiscursivity, particularly showing how the dynamics within university documentation mirror consumer relationships depicted in business texts. This perspective signifies a shift towards recognizing the multifaceted interactions between various discourses and societal structures.

Moreover, CDA champions interdisciplinary collaboration, bringing together experts from history, political science, anthropology, and sociology to enrich discourse analysis (Weiss & Wodak, 2003). A notable advancement within the domain of CDA is the inclusion of multimodal analyses, extending beyond textual analysis to encompass visual elements, as articulated by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996). This methodological expansion allows for a more comprehensive understanding of discourse in its various manifestations.

Distinctively, CDA maintains an explicit acknowledgment of its social and political orientations, setting it apart from other analytical approaches. It critically engages with discourses propagated by societal elites—ranging from politicians and business leaders to journalists and academics—aiming to deconstruct the power dynamics embedded within these narratives. By promoting a critical reading of such

texts, CDA endeavors to empower its audience, advocating for a more discerning engagement with information (Noro, 2009)

Critics sometimes challenge CDA for its overtly critical stance, alleging irresponsibility in its assertions. However, as Wodak et al. (2010) elucidated, the criticality in CDA is rooted in a methodological rigor that involves distancing from the data to recognize its social implications before articulating a clear political standpoint (Nashima, 2018). This approach underscores CDA's commitment to not merely analyzing discourse but situating it within broader societal and political contexts, thereby contributing to a stronger understanding of the interplay between language, power, and society.

Numerous studies within CDA have built upon Fairclough's seminal work in 1989, extending the analysis to spheres such as media, politics, education, and advertising through the lens of SFL. These studies reveal the important role of language in shaping power dynamics and constructing social identities. The choice of SFL within CDA research is attributed to its ability to elucidate the tripartite functions of language—ideational, interpersonal, and textual—mirroring CDA's conceptualization of language as a tool for discourse construction, ideological expression, and genre enactment to facilitate social hegemony (Van Leeuwen, 2009).

CDA employs a diverse array of methodological approaches beyond SFL, including argumentation strategies (Wodak & Matouschek, 1993), narrative analysis (Mumby, 1993), contextualization within broader societal frameworks (Ehrlich, 1998), and more elaborated applications of SFL (Van Leeuwen, 1996). The focus of discourse analysis has evolved over the past two decades, addressing issues such as racism, antisemitism, and immigration (Dijk, 1993; Van Dijk & Van Leeuwen, 1999; Wodak & Matouschek, 1993), the impacts of neoliberalism on business (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1997; Fairclough, 1993, 2000), and the marketization of higher education (Fairclough, 1993).

Recent trends in CDA research have concentrated on analyzing how speakers convey evaluations in public discourse. For instance, Fuoli (2012) investigated the strategic use of language's interpersonal functions by multinational corporations to shape public perceptions concerning social and environmental responsibilities (Hart, 2014). This burgeoning interest demonstrates CDA's ongoing commitment to deciphering the intricate mechanisms through which language influences societal perceptions and behaviors and underlines the field's integral role in the critical examination of discourse across diverse contexts.

2.5.1. Theoretical Framework

Fairclough (1992) articulated a nuanced understanding of discursive events, positing that any instance of discourse simultaneously constitutes a text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice. This multidimensional framework foregrounds the complexity of discourse analysis, emphasizing the interplay between textual analysis, discursive practices, and the broader social context in which these practices are embedded.

At the foundational level, the “text” dimension emphasizes the critical role of language analysis—rooted in traditions such as critical linguistics—in deconstructing how texts serve as representations of social realities, identities, and dynamics of participant relationships. This analytical lens enables a deep exploration of the ways in which language constructs and reflects the social world.

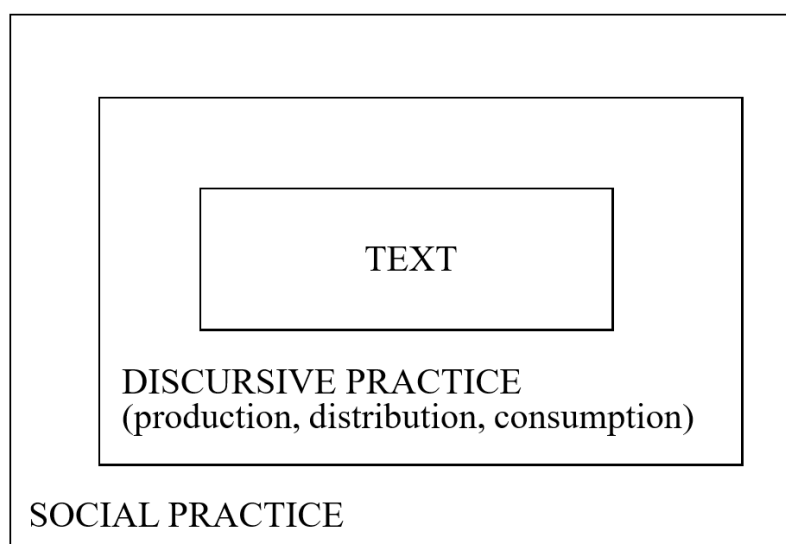
The “discursive practices” dimension extends beyond the text itself to encompass the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption. This includes a consideration of the diversity of discourses employed and their intertextual relationships. Within this scope, the interpretive processes and contextual factors influencing how texts are understood by audiences are integral, bringing to light the importance of audience norms and conventions in shaping discourse interpretation. Discursive practice thus bridges the gap between the textual and the social, mediating between the two.

Finally, the “social practice” dimension situates texts and discursive practices within the wider landscape of social identities, power relations, and ideological frameworks (Schröder, 2009). It examines how institutional and organizational contexts underpin discursive practices and the transformative impact of discourse on these broader societal structures. This perspective is crucial for understanding the role of discourse in constituting social reality and in the perpetuation or challenge of existing power dynamics and ideologies.

Fairclough (1995) visually represented these three dimensions of analysis, offering a coherent framework for dissecting the multifaceted nature of discourse as shown in Figure 4. This tripartite model shows the importance of a holistic approach to discourse analysis, one that integrates textual, discursive, and social practices to unravel the complex ways in which language shapes and is shaped by social forces.

Figure 4

Three Dimensions of Analysis in CDA



Note. This figure was created based on Fairclough (1995, p. 59).

Within the ambit of CDA, while there exists a shared objective and theoretical foundation across various analyses, the methodologies employed can be markedly

diverse. A considerable portion of CDA research integrates linguistic insights, aligning closely with the domain of applied linguistics. Nonetheless, there are instances where the methodological orientation is derived from ethnography or social psychology, diverging from purely linguistic approaches.

This methodological diversity is underpinned by a rich theoretical tapestry influenced by critical social theory, drawing upon the seminal works of illustrious scholars such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Pierre Bourdieu, Jürgen Habermas, and Michel Foucault (Hart, 2014). These influences illustrate the interdisciplinary nature of CDA, reflecting its engagement with complex socio-cultural phenomena through a multifaceted analytical lens.

2.5.2. Approaches

The interdisciplinary essence of CDA gives rise to a variety of methodological approaches, including the discourse-historical approach (DHA), the sociocognitive approach, and the cognitive linguistic approach.

DHA emerges from the integration of linguistic analysis with historical and sociological inquiry, aiming to elucidate the evolution of discourse over time and the factors driving such transformations. This approach is characterized by its rigorous engagement with the historical context of discourse phenomena, exemplified by its investigation into the proliferation of anti-Semitic stereotypes in public discourse during the Australian presidential election campaign, as detailed by Wodak et al. (2009, 2018). By foregrounding the temporal dynamics of discourse, DHA offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how discourses reflect and influence societal changes.

The sociocognitive approach to CDA delves into the triadic relationship among discourse, cognition, and society, distinguishing itself from traditional CDA methodologies by emphasizing the cognitive processes bridging discourse and social structures. This approach posits discourse and social structure as distinct entities interconnected through the mental representations of individuals or social entities. It

suggests that the influence of social structures on texts and vice versa is mediated through cognitive mechanisms, including mental models, knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies.

Analysis within this framework begins by examining the structural characteristics of discourse—such as themes, argumentative strategies, vocabulary choice, and metaphorical usage—interpreting these elements through the lens of mental models, and the attitudes and ideologies that underpin the articulation of discourse claims. Subsequently, the approach identifies and characterizes the social contexts and functions that discourse and cognition inhabit and fulfill and advocates for an integrative examination that spans discursive, cognitive, and social domains.

This model addresses a criticism frequently leveled against CDA: that the connection between discourse and society often overlooks the individual's personal mental models shaped by collective knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies. By foregrounding the role of individual cognition in the reproduction of ideologies within discourse, the sociocognitive approach provides a more complete perspective on how ideologies are perpetuated or contested in discourse, attributing this process to the interplay of personal mental frameworks and societal influences (Wodak et al., 2018). This approach, therefore, offers a comprehensive methodology for exploring how discourse both reflects and shapes societal structures through individual cognitive processes.

The cognitive linguistic approach within CDA delves into the intricate interplay between linguistic structures and the conceptual frameworks within the minds of discourse participants. This approach, aligned with the sociocognitive perspective, prioritizes understanding how language structures—such as metaphor and image schemas within cognitive grammar—shape and are shaped by the mental models of individuals engaging with discourse (Hart, 2014).

Hart's (2013) research into online British newspaper reports on student protests against rising fees exemplified the application of this approach, particularly

focusing on how different image schemas construe events and signify broader ideological discourses. The analysis of contrasting representations of police–protester interactions in various reports demonstrates the significant role of language in framing events. For instance, one report may depict police as unilateral victims of youth violence (*they [a number of police officers] came under attack from youth*), whereas another presents a reciprocal exchange of violence between police and activists (*Activists...traded punches with police*). Such differential framing not only influences public perception of the events but also reflects and reinforces underlying societal ideologies.

The study illuminates how specific grammatical constructions and narrative strategies can invoke distinct image-schematic representations in readers' minds, thereby guiding interpretations towards particular ideological viewpoints. The implicit bias towards justifying police actions in most newspapers, except for *The Guardian*, illustrates a tendency to depict citizen actions as deviations from normative behavior. This analysis reveals the power of discourse to shape social reality and reveals the need for an examination of the cognitive mechanisms underpinning discourse interpretation and production.

Through this lens, the cognitive linguistic approach offers a useful tool for dissecting the subtle ways in which language and thought interconnect to influence social perceptions and ideologies. By examining the cognitive underpinnings of discourse, researchers can better understand the processes through which societal norms and values are both reflected and constructed, advancing the broader goals of CDA to critically analyze and challenge the discursive practices that perpetuate social inequalities.

The domain of CDA has traditionally anchored its grammatical analysis in the exploration of modality to delineate evaluations within discourse (Fairclough, 1989; Fowler, 1991). However, the analytical scope and utility of such evaluations have garnered increasing scrutiny and elaboration in contemporary discourse analysis. The

articulation of evaluations has evolved to encompass notions of stance, as proposed by Biber and Finegan (1989), and appraisal, a framework meticulously developed by Martin and White (2005), drawing upon SFG.

Appraisal theory, as conceptualized by Martin and White (2005), emerges as a potent analytical instrument within CDA for the granular examination of evaluative language. This framework offers a systematic categorization of the expressions of subjective opinion and intersubjective positioning, segmented into three primary domains: affect (emotional reactions), judgment (moral evaluations), and appreciation (aesthetic assessments). The challenge within the analysis of interpersonal meanings—distinct from ideational content—lies in their diffuse representation across grammatical categories, including adjectives, adverbial phrases, and modal constructions, rendering their identification intricate.

Despite the sophisticated insights afforded by appraisal theory and complementary grammatical models such as Langacker's (2008) cognitive grammar, their adoption within the broader CDA research community remains limited (Hart 2004). This fact indicates a critical gap in the methodological repertoire of CDA, pointing to the necessity for a broader integration of these advanced grammatical frameworks to enrich the analysis of evaluative dimensions in discourse.

2.5.3. Relations with SFL

CDA and SFL both conceptualize language as a social resource endowed with a performative function. These perspectives emphasize the dynamic interplay between language and its social environment, a bidirectional relationship wherein linguistic choices, or register, are informed by the communicative context or setting. Such choices not only give rise to a specific communicative event or genre but also consider the interpersonal dynamics among participants, encapsulating the essence of language as an interactive medium (Hart, 2004).

CDA emerges as a pivotal domain in which the intricate connections between grammatical structures and ideological underpinnings are scrutinized. Within CDA,

which is regarded as a branch of discourse analysis, the necessity for a systematic and descriptive framework is paramount. This framework aims to uncover the ideological and persuasive dimensions embedded within texts or spoken discourse. SFG is posited as a fitting methodology to fulfill these analytical demands, offering a lens through which the ideological layers of discourse can be meticulously examined (Wodak, 2001).

Furthering the discourse on language, Martin (2000b) posited that grammar serves a dual purpose. It not only facilitates a nuanced understanding of textual meaning but also acts as a vehicle for disseminating its features among readers or listeners. This approach to grammar is useful in fostering a shared understanding and enabling quantitative analysis, enriching the discourse on the functional and ideological significance of language.

2.5.4. Critiques of CDA

CDA has been subject to scrutiny within the field of linguistics. Hart (2004) delineated several criticisms of CDA and critical linguistics, drawing from diverse perspectives that encompass issues of interpretation, the nature and handling of data, and epistemological concerns (Billig, 2008; Chilton, 2005; Stubbs, 1997; Widdowson, 2004).

A primary criticism leveled against CDA concerns its methodological approach, which some argue veers away from genuine discourse analysis towards textual interpretation or commentary (Stubbs, 1997). This notion suggests that CDA practitioners often select text segments that align with their critical perspectives, potentially biasing the analysis. Furthermore, CDA's limited engagement with quantitative methodologies has led to descriptions of its findings as fragmented and lacking comprehensiveness. Widdowson (2004) specifically critiqued the propensity among some CDA researchers to amplify the significance of textual features based on subjective interpretations, potentially driven by the analysts' political motivations rather than a robust, empirically supported analysis.

Moreover, there is a concern regarding the conflation of analysts' interpretations with those of general readers or the intended audience (O'Halloran, 2006; Widdowson, 2004). This misalignment underlines the necessity for more experimental methodologies to accurately gauge text reception among diverse audiences. Despite recognition of the value of such approaches, their application remains relatively infrequent within CDA research (Fuoli & Hart, 2018). This assessment points to the need for CDA to broaden its methodological toolkit, incorporating more empirical and quantitative methods to enhance the validity and reliability of its analyses.

Issues related to interpretation, particularly in the realms of data selection and presentation, have been identified as significant points of criticism within CDA. These challenges are often attributed to deficiencies in the processes of data selection and sampling. Specifically, there is a concern that data selection may be disproportionately influenced by the researchers' theoretical models and political motivations, established prior to the analytical phase. Moreover, the tendency to recognize the pragmatic significance of specific linguistic structures, while neglecting their occurrence in other contexts, raises questions about the representativeness of the selected examples for the discourse at large. Stubbs (1997) underscored the imperative of extending the scope of data sampling to mitigate the risk of drawing overly generalized conclusions from a narrow data set. Corpus linguistics has been heralded as a viable solution to these challenges, as it offers a more extensive data repository and enhances the analysis of typical discourse features (Baker et al., 2008; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008). O'Halloran (2007) advocated for the use of corpus methodologies to curtail the overinterpretation of metaphorical language, lending empirical support to interpretations that might otherwise be deemed intuitive.

Furthermore, CDA has witnessed an emergent trend towards the integration of novel linguistic theories, notably cognitive grammar. This shift is motivated by the limitations of SFG in addressing how linguistic structures are interpreted by listeners.

While SFG provides a robust framework for analyzing descriptive aspects of language, such as representation and evaluation, it is less adept at elucidating the psychological and cognitive processes involved in interpretation. Fairclough (1995a) delineated these interpretative processes as crucial phases wherein language use—including the conveyance of ideology and specific viewpoints—shapes the mental representations and evaluations of the audience. This burgeoning interest in the cognitive dimensions of language has been termed the “cognitive turn” (Hart, 2011; Hart & Lukeš, 2009), marking a significant paradigm shift in CDA. This approach prioritizes psychologically plausible explanations for the mechanisms of grammar and meaning construction, with an emphasis on mental phenomena (Hart, 2004), thereby enriching the analytical scope of CDA with insights into the cognitive processes underlying discourse interpretation.

2.6. Summary

The objective of this dissertation is to elucidate the nature of public discourse as a social practice that engages with an indeterminate audience by employing the theoretical frameworks and analytical tools provided by SFL and CDA. These frameworks bring a comprehensive methodology and a critical perspective for investigating corporate communications.

SFL articulates the multifunctionality of language, offering a systemic framework for analyzing how these functions are grammatically manifested. This dissertation pays particular attention to the three meta-functions of language—ideational, interpersonal, and textual—as they pertain to the portrayal of corporate identities. It examines how companies convey information about themselves (ideational function), establish connections with their readers and the wider public (interpersonal function), and structure their information (textual function). The systemic nature of SFL enables a quantitative examination, allowing for comparisons across different time periods and organizations. By adopting SFL’s perspective of language as a series of choices, this study also explores the evolution of corporate

narratives over time. Nonetheless, it acknowledges SFL's limitations, particularly its focus on clausal units and less comprehensive treatment of micro-level linguistic features such as lexical variations and the complex roles of adjectives and adverbs. This dissertation aims to address these gaps by offering a more detailed analysis of such elements.

CDA positions texts and discourse as integral components of social practice, emphasizing the investigation of various discourses—including media, corporate, and political discourses—that are characterized by unequal access and power dynamics. This approach aims to uncover the underlying values and ideologies that shape discourse and influence its reception. This dissertation focuses on corporate discourse, examining how companies craft messages that reflect their interests, such as profit maximization and response to societal demands. In response to critiques of traditional CDA methodologies, this study incorporates a robust data set and comprehensive document analyses to ensure a more grounded examination of corporate communication practices. It also seeks to elucidate the factors influencing linguistic choices in corporate profiles, taking into account the significant expansion of audiences in the last two decades due to the advent of the internet and globalization processes.

Chapter 3 Public Discourse

3.1. Introduction

This dissertation represents a novel departure from the conventional approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA), which has traditionally emphasized the exploration of values and ideologies inherent to the creators of discourse. In contrast, this study shifts the focus towards the underexamined influence of a broad and general audience on the narrative structure of public discourse. Utilizing the lens of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), this research endeavors to delineate the intricate dynamics among discourse narratives, its audience, and the encompassing societal context. In an age increasingly dominated by the rapid expansion of online media platforms, augmenting the public sphere, the necessity to precisely identify the narrative attributes of public discourse and to formulate approaches aligned with specified communicative objectives has never been more paramount.

In this chapter, the exploration embarks on defining the essence of public discourse, examining its characteristics and tracing its evolution across different epochs. This exploration is enriched by a multifaceted analysis that draws on diverse theoretical perspectives and methodologies. By doing so, the chapter aims to lay a comprehensive foundation for understanding the complex interplay of discourse producers, their audiences, and the broader social milieu in which they operate.

3.2. Public Discourse

This dissertation endeavors to elucidate the intricate relationship between language and the realm of public discourse, particularly through the lens of corporate narratives. In an era when human interactions transcend traditional boundaries, including time and space, understanding this dynamic has become increasingly vital. This section aims to delineate the conceptual framework of public discourse, exploring its definition, its characteristics, and the various methodologies employed in its study within the field of linguistics. By scrutinizing the multifaceted nature of

public discourse, the dissertation contributes to a deeper comprehension of how language serves as a pivotal medium in shaping public perceptions and interactions in the contemporary world.

3.2.1. Defining the Public

The term ‘public’ and its associated concept of the ‘public sphere’ have been subjects of extensive discussion and varying interpretations in academic discourse. The fundamental definition of the public sphere can be traced back to the work of German sociologist and philosopher Jurgen Habermas, who conceptualized it as a vital space for societal communication (Habermas, 1991). Habermas envisioned it as the arena where the citizenry articulates opinions, deliberates on issues of general concern, and formulates collective resolutions. This notion of the public sphere is grounded in the historical emergence of the concept during the 18th century, characterized by the spontaneous congregations of citizens in town squares, coffee houses, and salons. These venues were celebrated for hosting free and open debates on matters impacting the citizenry, irrespective of social standing or privilege (Shanahan, 2017).

In contemporary times, online comment forums have evolved to become a modern, albeit imperfect, incarnation of the ‘public sphere.’ They represent the digital age’s answer to the traditional, physical forums of public discourse. The role of mass media and, more recently, digital media, has been central in upholding and facilitating communication within the public sphere. Particularly, the internet has added a new dimension to the public sphere, transforming cyberspace into a gathering place where citizens engage in dialogue.

The concept of the “public” domain, as observed by Koller and Wodak (2008), is imbued with a degree of ambiguity. This notion was significantly elaborated upon by Habermas (1991), who illuminated the dual nature of “public.” On one hand, “public” can denote a state of general accessibility, distinguishing certain events and spaces from those that are closed or exclusive. On the other, it may refer to

institutional affiliations, a usage exemplified in terms such as “public buildings.” Moreover, the concept frequently serves to demarcate the public from the private domain, establishing a clear divide between these two spheres. Within this framework, the public sphere is conceptualized by Koller and Wodak (2008) as a vibrant social space where meanings are not only produced and exchanged but also subject to collective scrutiny and discussion.

Public discourse, as defined by Bhatia (2015), involves the creation of meaning, debate, or argument through various communicative modes within the public sphere. This discourse is inherently societal and is characterized by a multiplicity of ideologies. Moreover, globalization has contributed to the formation of a diasporic audience, rendering public discourse fertile ground for the emergence of hybrid identities. This contemporary discourse reflects the dynamic interplay between public participation and the shaping forces of business, politics, and media within the public sphere.

3.2.2. Audience

It is critical to identify the audience in public discourse to comprehend its discursive phenomena. Because public discourse is open to anybody, past research has focused on who speakers expected to be listeners rather than who the audience is (Bednarek, 2006; Bell, 1991; Koller & Wodak, 2008). Iser (1972), for example, referred to the reader as an ‘implicit reader’ whom the media producer imagines during the media production process, and Bell (1991) agreed that the addressee in media communication cannot be identified and hence is imagined. In face-to-face discourse, speakers adapt their communication based on the reaction of the person to whom they are speaking. Conversely, in media discourse, speakers do not know exactly who the audience is and cannot tailor their communication styles accordingly. A wide variety of audience members coexist, with different backgrounds; even when or where they receive the message is unknown. These chaotic circumstances, termed

‘context collapse’ in media discourse (Androutsopoulos, 2014), encourage producers to create an ‘ideal subject’ (Fairclough, 1989) and perform by addressing that subject (Jaffe, 2009).

The tendency of producers to craft an ideal audience is so strong that even if they can gain feedback from the audience in the process, they decide what they include in their message based on their own vision of the audience (Ede & Lunsford, 1984). This vision has historically evolved, as illustrated by the shift from the 1950s, when public discourse was characterized by a sincere and informative approach, to a later period where the audience fragmented into various cults and cliques with distinct “knowingness.” This evolution indicates a move from a unified to a segmented and diversified audience, challenging the notion of a general public and showing the complexity of media audience dynamics (Fairclough, 1998).

The producers tend to imagine an audience according to the topic of their story (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Coupland and Coupland (2009), who examined the discourse on delicate issues related to body shape and weight loss in lifestyle magazines, pointed out that the writers construct an audience based on common sense and the results gained from a demographic survey. Under indefinite conditions, speakers and listeners are expected to rely on presuppositions such as their common knowledge, views, norms, and values, as well as stereotypes of the putative opponents. As a result, public discourse tends to be targeted toward a stereotyped audience as a social group, and these presumptions are embedded in speakers’ minds as well as their texts (Bednarek, 2006).

Thus, media audiences have been studied from several perspectives, revealing the co-participation of unaddressed, ratified participants (Goffman, 1974, 1981) and nondesigned addressees (Clark & Carlson, 1982). The quality of the audience also varies by communication medium, with TV viewers and radio listeners having varied types of participation, ratified or not ratified, with or without side participants or bystanders, and so on (Fetzer & Weizman, 2006). The environment in which

audiences receive the information also has an impact, and the conversationalization of political discourse in domestic environments is one such factor (Fairclough, 1998). This evolution from a unified to a fragmented audience illustrates the shifting dynamics in public discourse, underscoring the importance of understanding these changes to fully grasp the complexities of audience engagement in media communication.

3.3. Public Discourse Studies and Key Concepts

The study of public discourse has primarily focused on media, politics and business (Bhatia, 2015). This section introduces the major communicative strategies that shape modern public discourse: accommodation theory, audience design, conversationalization, and marketization.

Bell (1984) introduced the audience design model, arguing that people change their style in response to other audience members. This idea is based on speech accommodation theory (Giles, 1973; Giles & Powesland, 1975), and in this theory, speakers adjust their style of speech with listeners when they want to get closer to them (i.e., convergence), and when they want to distance themselves, they choose the style of speech away from listeners (i.e., divergence). Audience design model assumes different types of audiences and specific style choices depending on who they are directed to. Other than hearers, there are three types of audience: ‘auditors,’ who are not directly addressed but ratified participants, ‘overhearers,’ who are not participants but are known to be present in the interaction, and ‘eavesdroppers,’ who are neither ratified nor known to be present in the interaction. Bell (1984) found that the speech styles of radio presenters in New Zealand shifted toward or away from dialectal New Zealand English and Received Pronunciation depending on whether the stations broadcast to lower- or higher-status audiences (Schilling, 2004). The fact that speakers design their utterances with an awareness of listeners who they believe or believe can be listening (Bell, 2002; Clark, 1997; Hernández-Campoy & Cutillas-Espinosa, 2012), even if it is mass communication with no listeners present,

demonstrates the importance of taking into account the active nature of the listeners and their interaction with the listeners.

Fairclough (1995b) noted that public discourse is conversationalized. The distinction between private and public spheres in media discourse has blurred, and mass-mediated language has begun to become informal and intimate while maintaining formality and distance (Coupland, 2007). According to Scannell (1991), people listen to radio or television in the context of household activities or routine contexts, which can result in ordinary and informal conversation similar to that heard in everyday life. This trend of conversationalization¹¹ has occurred in politics, which is transmitted through mass media and attempts to inform, persuade, and mobilize the public (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Fetzer & Weizman, 2006). Fetzer and Weizman (2006) argued that the monologue-oriented mode of speech that was popular from the 1950s to the 1980s is no longer effective today. Fairclough (1992) argued that conversationalization is more than just a change in the linguistic structure of mass media; it can also play a role in the transformation of society and culture into a more entertaining one. It also mentions that conversationalization can result in ideology being embedded in speech in a natural and implicit manner (Okai, 2012). The conversationalization of discourse mentioned above covers the democratization and marketization (commodification) of discourse (Okai, 2012). Montgomery (1988) demonstrated a prototype feature of conversationalization, such as direct address to audiences using second-person pronouns, interrogative clauses, and imperative clauses (Fairclough, 1995b).

Marketization represents the integration of commercial practices into various sectors, especially higher education. This concept, as outlined by (Saichaie, 2011), encapsulates the trend towards adopting business strategies within the educational

¹¹ Conversationalization can be seen in a range of linguistic characteristics, including colloquial vocabulary, idioms, and the use of demonstrative pronouns (Fairclough, 1995). Montgomery (1988) advocates addressing the audience directly using *you*, as well as using interrogative and imperative clauses.

sphere, such as cost reduction, elimination of superfluous offerings, and a focus on sought-after programs (Askehave, 2007; Kwong, 2000). The infusion of business terminology—terms like *customers*, *clients*, *mission statement*, and *strategic plans*—into the educational discourse signals a significant shift towards viewing education through a commercial lens (Connell & Galasiński, 1998). A historical analysis by Fairclough (1995a) revealed a marked transformation in the language of higher education prospectuses. While a 1966–67 prospectus primarily detailed the offerings of the university, the 1993 version adopted a promotional tone, actively marketing the institution and its courses to prospective students in a competitive environment. Indeed, this trend towards marketization in higher education is manifest in various promotional materials, including flyers, posters, brochures, and website homepages, as observed by Askehave (2007).

In the realm of media creation, Koller and Wodak (2008) argued for a balanced approach that not only prioritizes the inclusion of relevant material and accurate representations but also seeks to engage and entertain a broad audience. They stressed that all forms of public discourse—spanning business, politics, and media—possess a potential manipulative element aimed at maintaining consumer loyalty, securing political majorities, or extending media reach. Such discourse operates within a framework that is inherently both inclusive and exclusive. The evolution of promotional messaging is further evidenced in a diverse array of publications, from corporate annual reports to university brochures, as noted by Fairclough (2003). Warnick (2007) expanded on this notion by categorizing promotional messages as representations, advocacies, and anticipations, suggesting that factual statements often carry underlying value judgments. Fairclough (2000b) added that in political language, the lines between fact and expectation are increasingly blurred, indicating a complex interplay between information presentation and the persuasive intent behind it. This professional discourse reveals a broader shift towards the commodification of the public and educational spheres, where the principles of marketization influence not

only how institutions present themselves but also how they engage with their audiences.

3.4. Summary and Research Gap

This dissertation investigates the complex relationship between language and the realm of public discourse, with a particular focus on corporate communications during an era characterized by boundless interactions. The observation and analysis of public discourse in the discipline of linguistics reveals Habermas' fundamental concept of the "public sphere"—a key space for societal communication. Originating as 18th-century social gatherings and extending into the digital age, this sphere acts as a crucible for public debate and collective decision-making.

The discussion further elucidates the complex nature of the term "public," addressing its connotations of accessibility and institutional connections while delineating the distinctions between public and private spheres. It covers the transformation of the public sphere as a result of digital media and globalization and centers the emergence of hybrid identities and the challenges these pose to conventional methodologies in public discourse research.

The importance of precisely identifying audiences is emphasized in order to fully understand public discourse dynamics. This dissertation critiques the oversimplification of audiences as homogeneous groups, advocating instead for an acknowledgment of their diversity and the phenomenon of "context collapse." Such a shift towards understanding audience heterogeneity aligns with the changing landscape of media communication and its complexities. Thus, this chapter addresses a fundamental research gap: the absence of a comprehensive framework for analyzing broad-targeted public speech and investigating its interpersonal aspects.

In the present chapter, a comprehensive overview was provided of the previous research addressing public discourse, framed through the lens of seminal concepts including audience design, accommodation theory, conversationalization, and marketization. This examination points to the significant yet complex role that

listeners, who may not share a physical or immediate social context with the speaker, play in shaping the dynamics of interaction. It was elucidated that the content and stylistic choices of a speaker's utterances are not solely predicated on their individual objectives but also substantially influenced by listeners and overarching social structures. Despite scholarly acknowledgment of this influence, there has been little research into how a listener's indeterminacy, combined with the complicated nature of large social structures, influences a speaker's linguistic choices.

In conclusion, this chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the interplay between language and the public sphere while underlining the imperative for a refined comprehension of audience dynamics and the consequences of marketization. It advocates for a broad analytical framework capable of addressing the problems of engaging a diverse audience in public discourse. This identification of a research gap serves as a starting point for further investigation.

Chapter 4 Corporate Discourse

4.1. Introduction

In the preceding chapter, a review of public discourse shed light on the transformation brought about by advancements in communication technologies, which have led to a fragmentation of audience commonality and rendered broadly accepted discourses increasingly obsolete. It has been noted that speakers often craft their discourses with a conceptualized or ideal audience in mind. Yet, the dynamics through which speakers engage with an indeterminate multitude of audiences via discourse remain unclear, primarily due to the lack of standardized analytical frameworks. This ambiguity may be evident in the absence of descriptions of interpersonal qualities in public discourse.

This dissertation investigates corporate narratives within the broader context of public discourse, with the goal of understanding interactions with an unspecified plurality of audiences. Unlike the ideological roots of media or political discourse, corporate entities, motivated by commercial imperatives, present a separate neutral perspective in which the impact of an undefined audience range can be more clearly seen. Additionally, the reliability and accessibility of data sources in this context are assured.

As a result, this chapter attempts to define corporate discourse, emphasizing the intricacies of audience consciousness and engagement. It will then consolidate a number of research inquiries, outlining their methodology and goals in the examination of corporate speech, with a focus on its multidimensional interactions with various audience segments.

4.2. Corporate Discourse

This dissertation investigates corporate discourse, one of the representative public discourses, to understand the use of language in public. Companies, like the media and political discourse, explain themselves in a way that they expect their

audiences will find acceptable. The narratives are supposed to represent the social context of the time as well as the interaction with the audience. Corporate discourse was chosen as the subject of analysis in this study because, unlike media or political discourse, not only is the internal reality of the company stable but the message framework is fixed in many companies, making it easier to focus only on the characteristics of the way the company communicates. Based on prior studies, this section describes what kind of genre corporate discourse is.

4.2.1. Corporate Discourse as a Genre

In the realm of critical discourse analysis (CDA), discourse can be divided into two distinct categories: *Discourse*, with a capital “D”, signifies the language of social life, embodying the collective narratives and ideologies of a society, whereas *discourse*, written with a lowercase “d,” pertains to the specific articulations and texts that arise within particular social situations (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Merkl-Davies & Koller, 2012). This latter form of discourse is crafted through specific modalities of expression, identifiable by its temporal and locational context, as well as the underlying values of its originators, whether individuals or communities. The emergence of a set of expressions endowed with a distinct communicative purpose that has been conventionalized within a social context is recognized as a *genre* (Merkl-Davies & Koller, 2012).

Furthermore, Rentz and Debs (1987) delineated an ideological layer embedded within conventional corporate narratives, marking a noteworthy dimension in the study of corporate discourse. Two linguistic features stand out in this context: impersonalization and reference vagueness (Bhatia, 2010). The application of the first-person plural pronoun to denote the corporation as a collective entity, juxtaposed with its impersonal reference as ‘it’, exemplifies the nuanced ambiguity in attribution. This is further evidenced in the occasional deployment of collective personal pronouns like “our people” or “them” to demarcate the workforce from the

organization itself. Additionally, the characteristic of passivization, often manifested without a clear grammatical or social agent or through the employment of agentless passives (e.g., “continued cost savings”), indicates a pivotal stylistic element within corporate language, contributing to its distinctive discourse genre (Merkel-Davies & Koller, 2012).

4.2.2. Navigating Internal and External Realms

Corporate discourse strategically encompasses considerations for both internal stakeholders (employees, management) and external entities (consumers, communities, regulatory bodies). It serves as a conduit through which companies narrate their identity, culture, and values and intricately weave these elements to impact and resonate within the communities in which they operate. Koller (2009) emphasized the significant influence companies wield in their operational domains, manifesting their discourse across various social spheres, including higher education and governmental sectors. This external discourse is not merely outward communication but a reflection of the companies’ identities and values projected onto the broader social canvas.

Internally, the discourse is a mirror to the organization’s soul, revealing its culture, ethos, and identity. Kapferer (2002) eloquently demarcated corporate discourse into two pivotal realms: the intrinsic culture and identity of the company versus the external perception and brand identity. He labels the internal dynamic as “the manifested organizational identity” and the external projection as “the projected organizational identity” (p. 185), illustrating the dual facets of corporate discourse that navigate both the introspective and extroverted dimensions of corporate existence.

Further dissecting this dualism, Kunda (1999) introduced the concepts of the “ideal self” and the “ought self” (p. 472) within corporate narratives. The “ideal self” represents the companies’ aspirations, goals, and desired identity, while the “ought self” reflects the moral and societal obligations and responsibilities the company

acknowledges and strives to fulfill. The mission statement epitomizes this duality. It serves as a pivotal element in communicating and reinforcing the corporate ethos and vision internally, thereby fostering a unified corporate identity, and externally, asserting the company's societal and cultural alignment and aspirations (Koller, 2009; Swales & Rogers, 1995).

Fairclough (1995a) expanded on external discourse dynamics by focusing on the diversity of channels through which corporate discourse is disseminated. This plurality not only diversifies the stakeholder audience but also adds complexity to the creation, distribution, and interpretation of corporate texts. The discourse thus becomes a balancing act, mindful of societal norms, values, and expectations. Suchman (1995) warned of the repercussions of deviating from these societal benchmarks, which can range from consumer backlash to financial and reputational damages (Brown & Deegan, 1998; Frooman, 1999; Fuoli & Hart, 2018). Companies, as posited by Dowling and Pfeffer (1975), strive to harmonize their activities and discourse with societal norms, embedding social values within their corporate narrative to foster alignment and acceptance within the societal framework they inhabit.

4.2.3. Audience Engagement and Corporate Discourse Strategy

This section delves into the critical role of audience considerations within corporate discourse, a facet stressed by the preceding discussion on internal and external awareness. The delineation of the audience for corporate communication extends beyond mere shareholder engagement, due to the rising prominence of corporate social responsibility (CSR). The vast scope of potential stakeholders challenges companies to adopt a nuanced approach to discourse that effectively manages impressions and fosters positive perceptions of company performance.

Research in this domain suggests a stratification of audiences based on their likelihood of engagement and influence over corporate behaviors. Fuoli (2012), Neu

et al. (1998), and O'Donovan (2002) posited that corporate discourse predominantly resonates with specific stakeholder groups rather than a disinterested public. This segmentation relates to the concept of “most relevant publics,” a strategic focal point for companies aiming to cultivate identity and rapport within precisely defined audience segments.

Corporate documents, notably annual reports and CSR disclosures, serve as primary vehicles for tailored corporate messaging. These documents exhibit a dual-purpose strategy: financial reports target shareholders and investors, providing transparency on fiscal health, whereas CSR reports address a wider audience, reflecting the company's ethical commitments and societal contributions (Fuoli, 2018; Neu et al., 1998). Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) further argued that the extent of public engagement correlates with the inclusion of ethical statements, suggesting a link between organizational visibility and discourse strategy.

The segmentation into “relevant publics” versus the general populace introduces a framework for evaluating the impact of corporate discourse. This perspective acknowledges the diversity and specificity of audiences, advocating for a strategic alignment of discourse practices with the expectations and interests of key stakeholder groups (Lindblom, 1993). Such an approach is evident in the prioritization of content within corporate documents, where the annual report emerges as a cornerstone of communication aimed at financially invested stakeholders, alongside a broader engagement strategy encompassing environmental and regulatory concerns.

Understanding of audience segmentation and its implications for corporate discourse leads to the strategic imperative for companies to articulate their identity and values in alignment with the expectations of their most impactful stakeholders. This approach not only facilitates targeted communication but also enhances the efficacy of corporate discourse in shaping perceptions, fostering trust, and sustaining stakeholder relationships.

4.2.4. Interdiscursivity of Corporate Discourse

The concept of interdiscursivity plays a pivotal role in the construction and dissemination of corporate discourse, catering to the diverse interests and expectations of varied stakeholder groups through the simultaneous presentation of multiple forms of content. Merkl-Davies and Koller (2012) elucidated this complexity within corporate annual reports, which amalgamate financial discourse, showcasing fiscal achievements; accounting discourse, asserting accuracy and factual integrity; and promotional discourse, sculpting the corporate image. This blend of discourses is strategically employed by corporate management to steer audience interpretation in favor of the company's desired narrative.

Further complexity in the interdiscursive landscape is indicated by Fuoli (2018), who posited that the effectiveness of corporate discourse hinges on its adaptability to the unique demands of each stakeholder segment. Investors, for instance, prioritize insights into profitability and associated risks, while employees seek clarity on their role within the company and the opportunities available to them. Customers, conversely, are drawn to the quality and uniqueness of the products or services offered (Johansen & Nielsen, 2011). This differentiation in stakeholder needs means companies must adeptly navigate and fulfill these diverse expectations to maintain and enhance their business success (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Freeman, 1984; Fuoli, 2018).

The intricacies of interdiscursivity within corporate discourse point to a strategic imperative for companies: to meticulously understand and respond to the distinct demands of their key stakeholders. Through a calculated blend of financial, accounting, and promotional narratives, companies can effectively communicate their value proposition, operational integrity, and brand ethos. This multifaceted approach not only facilitates targeted stakeholder engagement but also fosters a cohesive corporate identity that resonates across the spectrum of stakeholder interests, thereby reinforcing the company's position in the competitive business landscape.

4.2.5. Analytical Perspectives and Methodologies

Due to the unobservability of companies' actions, corporate narratives have been a primary medium for stakeholders to learn about them (Fuoli & Hart, 2018). Neu et al. (1998) analyzed official publication as a factor in the formation of modern society, arguing that annual reports, in addition to magazines and newspapers, play an important role. Furthermore, public awareness of the detrimental effects of corporate actions on the environment and society has made it more vital than ever for companies to communicate that they are operating responsibly (Fuoli, 2012). Lindblom (1993) identified three corporate communication strategies, recognizing the functions of a company to communicate to the relevant public about how the company is behaving now, as opposed to its former image of corporate deficiency, to aim at changing external parties' perceptions or to divert attention from an issue.

The significance of corporate speech has led to numerous studies that look at how companies might use their discourse to gain stakeholders' trust. According to Fuoli and Hart (2018), companies employ a variety of linguistic and semiotic resources in their public discourse to enhance their good image based on an ideal and trustworthy self and to build favorable relationships with stakeholders (Hallahan et al., 2007; Merkl-Davies & Brennan, 2007; Riel, 1995). A positive corporate image has been attributed to a good reputation (Fombrun, 1996; Riel, 1995; Westcott Alessandri, 2001) and multiple benefits for the company, such as a competitive advantage and sales, as well as the acquisition of consumers, investors, and more qualified staff (Walker, 2010). The ways in which these positive images are acquired change over time; Laine (2010) examined the discourses of three major Finnish companies over a 20-year period and discovers that the tendency to focus on sustainability has shifted to a tendency to write practical objectives that are less at odds with the company's actual actions. Lischinsky (2010) analyzed how Swedish companies described sustainable development from the collocation of the verb *sustain*, finding that sustainability was more likely to be associated with corporate profit and prestige and that market descriptions of purpose and intention were more prominent than specific actions.

Koller (2009) acknowledged that both ideational and interpersonal parts of corporate discourse exist but that interpersonal research is still less prevalent than ideational research (Fuoli, 2012; Hart, 2014; Merkl-Davies & Koller, 2012). Fuoli (2018) also emphasized the dialogic nature of corporate communication, namely the employment of stance markers as a company's own image strategy with an awareness of readers' attitudes and reactions. Interpersonal research has focused on personal emotional expressions such as *caring*, *wanting*, and *standing*, as well as emotional metaphors used in corporate descriptions (Livesey & Kearins, 2002), rhetorical patterns, and narrative story lines in corporate social reports (Buhr & Reiter, 2006; Skulstad, 2008). There is additional research on appraisal theory (Martin, 2000a; Martin & White, 2005), which aims to expand the idea of SFL to study the qualities of texts that represent the interpersonal function of discourse systematically. Appraisal theory integrates and examines feelings, attitudes, judgments, and modalities (Fuoli, 2012).

Evaluative expression can be explicit or implicit, making it difficult to identify in texts. The degree of explicitness is determined by context factors such as text type, communicative setting, and the receiver's ideological views on the text (Martin, 1995; Martin & White, 2005).¹² Implicit evaluations are expressed through adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and nouns and are judged based on context (Fuoli, 2012; Merkl-Davies & Koller, 2012). Although positive evaluation predominates in corporate communication (Bhatia, 2010), there are various attitudes toward each subject, such as the organization, the audience, and social and environmental issues (Fuoli, 2018; Merkl-Davies & Koller, 2012). For example, according to Merkl-Davies and Koller (2012), negative appraisal is primarily accompanied by external circumstances when companies refer to the economic and political setting in which they operate. Negative evaluations can also be seen when companies need to describe unpleasant situations

¹² This refers to the individual values and norms that are utilized to understand a text.

or negative results, however, they tend to rely on euphemisms, including the word *challenging* (Breeze, 2012). On the other hand, information about the company, such as financial performance, board members, employees, competitiveness, and ethical values, is described positively (Bhatia, 2010; Malavasi, 2010). Even companies with poor performance display optimistic attitudes in their annual reports, which is crucial for impression management and modifying readers' impressions of the company. (Merkel-Davies & Brennan, 2007; Rutherford, 2005).

Corporate discourse, particularly annual reports, is considered to have a rapport-building function and plays a crucial role in creating positive relations with investors and other stakeholders, as well as trust in the organization, as shown in reader-conscious evaluative language (Breeze, 2012; Fuoli, 2018; Malavasi, 2010).

This section finally delves into what past research has found about the basic characteristics of corporate discourse, as well as the characteristics of each document (particularly annual reports and CSR reports). According to Koller (2007), one feature of corporate discourse is the use of parallelism and numbers, such as "Europe, Asian Pacific, the Americas, the Middle East, and Africa" and "218,000 employees and nearly 200,000 shareholders around the world" (p. 126).

An annual report is a formal document that must include legally mandated information on a company's financial situation and prospects. It is recognized as a hybrid discourse genre with both informative and persuasive features (Bhatia, 2014; Breeze, 2013; Garzone, 2004; Malavasi, 2010; Rutherford, 2005). According to (Ditlevsen, 2012b), the main communicative aims of annual reports are to provide a factual and neutral picture of the company's affairs and to present a good image of the company. Additionally, annual reports have evolved over time, increasingly serving as a public relations tool to promote trust and a favorable business image, and Beattie et al. (2008) pointed to a movement from financial-driven to design-oriented. Furthermore, the number of pages, the length of the document, and the use of photographs and other multimodal elements is expanding (Beattie et al., 2008; David,

2001; Ditlevsen, 2012a, 2012b; Garzone, 2004; Rutherford, 2005), and annual reports are becoming more complicated and colorful publications (Breeze, 2013).

CSR reports are released annually and made available on the company's website; however, unlike annual reports, they are voluntarily provided with no specific legal constraints (Ditlev-Simonsen & Wenstøp, 2011). However, CSR reports and annual reports share a hybrid nature that includes both instructive and promotional components (Bondi, 2016; Malavasi, 2011). CSR is believed to be dynamic and developing because its topics change with the times (Jaworska & Nanda, 2018). According to Fuoli (2018), a study of annual reports and CSR stance statements indicated that CSR reports explicitly incorporate subjective evaluations; companies were found to be more openly expressing their feelings, opinions, and evaluations in CSR reports.

In summary, the analytical focus on corporate discourse encompasses a range of methodologies and theoretical perspectives, appropriate for the multifaceted nature of corporate communication. Through a strategic interplay of content, tone, and modality, companies navigate the complex terrain of stakeholder expectations while seeking to foster a transparent, responsible, and engaging corporate identity.

4.3. Previous Studies of Corporate Discourse

The articulation and dissemination of a company's efforts and ethos are predominantly narrated through corporate discourse, a mechanism through which stakeholders' perceptions are shaped and informed. Fuoli and Hart (2018) emphasized that, from the perspective of external observers, the tangible actions of a company often remain opaque, rendering discourse a critical channel for illuminating corporate activities, values, and intentions. This communicative practice assumes heightened significance in the context of an evolving capitalist consumer culture where brand identity not only differentiates but also defines a company's market presence and societal impact. Koller (2009) argued that in this milieu, the strategic development

and projection of brand concepts through corporate discourse have become imperative for maintaining competitive advantage and fostering stakeholder engagement.

Further, Flowerdew (2004) posited that branding transcends mere marketing tactics to embody a discursive process whereby a company's core values and attributes are encoded within a diverse array of multimodal texts. These include mission statements, vision declarations, and visual identifiers such as logos, all of which serve to narrate the corporate identity in a manner that is both engaging and persuasive. The overarching objective of these discursive strategies is not merely to inform but to engender stakeholder buy-in, fostering a sense of allegiance and positive association with the brand.

The subsequent sections will introduce the findings of previous studies on corporate discourse. This overview will not only feature the diverse methodologies and analytical frameworks employed in the field but also shed light on the multifaceted ways in which corporate discourse functions as a tool for strategic communication, identity construction, and stakeholder engagement.

4.3.1. Business and Marketing Approach to Corporate Discourse

The examination of corporate discourse within business and marketing contexts has highlighted its strategic role, with a particular focus on the elements that distinguish the messaging of superior companies. Mission statements are particularly valued as essential instruments for conveying corporate management's vision. Campbell and Yeung (1991) described a mission statement as a form of discourse that conveys an organization's purpose, strategy, values, standards, and behaviors comprehensively. Extensive research within the realms of business and management has looked at the content of mission statements, analyzing their components—such as products, services, values—and the audiences they are designed to reach, including customers, employees, and shareholders (Bart, 1997; Bartkus et al., 2004; Germain & Cooper, 1990; Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997; Pearce II, 1982; Stallworth Williams, 2008).

Bartkus et al. (2004) conducted a notable study that investigated the stakeholder focus and content of mission statements among 30 Fortune Global 500 companies across Japan, Europe, and the United States. Their findings revealed regional variations in the inclusion of academically recommended elements, suggesting that companies may independently tailor their mission statement content¹³ to reflect their unique philosophies and cultural orientations.

Swales and Rogers (1995) contributed a longitudinal perspective by examining the transformation of a company's mission statement before and after a financial crisis. Their analysis spotlighted significant shifts in content structuring and stakeholder prioritization, notably the shift from the term "customer" to "stakeholder" to denote a broader engagement strategy. Furthermore, the order of the components has changed, with "Profit" now appearing first, but embedded in the second heading, "For shareholders," with the more euphemistic phrase "to consistently generate above-average returns." In the aftermath of the financial crisis, "integrity" was moved to the top of the mission statement, and "quality" was moved from fifth to second place (p. 231). Swales and Rogers (1995) conducted a more detailed analysis, noting changes in sentence-subject descriptions. They observed that while "employees" is frequently used as the subject, there has been a notable shift in the description methods: the use of "the company" has decreased, whereas the employment of "we" to refer to the company has seen an increase. This study, by applying Halliday's three meta-functions, illustrates the strategic linguistic adjustments companies make to align with shifting corporate goals and stakeholder expectations.

Furthermore, Blair-Loy et al. (2011) explored the correlation between corporate discourse and organizational initiatives by comparing the mission statements of companies recognized for their work-life practices against those not

¹³ Bartkus et al. (2004) identified the following components of mission statements: industry, target customer, geographic scope, values/philosophy, motivational (excellence), motivational (societal benefit), motivational (excellence or societal benefit), distinctive competency, future orientation, and financial objective.

awarded such distinction.¹⁴ Their research, which employed coding for various components of mission statements and thematic analysis,¹⁵ found a pronounced emphasis on employee value within companies praised for work-life balance, contrasting with a reduced focus on shareholder interests. This comparative approach sheds light on the ways in which corporate discourse reflects organizational priorities and values, illuminating its important role in communicating with a diverse array of stakeholders.

4.3.2. Rhetorical Strategies in Corporate Discourse

The exploration of mission statements in the preceding analysis exhibits a crucial objective of corporate discourse: to foster unity among internal stakeholders, such as employees, and to effectively persuade external stakeholders. This dual aim underscores the strategic use of rhetorical strategies within corporate narratives to cultivate a sense of community and alignment with the company's values and objectives.

Burke (1950) introduced the concept of identification as a foundational tool in the rhetorical arsenal for persuading audiences. Central to effective persuasion, according to Burke, is the ability of speakers to demonstrate commonalities with their audience, sharing beliefs and values that resonate on a personal level. Through this shared identity, the audience is drawn almost subconsciously into a deeper affiliation with the speaker, thus initiating a transformative process whereby individuals actively integrate into the community, advocating and supporting its objectives. Burke (1950) delineated two primary mechanisms for achieving this identification: *association* and

¹⁴ Whether it is featured on *Working Mother* serves as a standard. *Working Mother* has been published annually since 1985 and ranks the top 100 companies for working mothers. The criteria include the percentage of women promoted, employee satisfaction, and the availability of work-life policies.

¹⁵ Examples of themes for employees include “as partners or owners,” “team/teamwork,” and “commitment.” The products and services’ themes include “quality service/products,” “competitive,” and “Shareholder value,” while the themes of organization are “integrity/accountability,” and “corporate citizenship, community.”

dissociation. Association is the establishment of common ground to foster connection, whereas dissociation strategically differentiates the entity from other groups, enhancing its unique identity and appeal.

Expanding on Burke's foundational theory, Cheney (1983) applied these concepts to the realm of corporate communication, particularly through the lens of corporate house organs¹⁶ or internal periodicals. Cheney's investigation revealed that companies tactically employ both association and dissociation to strengthen internal cohesion and project a consistent external image. He identified six specific strategies under the umbrella of association, including the expression of concern for the individual, acknowledgment of contributions, advocacy of shared values and benefits, and leveraging testimonials from employees. These strategies collectively serve to underline a communal corporate identity, with the pronoun "we" playing a critical role in signaling a unified corporate perspective.

Cheney posits that the strategic deployment of "we" in corporate discourse is not merely a linguistic choice but a powerful tool for identification. It implicitly fosters a collective identity, reinforcing the company's values and objectives as shared aspirations. This analysis offers insight into the ways in which companies leverage rhetorical strategies to not only align and motivate their internal workforce but also to shape perceptions and build trust among broader external stakeholders.

4.3.3. Corpus-Based Analysis of Corporate Discourse

In a seminal study by Fuoli (2018), a comprehensive corpus analysis of annual reports and CSR documents was conducted to explore how companies construct positive identities to foster trust among their target stakeholders. This investigation centered on the concept of *stance*, a linguistic mechanism that encodes the speaker's feelings, attitudes, evaluations, and even their identity and interpersonal relationships

¹⁶ House organ refers to the messages sent by the organization to its employees, which include policies, viewpoints, and attitudes. Cheney's (1983) study included eleven magazine-style corporate house organs from 1979.

(Du Bois, 2007; Englebretson, 2007; Hunston & Thompson, 2000; Martin & White, 2005). Stance is categorized into three primary types: attitudinal, reflecting personal attitudes and value judgments; epistemic, denoting certainty and credibility regarding a proposition; and style-of-speaker, which involves meta-referencing in communication (Conrad & Biber, 2000).

Fuoli's (2018) meticulous analysis distinguished these stance types within the corpus, particularly focusing on attitudinal and epistemic stances, alongside modality. Notably, the study omits style-of-speaker stance due to its absence in the corporate messages examined. The research corpus, encompassing approximately 2.5 million words from 16 companies across various industries,¹⁷ provides a robust foundation for this analysis. By employing Biber's (Biber, 2006; Biber & Finegan, 1989) methodological framework, stance markers were systematically identified, with a specific focus on grammatical stance constructions and the exclusion of lexically based markers owing to their inherent identification challenges.

This analysis unveiled distinct patterns of stance expression between annual reports and CSR narratives, which reflect divergent approaches to constructing corporate identity through discourse. Annual reports predominantly portrayed companies as unbiased, rational decision-makers, sparingly utilizing attitudinal stance. In contrast, CSR documents frequently adopted a tone that emphasized commitment, honesty, and care, signaling a more engaged and responsible corporate citizenry. This dichotomy reveals a strategic differentiation in corporate discourse, with annual reports targeting shareholders and investors, and CSRs appealing to a wider, more diverse audience with a pronounced focus on social and environmental accountability.

Fuoli's (2018) findings illuminated the ways in which companies leverage discourse to shape their identity and engage with distinct stakeholder groups. The differential use of stance expressions in corporate communications not only reflects

¹⁷ It covers four industries: financial services, oil and gas, pharmaceuticals, and food processing.

strategic intent but also demonstrates the dynamic nature of corporate identity construction through discourse. This corpus-based analysis offers valuable insights into the rhetorical strategies employed by companies to navigate the complexities of stakeholder engagement and identity management in the contemporary business landscape.

4.3.4. CDA in Exploring Corporate Identity

Koller (2009) posited that branding is a critical determinant of corporate success and delves into the analysis of how companies articulate their identities through mission statements, comparing two exemplars: IBM, from the top 50 of the Fortune list, and TPG, ranked in the bottom 50. The study meticulously examines the linguistic strategies employed by these companies, particularly the use of adjectives, including their superlative and comparative forms, and relational processes as outlined by Halliday & Matthiessen (2004). Both IBM and TPG are noted for their prolific use of positive adjectives, such as “professional,” “smart,” and “crystal clear,” to describe corporate attributes. However, IBM distinguishes its narrative by initially employing negative adjectives like “uncertain” and “dysfunctional” to set up a contrast with a subsequently positive portrayal of the present, thereby creating a discourse of transformation and progress (p. 274).

Further, Koller (2009) observed a difference in how these companies verbalize their characteristics; IBM tends to use a series of adjectives (“grim, conflicted, or hesitant” p. 274), creating a more nuanced and possibly ambivalent image, whereas TPG adopts a relational stance, asserting itself as “the industry benchmark (p. 275),” which directly positions the company as a leader.

The study also explores the concept of agency in corporate discourse, including the use of personal pronouns and the categorization of actors into individual and collectivized forms (Van Leeuwen, 1996). IBM’s occasional use of first-person singular pronouns (“I must tell you, this process has been very meaningful to me”, p. 275) associated with verbal and mental process introduces a personalized,

conversational tone to its discourse, inviting reader engagement. In contrast, TPG predominantly utilizes the first-person plural “we,” fostering a collective identity.

Koller further notes the absence of modal expressions of certainty, whereas deontic modality, expressing necessity or obligation (“we needed to affirm”), prevails. This indicates a directive or committed stance towards future actions or beliefs. The analysis extends to the use of tense, where IBM’s varied tense usage contributes to a dynamic, evolving narrative, in contrast to TPG’s more static depiction through the predominant use of the simple present tense. According to Koller (2009), IBM’s discourse, which portrays companies as living organisms with personal interactions, reinforces their position in the late capitalism social structure.

In the discourse of corporate communication, the strategic deployment of corporate names and the use of first-person plural pronouns to represent the company collectively serve as nuanced forms of impersonalization. Koller (2009) posited that such linguistic choices, while ostensibly promoting a unified corporate identity, may introduce a level of referential ambiguity that abstracts individual accountability. This phenomenon is further explored by Merkl-Davies and Koller (2012) through an analysis of the chairman’s statement from Meggitt,¹⁸ a defense company, which provided fertile ground for examining the dynamics of impersonalization and its role in the orchestration of impression management¹⁹ within corporate discourse.

¹⁸ Merkl-Davies and Koller (2012) used the chairman’s statement when there are no controversial events or a legitimacy threat because they believe that corporate discourse always includes the company’s ideological perspectives, and they attempt to expose them.

¹⁹ The concept of “impression management” originated in social psychology (Goffman 1959) and is an interpersonal phenomenon between speakers and audiences. Previous research on corporate impression management has primarily examined messages when they are involved in contentious issues or legitimacy-threatening events such as deteriorating financial conditions (Amernic & Craig, 2000), scandals (Craig & Amernic, 2004), or corporate transformations (Amernic, Craig, & Tourish, 2007). This is due to the need for the corporation and its stakeholders to share a knowledge of the company’s values and the nature of change.

Impersonalization, as identified in their analysis, manifests through several linguistic strategies that effectively diminish the specificity of agency, thereby offering a layer of obfuscation. These strategies include referential vagueness, as seen in expressions like “our people are [part] of our success”, which broadens the identity of contributors to corporate achievements; passivization, exemplified by “products are being integrated”, which removes the active agent; and the use of grammatical and conceptual metaphors, such as “dividend payments” and “strong military markets underline”, which further abstract the discourse (Merkel-Davies and Koller, 2012, p. 182; Marín-Arrese, 2002).

The nuanced evaluation of corporate entities, actions, and events emerges as a critical component in shaping stakeholder perceptions, wherein subjective judgments are conveyed through both explicit and implicit means. Merkel-Davies and Koller (2012, p. 184) delineate this evaluative spectrum through illustrative examples:

- a. consistently good financial performance (explicitly positive)
- b. economic uncertainty exacerbated by the situation in the Middle East (explicitly negative)
- c. operating profit...fell by just seven percent (implicitly positive)
- d. to question decisions and policies (implicitly negative)

In the realm of referential vagueness, the deployment of the first-person plural pronoun serves a dual purpose: it encompasses both the corporate entity and its individual employees. This linguistic strategy may be indicative of a broader trend within late capitalism, in which the interests of shareholders, including those of employee shareholders, are prioritized. Strategically, companies employ passivization to obfuscate agency, using the active voice to put the focus on positive strategic endeavors and achievements, while resorting to the passive voice when addressing

less favorable financial outcomes. This selective voice usage facilitates a narrative that accentuates success and minimizes the emphasis on setbacks.

Furthermore, grammatical metaphors play a pivotal role in portraying objective and tangible events over subjective interpretations or abstract concepts. For example, the phrase “2002’s results show Meggitt’s business strategy continuing to deliver shareholder value” (p. 185) illustrates this point by presenting concrete achievements in a matter-of-fact manner. The analysis of evaluative language within corporate discourse uncovers a strategic use of negative evaluations, which are predominantly applied to external circumstances beyond the company’s control, thereby maintaining a positive internal image. Conversely, the company, its operational integrity, and its workforce are consistently cast in a positive light, underscoring a deliberate effort to construct a favorable corporate identity amidst varying external challenges.²⁰

4.4. Summary and Research Gap

Corporate discourse plays an important role in corporate management because what companies do is not transparent, there is a power gap between senders and receivers, and the audience must understand the companies based on the information provided. However, this does not imply that businesses are sending out messages without thinking, as previous research has shown that they are using this as an opportunity to express their position while remaining aware of their audience. Companies deliver information strategically based on the fact that each company includes unique content and positions itself differently depending on the medium and target audience. Thus, such discursive performance of a company is frequently discussed in relation to its good or bad performance and external reputation.

²⁰ It has been noted that companies are generally described positively (Bhatia, 2010).

On the other hand, there is little research on the precise public influence on corporate discourse while accounting for related stakeholders and a vague society, as seen in corporate social responsibility. Based primarily on the companies' intentions, what elements to include in the discourse, how they construct their identities, and how their values are embedded have been considered, but unrelated listeners/readers have not received much attention, even though anyone can access their information.

For companies attempting to make a profit, it can also be critical to be accepted by everyone, including an unrelated or broad audience, but no research has been conducted to examine the impact of such publicness on discursive construction other than the research that argued companies primarily note their positive aspects. Furthermore, some research suggests that in public discourse, which cannot provide a complete picture of the audience, speakers construct their message by assuming a default (imagined, stereotyped) audience, but it is unclear how this audience can be defined and changed over time.

Thus, this dissertation conducts research to determine the relationship between data characteristics and the background or contexts surrounding companies. The details of its data and background will be presented in Chapter 5. This dissertation attempts to expose public influence on message constructions by using data collected consistently over the last two decades, during which time the audience has grown dramatically.

In terms of methodology, this dissertation will address the shortcomings of the traditional CDA approach, which focuses on each level, including words, components, and specific expressions in which companies' beliefs and values are embedded. Instead, in this dissertation, data-driven analysis will be used to annotate language functions across the entire discourse using SFG. The changes observed over time will reveal the relationship between the indeterminacy of recent audiences and text construction, and CDA's viewpoints will be applied to reexamine the ideology embedded in the discourses.

Chapter 5 Data and Corporate Background

5.1. Data

This dissertation examines corporate narratives, presented through corporate profiles, to determine public influence on discursive construction. Corporate profiles are often included in annual reports and websites.²¹ Figure 5 depicts a corporate profile²² from World Fuel Services' annual report (2005). They include basic corporate information such as size/location, products/services, philosophy, and goals, as well as other types of corporate discourse discussed in previous chapters, such as mission statements, shareholder letters, and CSR reports. The reason for focusing on corporate profiles as a part of the annual report is that previous research has shown that each type of document, such as annual reports and CSR reports, has its own unique characteristics, such as focus on financial and environmental information, respectively. As a result, this dissertation chooses to use corporate profiles, which are more neutral. This dissertation also used similar statements as data, such as "mission statements," "vision statements," "about us," and "who we are," if annual reports included them in the introduction.

Figure 5

World Fuel Services' 2005 Annual Report, Cover and Second Page



²¹ See Costco's company profile on the website (<https://investor.costco.com/company-profile/default.aspx>) (retrieved on 08/02/2024).

²² World Fuel Services calls it a *corporate overview*, not *corporate profile*.

The data consisted of corporate profiles obtained from 23 companies' annual reports over three years (1998, 2005, and 2021). All of the companies used as data are listed in the Fortune 500. Annual reports were obtained from Mergent Online.²³ Table 8 shows the data set for this dissertation—the “Data ID” column contains acronyms for each company created by the author; “Years” refers to the years from which the corporate profiles were taken. Each year’s characteristics are shown; for example, in 1998, companies mostly communicated through printed annual reports; in 2005, the companies began providing their information online; and, finally, since 2021, they have employed various media to communicate their messages, not only via their websites, but also through other types of media, such as social media. The number of media users in the world has increased from about 147 million in 1998 and 1,018 million in 2005 to 5,252 million in 2021, according to Internet World Stats.²⁴

Table 8

Data Set of This Dissertation

Company Name	Data ID	Year
Charter Communications Inc.	CCM	1999, 2005, 2021
New York Life Insurance Company	NLC	1998, 2005, 2021
Merck & Co., Inc.	MC	1998, 2005, 2021
Allstate Insurance Company	AS	1998, 2005, 2021
American Express	AE	1998, 2005
Pfizer Inc.	PZ	1998, 2005
American International Group, Inc.	AIG	1998, 2005
World Fuel Services ²	WFS	1998, 2005, 2021

²³ Mergent, Inc. has archived and provided business and financial information to investors for over 100 years (<https://www.mergentonline.com/login.php>).

²⁴ Based on the information retrieved from the World Internet Users Statistics and 2023 World Population Stats (internetworldstats.com).

Oracle	OC	1998, 2021
Tech Data Corp.	TD	1998, 2005, 2021
Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company	MM	1998, 2005, 2021
Dow	DC	1998, 2005, 2021
Best Buy	BB	1998, 2004, 2021
The Coca-Cola Company	CC	1998, 2005, 2021
Cardinal Health	CH	1998, 2005, 2021
Cigna	CN	1998, 2005, 2021
Costco Wholesale Corporation	CS	1998, 2005
CVS Pharmacy	CVS	2005, 2021
Chevron Corporation	CV	1998, 2005, 2021
Ford Motor Company	FM	1998, 2005
Mckesson Corporation	MK	1998, 2021
United Health Group	UHG	1998, 2005, 2021
Valero	VEC	1998, 2021

Note. Some companies do not have annual reports available, or have annual reports but no company profile description, resulting in some variation in the year of composition. This dissertation attempts to compensate for this by increasing the number of companies analyzed.

The corporate profiles in annual reports were manually extracted and transcribed into documents organized by company and year. All the documents were entered into the qualitative software MAXQDA,²⁵ and the coding process was carried out based on the purpose of the analysis.

²⁵ MAXQDA is a software for qualitative and mixed method data analysis. The software enables the development of custom codes or those based on previous studies and facilitates document annotation at any desired unit. Additionally, it simplifies the process of visualizing the relationships between documents and codes, as well as

5.2. History of Company Relations with the Outside World

Since this dissertation examines corporate profiles in annual reports over the last two decades, it is critical to understand the relationship between companies and the outside world surrounding them, as the message is the result of companies selecting language based on context, including social circumstances and expectations.

Since the inception of the *Fortune* magazine rankings in 1955, companies have become more concerned about their reputations. In addition to the Fortune 500, which served as the benchmark for data collection in this dissertation, the content of other rankings has changed to meet the needs of the times. Fombrun (1998) presented the ranking of companies that have been identified so far, as well as their contents and methodology for evaluating them. The Fortune 500 focuses on total avenues, but the “Most Admired Corporation,” announced by the same *Fortune* magazine in 1983, ranks the ten best companies based on eight criteria: quality of management; quality of products or services; innovativeness; long-term investment value; financial soundness; ability to attract, develop, and keep talented people; responsibility to the community and the environment; and wise use of corporate assets. These are evaluated by over 10,000 senior executives, outside directors, and financial analysts.

Furthermore, various rankings have emerged in line with the corporate image of the times (Fombrun, 1998), such as *Business Ethics*’ “America’s 100 Best Corporate Citizens” in 1996, where social responsibility is a key evaluation criterion; *Working Mother Magazine*’s “The 100 Best Companies for Working Women” in 1993, focusing on advancement opportunities and salaries for working mothers; *Fortune*’s “The Best Companies to Work for in America” (Levering & Moskowitz, 1998); “The Best Companies for Minorities” (Graham, 1993); “The Best Companies for Women” (Zeitz & Dusky, 1988), and “The 100 Best Companies for Gay Men and Lesbians” (Mickens, 1994).

identifying inter-code relationships.

The narratives that companies share with the world have also shifted. The message of corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be seen in the title of the report discussing it. That concept emerged in the 1950s in response to increased stakeholder concern about societal and environmental challenges and has grown in importance in scientific and business fields since 1960. Since the mid-1970s, much research has focused on CSR reports and discussed the relationship between social disclosures and social/economic performance, as well as firm characteristic and external influences (Neu et al., 1998). Carroll (1979) proposed that the concept of CSR includes four responsibilities: economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, and philanthropic responsibility. Barić (2017) argued that companies should consider all internal and external stakeholder expectations when developing their CSR strategy. Sun et al. (2010) argued that the concept of corporate social responsibility cannot be explained without taking the company's stakeholders into account.

Corporate citizenship is a term that has become increasingly popular in management literature over the last two decades to describe business's social role. CEOs from 34 of the world's largest multinational companies issued a joint statement at the World Economic Forum in New York in 2002, titled "Global Corporate Citizenship: The Leadership Challenge for CEOs and Boards." In 2006, major global companies such as Citigroup and Microsoft published "citizenship reports" and "global citizenship reports" alongside their annual financial reports, indicating that the term had spread throughout the business world. Furthermore, *Business Ethics*, the influential American magazine mentioned earlier, published a list of the "100 Best Corporate Citizens." This corporate citizenship, which is frequently accompanied by adjectives such as "good corporate citizenship" or "global citizenship," means that the company should participate in the local community in order to be a good neighbor—i.e. to foster positive relationships between the company and its stakeholders (Altman & Vidaver-Cohen, 2000; Crane et al., 2008; Waddell, 2000). According to Crane et al. (2008), citizenship serves as a metaphor for shifting from the traditional corporate

image of impersonal, bureaucratic, inhumane power players to that of the good guy who cares about their neighbors and works hard for them. It is language that values mutual connection and reliance, as well as the rights and responsibilities of the entire community (Waddell 2000). However, there is no clear definition of CSR or corporate citizenship, and the concept is dynamic and can change over time (Carroll, 1979; Crane et al., 2008).

Changes in corporate governance reflect the trend of placing a greater emphasis on stakeholder connections. Fenwick et al. (2019) defined traditional companies as shareholder-oriented (i.e., economic, legal, and moral owners of a company) with a clear line between the companies and the outside world, power-centered, and hierarchically structured. Their management methods are highly bureaucratic, with the goal of reducing transaction costs and information asymmetries while providing relatively stable products and services to stable markets. Fenwick et al. (2019) asserted that this approach works when large companies support the state of the economy; however, as consumer demand changes rapidly with the digital transformation, a different type of business model is required for survival. In fact, as information technology advances, the distinction between markets and businesses is blurring, and successful companies such as Amazon, Facebook, and Netflix are facilitating peer-to-peer transactions between service providers, creators, producers, and consumers. Fenwick et al. (2019) contended that the platform age has arrived, necessitating flat, open, and inclusive platform governance.

The preceding demonstrates that the content, terminology, and management design of corporate rankings are evolving to place a greater emphasis on the external world, such as stakeholder, community, and social relationships.

5.3. Change in Corporate Communication

The discussion on stakeholder engagement, as outlined in Section 5.2, ties into the evolving landscape of corporate communication. The forces of globalization have pushed the imperative need for organizations to broaden their communicative

outreach, catering to a diverse array of communities across local, national, and international spectrums. This shift is further compounded by rapid advancements in information technology, which render traditional communication channels increasingly outmoded.

Birth et al. (2008) reported a paradigm change from the previously dominant one-to-many broadcasting model, which included websites, reports, advertising, and news media, to a more interactive, platform-based communication. This transition, distinct from the initial internet boom marked by the adoption of webpages by pioneers like Amazon and eBay in 1995 and the dot.com surge in 2001 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), fosters a participatory culture. Web 2.0²⁶ technologies have promoted this shift towards bidirectional or direct communication, empowering consumers, who were once passive receivers of information, to actively create and disseminate content, thereby influencing corporate reputations significantly, as noted by Sims (2004) and Barić (2017). This democratization of information creation has not only reshaped consumer dynamics but also opened avenues for collaborative CSR initiatives between companies and stakeholders (Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

Despite the growing predilection for social media and online platforms for efficient information dissemination, as shown by Barić (2017) and Lei et al. (2019), Morsing and Schultz (2006) pointed out the enduring credibility of traditional reports and web-based communications that are characterized by their indirect, subtle, and restrained nature. Nevertheless, in an era where stakeholder expectations are rapidly evolving and organizational control over information diminishes (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), it becomes crucial for businesses to actively engage with their stakeholders and

²⁶ The term *Web 2.0* was coined in 2004 to describe a new situation in which all users, rather than only some individuals, could create, publish, or modify content and applications. Web 1.0 offered only applications such as personal web pages and *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, whereas Web 2.0 allowed anyone to create blogs, wikis, and collaborative projects (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), Web 2.0 serves as the platform for the evolution of social media, and user generated content (UGC) refers to the sum of all ways in which people use social media.

make sound content decisions to navigate this complex communication environment effectively.

5.4. Summary

This chapter delves into the data and corporate background essential for understanding the evolution and impact of corporate discourse over recent decades, particularly through corporate profiles in annual reports. The analysis spans corporate profiles from 23 Fortune 500 companies across three pivotal years (1998, 2005, and 2021) to discern public influence on discursive construction. These profiles, extracted from Mergent Online, embody a blend of corporate essentials such as philosophy, goals, and offered services/products, reflecting a shift towards a more balanced and neutral information presentation over time.

The rationale behind these selecting corporate profiles lies in their consistency and neutrality compared to other corporate disclosures such as annual reports and CSR reports, which tend to focus more narrowly on financial or environmental aspects. This selection aims to provide a comprehensive overview of corporate messaging and its evolution in response to societal and technological changes.

The historical context outlines the transformation in the relationship between companies and the external world, illustrating the increasing importance of corporate reputation as influenced by various rankings and criteria over the years. From economic responsibility to broader concepts such as CSR and corporate citizenship, the narrative reflects a shift towards emphasizing stakeholder relationships and societal contributions.

Moreover, the chapter addresses changes in corporate communication strategies amidst globalization and technological advancements. The transition from traditional, one-to-many communication forms to interactive, platform-based engagements results in a need for companies to adapt to the digital era's demands. This shift not only facilitates more direct and two-way communication with

stakeholders but also necessitates a more strategic and responsive approach to corporate messaging to maintain credibility and trust.

Through a detailed examination of corporate profiles and the broader historical and communicative context, this chapter elucidates the dynamic interplay between corporate discourse and societal expectations. It shows the evolving nature of corporate communication in response to external pressures and the growing importance of stakeholder engagement in shaping corporate narratives. This analysis sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how public influence has molded the construction and presentation of corporate identities over the last two decades, providing insights into the strategic considerations behind corporate discourse in the modern business landscape.

Chapter 6 Quantitative Analysis of Corporate Profiles

6.1. Introduction

This research focuses on the narrative evolution of corporate profiles to study how increased publicness has influenced public discourse. In this chapter, before delving into how companies perceive their surroundings and construct their discourse (ideational), as well as how they establish their relationship with potential audiences through their discourse (interpersonal), a more objective analysis of corporate profiles will be conducted using topic modeling, sentiment analysis, and readability. This chapter uses a quantitative method for topic modeling, specifically latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA), to objectively assess conversation in terms of topics, setting, and emotion. This helps to address the shortage of traditional manual data gathering and processing methods, which lack analytical precision and accuracy (Jafery et al., 2022). This approach has received much interest in textual analyses for topic extraction and topic modeling, with LDA analysis being a very popular tool for semantic exploration and subject inference (Jafery et al., 2022). Topic modelling is based on the notion that text typically contains some latent subjects. It is a machine learning technique that involves scanning a series of documents, identifying words and patterns, and automatically clustering word groups that best represent the information in the collection (Sofian et al., 2022). It serves as an effective text mining technique for discovering hidden patterns, i.e., topics, and annotating documents based on those subjects, resulting in text organizing, searching, and summarization (Sofian et al., 2022).

Sentiment analysis, like topic modeling, is a natural language processing (NLP) technique for identifying, extracting, and analyzing subjective information (Chu et al., 2022). It gives a basic concept of positive, natural, and negative sentiment in texts at each level of document, sentence, and aspect (Devika et al., 2016; Ding et al., 2008; Vinodhini & Chandrasekaran, 2012). This method can be used based on the premise that opinions are the primary activity of all humans and have an impact on

their behaviors (Liu, 2010; Ozyurt & Akcayol, 2021). There are two Python libraries for sentiment analysis: TextBlob and VADER. In addition to sentiment analysis, TextBlob can be used for part-of-speech tagging, noun phrase extraction, classification, and translation. Sentiment analysis identifies two categories of user emotions: polarity and subjectivity. Polarity ranges from negative to positive within the range $[-1.0, 1.0]$, while subjectivity ranges between $[0.0, 1.0]$, indicating whether it is objective or subjective (Jafery et al., 2022). VADER exhibits emotion polarity (positive/negative), neutrality, and intensity. This method refers to a dictionary of terms connected with a sentiment score, and the results are based on the sum of intensity of each word in the text (Sofian et al., 2022).

Readability was originally used to determine the grade level of a textbook, and this dissertation employs several readability metrics, including Fog Index, Flesch Reading-Ease, Flesch Grade-Level, and the Dale-Chall Readability Score. The Fog Index was developed in the 1950s to calculate grade school reading material, and the level can be computed using the average amount of words per sentence and the fraction of complex words. Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch Grade Level are based on average sentence length and syllable count. The Dale-Chall Readability Score is calculated using the average complicated words and average words per sentence (Loughran & McDonald, 2020; Zurel, 2014). Many studies have been conducted to examine the readability of corporate discourse, particularly annual, financial, and accounting reports, as well as the relationship with company reputation (Loughran & McDonald, 2020). According to Baxamusa et al. (2018), the market perceives the company as less credible when it uses longer phrases or a higher proportion of words with more than two syllables. Dyer et al. (2017) also noted a reduction in annual report readability from 1996 to 2013, attributed to greater Fog Index values and longer duration. Furthermore, by using previously mentioned LDA to find subjects in the text, they discover that three specific topics ‘internal controls,’ ‘fair value,’ and ‘risk factor disclosure’ are associated with increased length and decreased readability.

First, this chapter employs a computerized method known as LDA to do topic modeling, and based on the findings, it investigates what feelings companies aim to portray toward each topic. It helps disclose companies core attitudes toward the issues. In terms of topic modeling, this study looks at how the proportion of each topic has changed across three years (1998, 2005, and 2021). In addition, differences and similarities across firms will be examined based on the findings of how many of each issue companies include in their communications. These findings are associated with different sorts of industries, and the proportion of topic content in each is taken into account.

Unlike modality or evaluation analysis, which relies on markers like modal expressions or stance, this chapter explores the emotions of companies by looking at words and their relationship to sentences or the full document using sentiment analysis. This phase leads to an understanding of how companies' postures change throughout time.

What topics companies cover (LDA) and how they express their ideas (sentiment analysis) may become the norm in how businesses think about society or their target audience, demonstrating that they are aiming to align with them. This alignment can be noticed in the degree of readability, therefore this chapter concludes by examining the readability of each year's corporate profiles.

6.2. Methodology

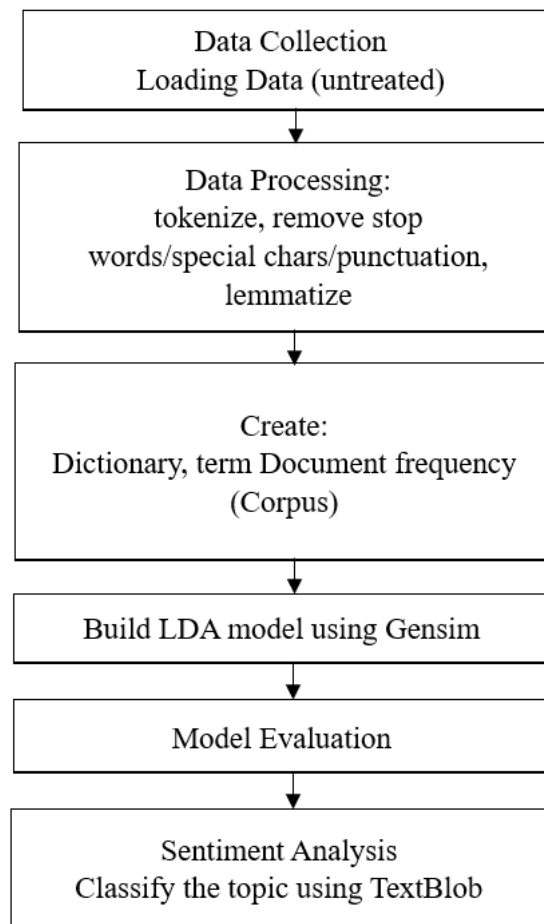
6.2.1. Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)

First, multiple stages are required to undertake topic modeling using LDA, including data collection, processing, and dictionary creation, as illustrated in Figure 6. The data for this study was compiled from a directory titled "Corporate Profiles," which includes 75 text files organized by each company's fiscal year, containing collected corporate profiles. Each file represents a corporate profile, identified by specific attributes such as the company name and the year of publication. The files were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives and were retrieved

using the Python library glob to match the pattern in file names (e.g., “Corporate-profiles-by-AE-in-1998”).

Figure 6

Process of LDA’s Topic Modelling and Sentiment Analysis



Note. This figure was created based on Jafery et al. (2022).

The initial processing of the data involved reading each text file and extracting meaningful information. This was accomplished by splitting the file names to identify and separate the source, company, and year of each corporate profile. The content of each file was then read, with each line representing a sentence in the corporate profile.

These sentences were stored in a pandas DataFrame alongside their corresponding file attributes, creating a structured form of the raw text data.

Further processing included the generation of unigrams (single words), skippy 2-grams, and skippy 3-grams from the sentences. This was achieved by tokenizing the text into words, normalizing the text to lowercase, and removing punctuation and stopwords. Stopwords included determiners, pronouns, prepositions, connectives, and company names,²⁷ among others, to ensure that only meaningful words were considered for analysis. Custom Python functions were utilized for generating the skippy n-grams, allowing for the capture of non-adjacent word pairs and triples within a specified maximum distance, enhancing the linguistic analysis by incorporating more contextual information. Figure 7 depicts a DataFrame containing all processed information.²⁸

Figure 7

DataFrame of The Data Set in This Study

	sentence	text		source	company	year	1gram	skippy2gram	skippy3gram
0	AMERICAN EXPRESS COMPANY	1	Corporate profiles	AE	1998		[company]	[company, company]	[company, company, company]
1	American Express Company is a global travel, f...	1	Corporate profiles	AE	1998		[company, global, travel, financial, network, ...]	[company global, company ... travel, company ... f...]	[company global travel, company global ... finan...]
2	Founded in 1850, the Company serves individual...	1	Corporate profiles	AE	1998		[founded, 1850, company, serves, individuals, ...]	[founded 1850, founded ... company, founded ... se...]	[founded 1850 company, founded 1850 ... serves, ...]
3	It also offers financial planning, brokerage s...	1	Corporate profiles	AE	1998		[also, offers, financial, planning, brokerage...]	[also offers, also ... financial, also ... plannin...]	[also offers financial, also offers ... planning...]
4	Through its family of Corporate Card services...	1	Corporate profiles	AE	1998		[through, family, corporate, card, services, h...]	[through family, through ... corporate, through ...]	[through family corporate, through family ... ca...]
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
0	Our Mission	72	Corporate profiles	WFS2	2021		[mission]	[mission, mission]	[mission, mission, mission]
1	Create value for our business partners by deli...	72	Corporate profiles	WFS2	2021		[create, value, business, partners, delivering...]	[create value, create ... business, create ... par...]	[create value business, create value ... partner...]

523 rows x 9 columns

The next step involved creating a document-term matrix to represent the frequency of terms (unigrams, skippy 2-grams, and skippy 3-grams) across all documents. This was achieved using the Dictionary class from the gensim.corpora

²⁷ Company names are removed, since they function similarly to the pronoun “we” as self-reference and are unrelated to the content.

²⁸ Due to the difficulty in viewing Figure 7, please refer to the following link for detailed information: https://github.com/Mananorth/Dissertation_ManaKitazawa.

module. The dictionary was filtered to exclude terms that appeared in less than 2 documents or in more than 3% of all documents, addressing both rare and overly common terms that might not contribute meaningful information for topic modeling.

Finally, the cleaned and processed terms were converted into a corpus, a collection of bag-of-words representations of the documents, which served as input for LDA modeling to identify latent topics within the corporate profiles.

6.2.2. Sentiment Analysis

Following the identification of these topics, sentiment analysis was conducted to assess the sentiment polarity and subjectivity associated with each topic, involving a comprehensive process.

The initial phase was dedicated to preparing for sentiment analysis. The TextBlob library, a Python tool designed for processing textual data, was utilized, facilitating the measurement of polarity and subjectivity. Polarity serves to capture the emotional tone of the text, ranging from -1 for highly negative sentiments to +1 for highly positive sentiments, while subjectivity measures the extent to which a statement reflects opinion versus fact on a scale from 0 to 1.

Documents corresponding to each of the 10 topics unearthed by the LDA model were then identified. This was achieved by examining the topic distribution generated by the LDA model, focusing on documents that significantly contributed to each topic, ensuring a topic-specific document analysis.

The sentiment analysis phase involved analyzing the textual content of documents associated with each topic. By applying TextBlob, sentiment polarity and subjectivity for each document were calculated, thus gauging the emotional tone and subjectivity/objectivity of the text.

To synthesize the findings, average polarity and subjectivity scores for all documents pertaining to a specific topic were calculated. This aggregation provided an overarching view of the sentiment and the degree of subjectivity or objectivity characterizing the discourse surrounding each topic.

Furthermore, this chapter extends the sentiment analysis to encompass the entirety of three text files, each representing different years (1998, 2005, and 2021), to trace the evolution of corporate discourse sentiment over time. The `SentimentIntensityAnalyzer` from the NLTK's sentiment module was employed for this analysis. This tool assesses text polarity, yielding scores for negative, neutral, and positive sentiments, alongside a composite score that consolidates these sentiments into a single metric. The analysis was meticulously carried out for text data from the years 1998, 2005, and 2021.

To achieve a more detailed understanding of sentiment variations, sentence-level sentiment analysis was conducted. This entailed segmenting each document into individual sentences and performing sentiment analysis on each. The aggregated results from this sentence-level analysis offered insights into the sentiment dynamics within each document, enhancing comprehension of sentiment variations at a granular level.

6.2.3. Readability Assessment

To explore the readability of corporate profiles over time, a systematic approach was undertaken to evaluate the clarity and complexity of documents from three distinct years: 1998, 2005, and 2021. This investigation aimed to track changes in the way corporate communications are presented, focusing on their textual readability. The process involved several key steps to ensure a thorough analysis.

First, the `textstat` library, a Python package designed for readability assessments, was chosen for its comprehensive set of functions capable of calculating various readability scores. `Textstat`'s user-friendly interface allows for an efficient evaluation of text through well-established metrics, making it an ideal tool for this analysis.

To prepare the documents for analysis, a Python script was developed specifically for reading the contents of each text file. This script utilized the open method with UTF-8 encoding, guaranteeing an accurate representation of the text.

The contents of each file were then stored in string variables, setting the stage for the subsequent readability assessment.

The core of the analysis involved calculating readability scores for each document using three metrics from the textstat library. The Flesch Reading Ease score was first applied, which rates the text's ease of reading based on sentence length and syllable count per word. A higher score on this metric signifies a text that is easier to read, with the scale typically ranging from 0 to 100. Next, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level was used to estimate the U.S. school grade level required for understanding the text, where a lower grade suggests simpler text. Lastly, the Dale-Chall Readability Score was calculated, which determines readability by analyzing sentence complexity and the familiarity of words against a list known to fourth-grade students, with lower scores indicating texts that are easier to comprehend.

Through these steps, the methodology provided a nuanced understanding of how the readability of corporate profiles has evolved, reflecting on the progression of textual clarity and complexity within corporate communications over the analyzed years.

6.3. Results

6.3.1. Topic Modelling Based on LDA

First, this chapter explores the types of topics included in corporate profiles using topic modeling. To determine the ideal number of topics for the LDA model, a coherence score analysis was performed, with a range of 5 to 15.²⁹ Figure 8 depicts the results, and the number of themes chosen for this chapter is ten due to their relatively high coherence score and ease of qualitative analysis.

²⁹ Python script: https://github.com/Mana-north/Dissertation_ManaKitazawa

Figure 8

Coherence Scores of the Number of Topics from 5 to 15

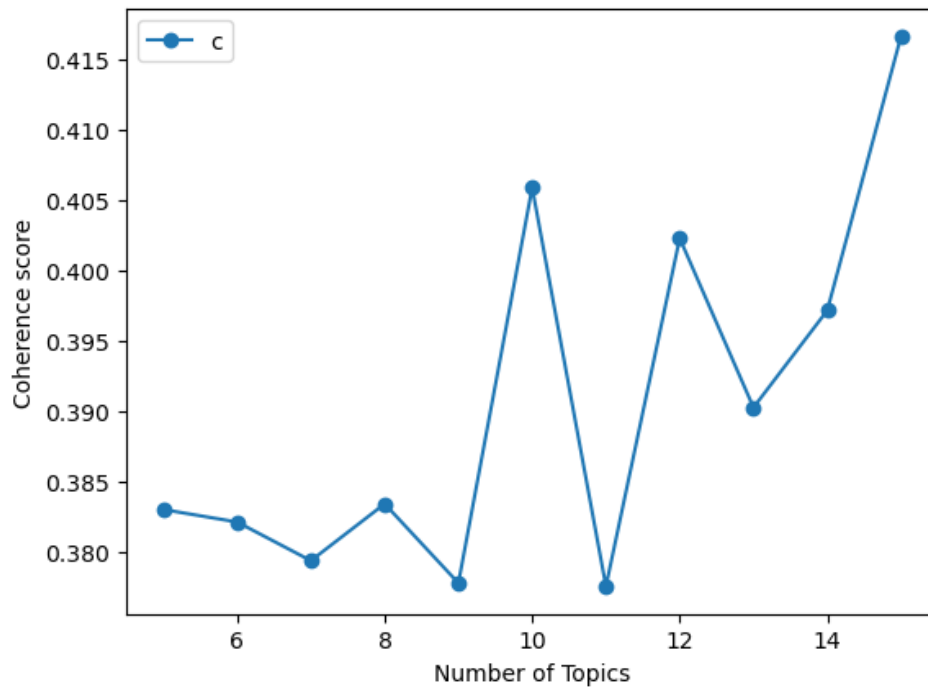


Figure 9 was obtained as a result of LDA with a number of topics set to 10. In this process, coherence score is 0.5960420123708697.³⁰ Figure 10 displays 15 typical example terms for every topic.³¹

³⁰ The greater the coherence score, the better the model is thought to be (Boussaadi et al., 2000). This score is higher than the one obtained in Figure 8; thus, it was determined to be more accurate.

³¹ Although corporate names and various symbols have been eliminated as stop words, the phrases “best buy” in topic 3, “-” in topic 2, and several brackets in topics 2 and 10 remain. When unrelated phrases are discovered, the topic modelling process is repeated several times; however, noise persists and should be reduced in future investigations.

Figure 9

Top 10 Topics: 15 Key Terms in Corporate Profiles

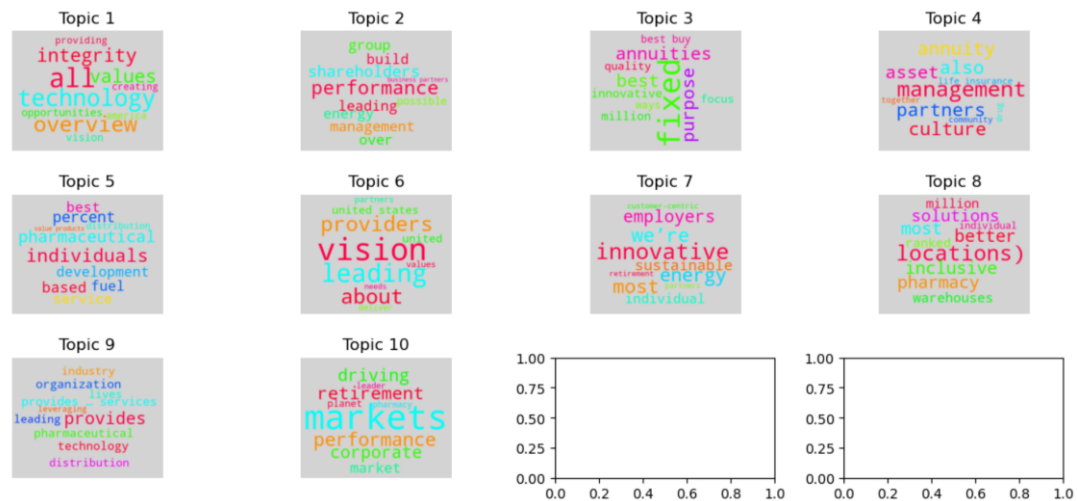
	topic 1	topic 2	topic 3	topic 4	topic 5	topic 6	topic 7	topic 8	topic 9	topic 10
0	all	performance	fixed	management	individuals	vision	innovative	locations)	provides	
1	technology	shareholders	annuities	also	pharmaceutical	leading	we're	most	provides ... services	markets
2	overview	management	best	partners	percent	providers	most	pharmacy	organization	performance
3	integrity	leading	purpose	culture	based	about	energy	better	technology	retirement
4	values	group	innovative	annuity	service	united states	employers	inclusive	pharmaceutical	corporate
5	opportunities	over	million	asset	best	united	sustainable	solutions	distribution	driving
6	vision	energy	focus	life insurance	development	partners	individual	warehouses	industry	market
7	providing	build	quality	community	fuel	values	customer-centric	million	leading	planet
8	america	possible	ways	drug	distribution	deliver	retirement	ranked	lives	pharmacy
9	creating	business partners	best buy	together	value products	needs	partners	individual	leveraging	leader
10	performance	-	overview	success	other	data	solutions	operates	superior	brands
11	personal	partners	mutual	deliver	system	community	energy ... world	investment	individuals	marine
12	maintain	future	premier	every	brands	network	share	fortune	competitive	fuel
13	leadership	innovative	four	largest	innovative	international	theme	vision	which	challenge
14	future	human	fixed ... products	mckesson's	provides	shareholder	strategies	serve	consumer	over

To effectively illustrate the thematic composition of the topics identified by the LDA model, WordCloud visualizations were employed as shown in Figure 10.³² These visualizations provide a visually engaging means to display the most prominent words within each topic, where the size of each word is proportional to its weight or frequency within the topic. This approach facilitates an intuitive understanding of the key themes and terms that characterize each topic.

³² Python script: https://github.com/Mana-north/Dissertation_ManaKitazawa

Figure 10

WordCloud Visualization of Ten Topics in Corporate Profiles



In Topic 6, for example, the term “vision” is relatively larger than any other term in any subject, and this topic, along with the second largest, “leading,” emphasizes the necessity of leadership with a vision for companies. In addition, “markets” in Topic 10 appears to be the largest, and it seems to be aware of the markets to which the companies belong. Topic 9’s components are small in comparison to those in other topics, but terms connected to providing services, such as “provide,” “distribution,” and “services,” can be perceived as prevalent. Topic 7 can highlight corporate responsibility by using phrases connected to the outer world (“sustainable,” “energy”) and the inside world (“employers”). Although word clouds display the major terms in each topic, they do not describe the relationship between the topics.

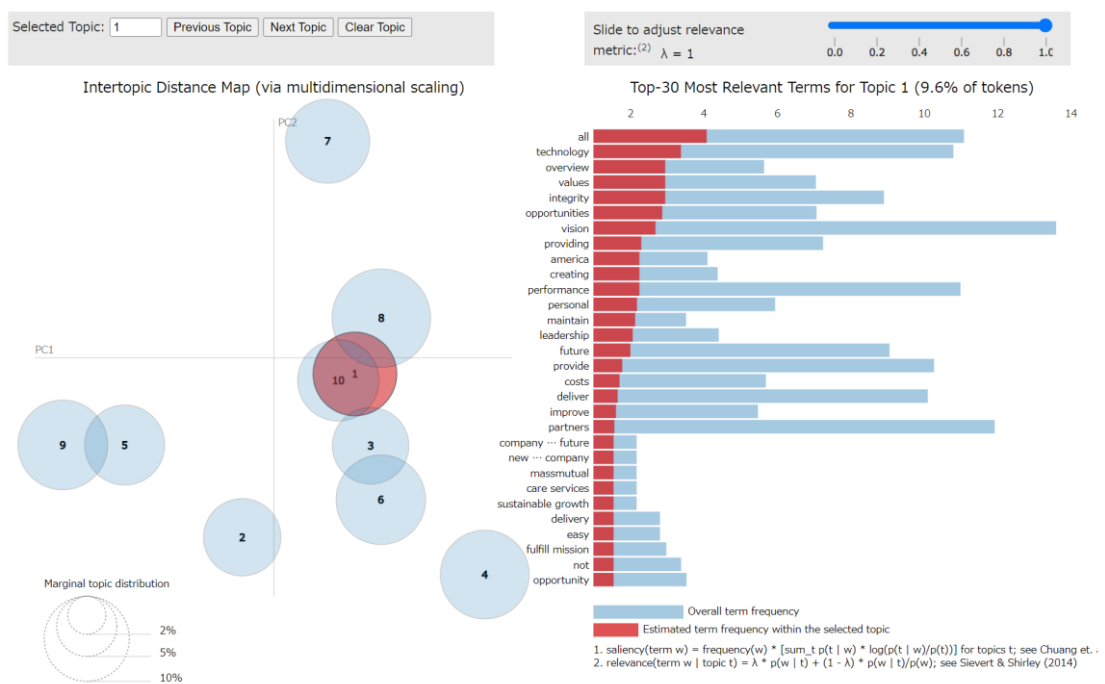
To further elucidate the structure and interrelationships between the topics derived from the LDA model, an interactive visualization was created using the pyLDAvis library.³³ PyLDAvis offers a sophisticated method for interpreting and exploring topics in a two-dimensional space, providing insights that surpass those

³³ Python script: https://github.com/Mana-north/Dissertation_ManaKitazawa

afforded by traditional hierarchical clustering visualizations. This interactive tool facilitates an intuitive understanding of the topics' sizes, the distribution of terms within topics, and the distance between them, representing topic similarity. Figure 11 depicts the Intertopic Distance Map, which consists of ten circles of topics and the top 30 most relevant terms for Topic 1.³⁴

Figure 11

Intertopic Distance and Top 30 Terms for Topic 1



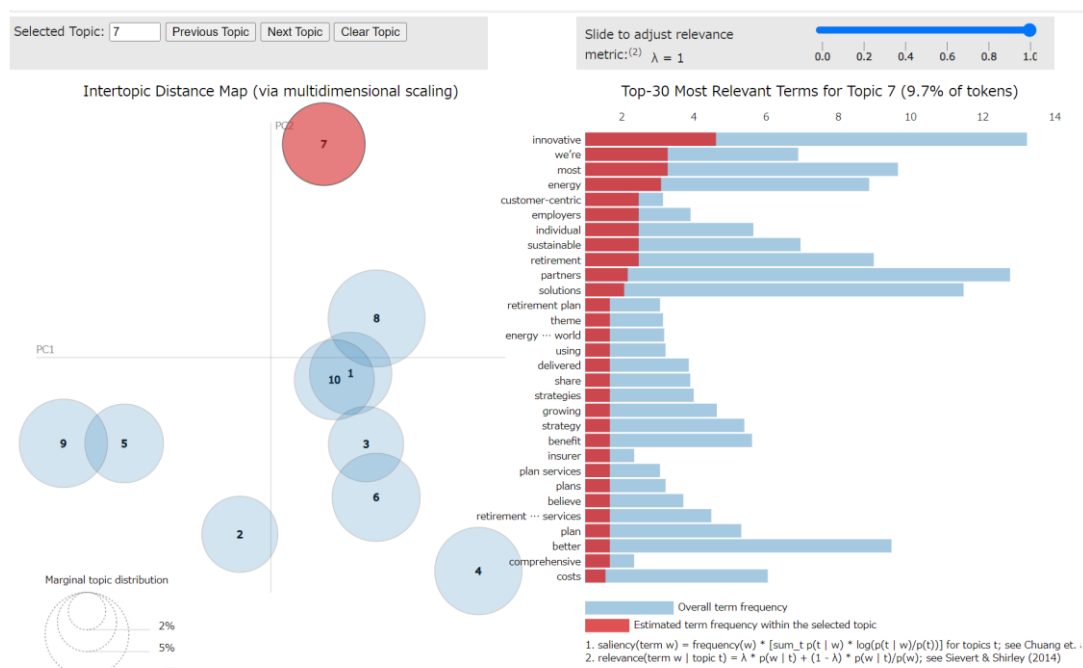
The Intertopic Distance Map shows that Topic 1 overlaps with Topic 10, and less with Topics 8 and 3. This similarity across topics implies that corporate profiles have consistent components throughout years or types of companies. Considering the information from Figure 9 and the connection of Topic 1 and Topic 3 with three topics, it can be inferred that these topics are likely to encapsulate fundamental characteristics such as the “values,” “vision,” and “purpose” that organizations aim to

³⁴ For topics not addressed in this section, the results can be viewed at the following link: https://github.com/Mana-north/Dissertation_ManaKitazawa

communicate through their corporate profiles. Figure 12 shows the findings related to Topic 7.

Figure 12

Intertopic Distance and Top 30 Terms for Topic 7



Topic 7 appears to have distinct qualities due to its distance from the others. Unlike Topics 1 and 3, which explicitly express their aim or vision, Topic 7 phrases such as “customer-centric” and “sustainable” are attitudes in and of themselves, with no mention of purpose or vision. Also, the terms “strategy/strategies” and “plan” appear to emphasize the importance of procedure rather than actual company successes.

Figure 13 displays the characteristics of Topic 9, which is positioned distantly from Topics 1 and 7, which have already been described. Among the most relevant terms, the years “1999” and “1998” appear. Also, as previously indicated in Figure 10, service-related phrases such as “provides,” “distribution,” and “offers” appear frequently. It is characteristic to include phrases referring to the quality of the

products (e.g., “superior” and “superior products.” Furthermore, the terms that characterize themselves as institutions “organization,” “corporations,” and “company” are marked.

Figure 13

Intertopic Distance and Top 30 Terms for Topic 9

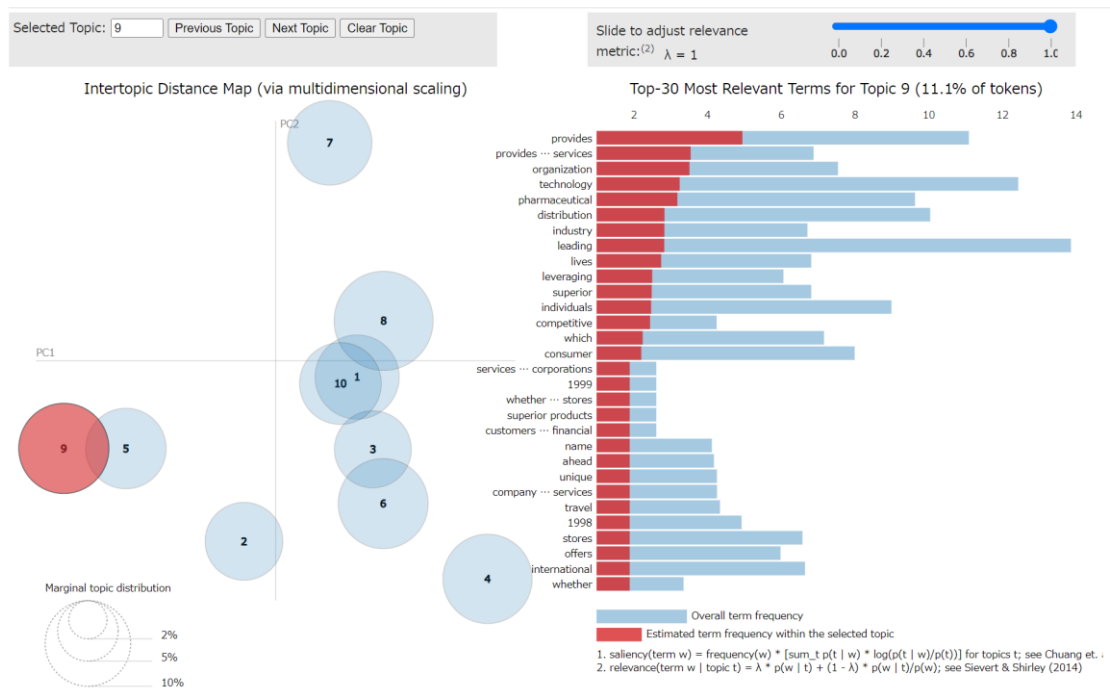


Table 9 shows that each subject was labeled “Theme” based on the findings from topic modeling using LDA. These themes indicate the type of information that companies provide in their corporate profiles, regardless of the year they publish (1998, 2005, or 2021).

Because company profiles are derived from annual reports, it is normal for them to include information about their financial achievements (“financial services”) or current market position (“strategic market positioning” and “consumer service”). Actually, under the heading ‘financial services,’ the company announces its revenue for the year. Furthermore, they introduce themselves as a “global leader” and their

coverage area by referring to the locations where their companies operate. As the Intertopic Distance Map (Figure 11-13) indicates, “strategic market positioning” is close to the theme “leadership and vision”; they are not overlapping, but they are positioned nearby. This implies that the organization has a desire to lead in its market as a future goal.

Furthermore, their actions in supplying certain products (“service distribution”) or management (“management and performance”) may become the main issue of business profiles. They clarify what kind of services and management they provide to their consumers under each theme. In addition, the theme “technological advancement” and “innovation in products” refers to the features or quality of their products, and organizations must produce or provide the best quality possible. Finally, firms appear to include what society expects of them in terms of societal responsibility (“sustainability and corporate responsibility” and “culture and partnerships”). In terms of “culture and partnerships,” companies are concerned about the working environment and the community in which they operate.

Table 9*Ten Topics: Key Themes and Example Terms*

Topic No.	Example (terms)	Theme
1	First, we deliver compelling technology solutions to a dynamic global marketplace. (TD_2021) Delivered 1/3 of all prescription medicines in North America (MK_2021)	technological advancement
2	Our goal is to deliver value growth and best-in-class performance . (DC_2021) McKesson's mission and focus are clear: to be the world leader in health care supply management by advancing the success of our partners. (MK_1998)	management and performance
3	We offer fixed and variable insurance and annuity products, including whole life, universal life, variable universal life, term insurance, fixed and variable deferred annuities , and income annuities. (NLI_2005) In fiscal 1998, revenue reached a record \$801.8 million . (WFS_1998)	financial services
4	Creating a company culture that inspires performance excellence among our employees: a people-centric performance culture (DC_2005) Strategic business partnerships with customers, vendors and suppliers produce benefits for all of our business partners. (TD_1998)	culture and partnerships
5	Continued development of all employees, our number one asset. (VEC_1998) we embrace differences to drive the best outcomes (CH_2021)	innovation in products
6	Ford Motor Company's vision for the future is to deliver superior shareholder returns and to become the world's leading consumer company that provides automotive	leadership and vision

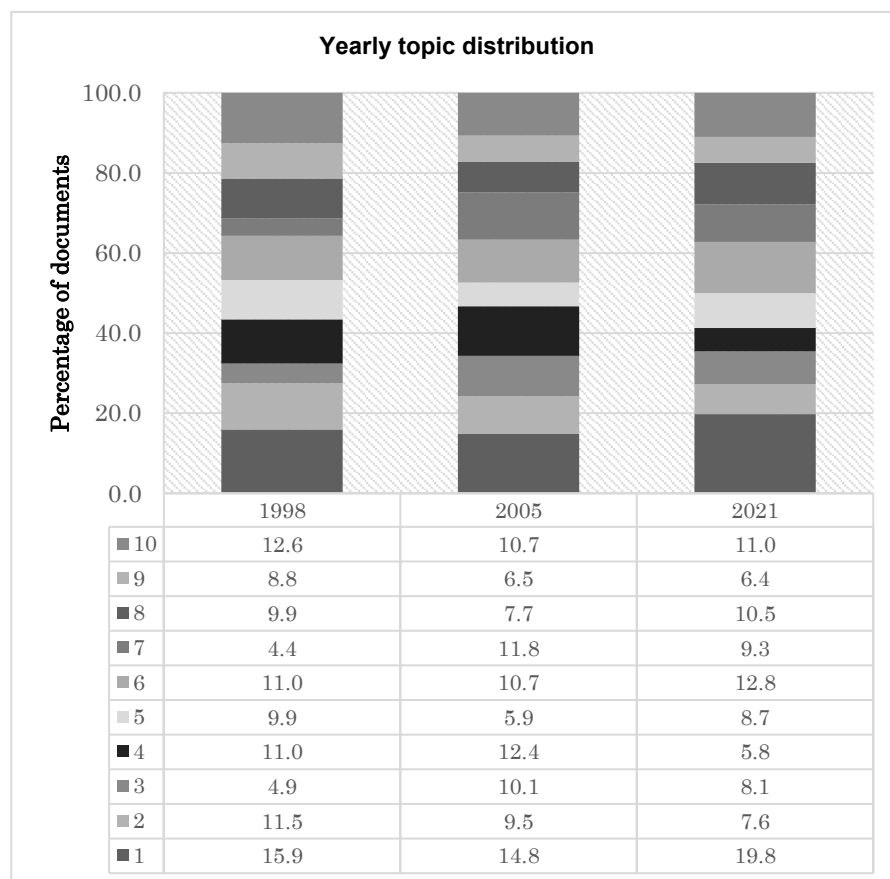
	products and services. (FM_1998)	
7	We want to become the most innovative , customer-centric, inclusive and sustainable materials science company in the world. (DC_2021)	sustainability and corporate responsibility
8	As of December 1998, the Company operated a chain of 285 warehouses in 26 states (217 locations), nine Canadian provinces (57 locations), the United Kingdom (seven locations , through a 60%-owned subsidiary), Korea (three locations) and one warehouse in Taiwan. (CS_1998)	consumer services
9	UnitedHealthcare Global provides health and dental benefits and hospital and clinical services to employer groups and individuals in South America, and through other diversified global health services. (UHG_2021)	service distribution
10	Our organization compels each business to focus on the needs of its markets . (UHG_1998)	strategic market positioning
	World Fuel Services is a global leader in the downstream marketing, logistics and financing of aviation and marine fuel products and related services. (WFS_2005)	

Note. Sentence examples are obtained by searching for typical terms in each topic. The typical terms in each topic are bolded. Some sentences include more than two related terms at once, and it is also possible that a single document contains many of these words. It should be noted that “fixed” and “annuity” in Topic 3 primarily refer to NLI (New York Life Insurance Company).

The next step is to investigate how the ten subjects, or themes, varied in proportion in each year to determine whether or not the year influences the topics in business profiles. Figure 14 depicts the distribution of topics by year, with each year having some of each.

Figure 14

Topic Distribution in 1998, 2005, and 2021



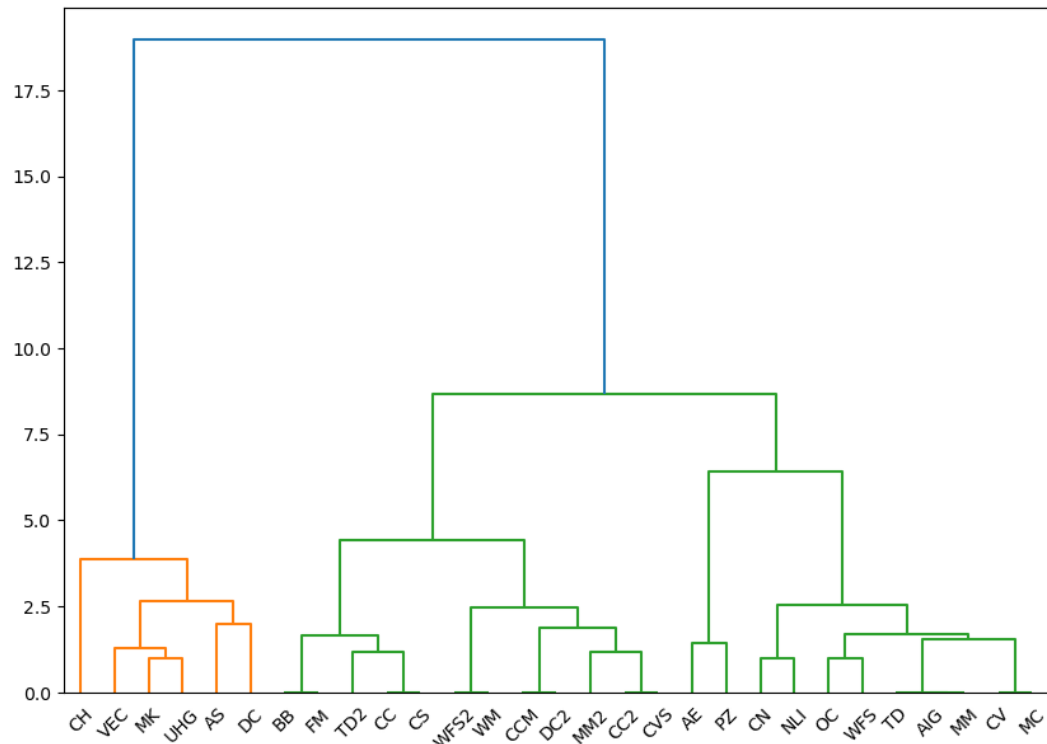
A notable change was observed in Topic 7, “sustainability and corporate responsibility,” which saw an increase from 4.4% in 1998 to 11.8% in 2005, and remained elevated at 9.3% in 2021, nearly doubling its initial value. Conversely, Topic 4, “culture and partnerships,” experienced a significant decline, dropping from 11% in 1998 and 12.4% in 2005 to just 5.8% in 2021. Furthermore, Topic 3, “financial services,” almost doubled its share from 4.9% in 1998 to 10.1% in 2005,

although it saw a slight decrease to 8.1% by 2021. Across all three years, the most prevalent theme was consistently “technological advancement.” The second most common themes varied, with “strategic market positioning” at 12.6% in 1998, “culture and partnerships” at 12.4% in 2005, and “leadership and vision” emerging in 2021 with 12.8%.

Next, Figure 15 depicts the results of clustering a data set of companies based on their topic distribution.³⁵ The clustering results describe how companies are grouped based on similarities in their topic distributions, reflecting underlying patterns in their business activities or sectors. In this case, three clusters will be observed with more details since each cluster has more than five companies.³⁶ Table 10 shows three clusters and the company IDs inside each cluster.

³⁵ Python script: https://github.com/Mananorth/Dissertation_ManaKitazawa

³⁶ With four or five clusters, the data in each cluster becomes small, making it impossible to determine the properties of each cluster.

Figure 15*Clustering of Companies Based on Topic Distribution*

Note. Documents with a “2” in their Data ID refer not to company profiles, but to documents containing corporate overviews with headings like mission statements or vision statements. These are saved in a separate file.

Table 10*Clustering of Companies and Characteristics of Each Clusters*

Cluster	Characteristics	Company ID
0	Financial, Health and Insurance Focus	AE, AIG, CN, CV, MC, MM, NLI, OC, PL, TD, WFS
1	Essential Services and Products	AS, CH, DC, MK, UHG, VEC
2	Consumer-oriented and Manufacturing	BB, CC, CC2, CCM, CS, CVS, DC2, FM, MM2, TD2, WFS2, WM

Considering the findings of clustering based on topic distributions and each company's characteristics such as industry type, it is revealed that each cluster has distinct aspects of its products or services, similar to the difference in industry type.³⁷ Cluster 0 aggregates companies primarily engaged in financial services, insurance, and pharmaceuticals. The common theme among these companies is their focus on services or products that cater to financial security and health. This includes a range of services from banking and insurance to pharmaceuticals, indicating a clustering based on the essential nature of these services in providing financial and health security. Notably, Oracle (OC), though primarily a technology company, is included here due to its significant involvement in software solutions that support financial and health sectors.

Cluster 1 consists of companies in health services, energy, and certain consumer services sectors. These entities are characterized by their provision of fundamental services or products, such as healthcare, telecommunications, and energy. The inclusion of companies from diverse fields such as healthcare services, energy production, and telecommunications underlines a shared emphasis on essential services and goods.

Finally, Cluster 2 encompasses a broad mix of companies, including those focused on retail, consumer goods, and automotive manufacturing. This grouping suggests a focus on companies that are directly involved in manufacturing, retail, and serving end consumers with tangible products. The diversity within this cluster—from retail giants and automotive manufacturers to beverage companies—points to a commonality in consumer engagement and product orientation, emphasizing the production, retail, and consumption of goods.

The cluster analysis findings revealed variances in the topics addressed by different companies. Although the quantities of every topic fluctuate by year (1998,

³⁷ Appendix B includes brief explanations for each company.

2005, and 2021) and cluster (Cluster 0, 1, and 2), the topics included in the company profiles are rather consistent.³⁸

6.3.2. Sentiment analysis

The previous section investigated what kind of topics business profiles cover, as well as how topic distribution varies by year and industry type. This section focuses on the company's attitude towards a certain topic as determined by topic modeling, as well as the text's overall contextual polarity. The attitudes include their judgment, affective state, and the intended emotional communication (Ding et al., 2008; Jafery et al., 2022; Sofian et al., 2022).

Table 11 displays the results of sentiment analysis using the TextBlob library in combination with LDA's topic modeling.³⁹ Polarity assesses the positive or negative sentiment indicated in the text on a scale of -1 to +1, where -1 denotes a negative sentiment, zero suggests a neutral sentiment, and +1 represents a positive sentiment. The feeling becomes stronger as the score approaches +1 or -1. Subjectivity assesses whether the text is more subjective (opinionated) or objective (factual), with a score ranging from 0 to 1. A subjectivity score close to zero implies that the text is highly objective, factual, and unbiased. A score close to one suggests that the text is highly subjective, opinionated, or prejudiced.

³⁸ However, in Cluster 2, which refers to organizations that have relationships with end users and deal with actual items, Topic 4 "Culture and Partnerships" is not present in the 1998 and 2021 profiles, while Topic 2 "Management and Performance" is not mentioned in 2005 (See Appendix C for bar graphs).

³⁹ Python script: https://github.com/Mana-north/Dissertation_ManaKitazawa

Table 11*Sentiment Analysis for Each Topic and Theme*

Topic No.	Theme	Polarity	Subjectivity
1	technological advancement	0.080642	0.172157
2	management and performance	0.126582	0.275809
3	financial services	0.164827	0.251771
4	culture and partnerships	0.116084	0.242074
5	innovation in healthcare	0.157961	0.22079
6	leadership and vision	0.135028	0.252652
7	sustainability and corporate responsibility	0.182546	0.334554
8	consumer services	0.137906	0.288935
9	service distribution	0.148113	0.282836
10	strategic market positioning	0.07433	0.156075

The results suggest that companies have a good attitude regarding all themes, while the mean⁴⁰ is closer to neutral mood than positive sentiment (+1). In addition, companies reveal no more than 33% of their subjectivity throughout the content. The lowest mean, or topics that companies do not reveal their attitude toward substantially, is Topic 10 “strategic market positioning.” It was characterized by the lowest sentiment positivity (mean polarity: 0.074330) and subjectivity (mean: 0.156075), indicating discussions that are more neutral and centered on objective market analyses. The second lowest is Topic 1 “technological advancement” and it exhibited a neutral to slightly positive sentiment (mean polarity: 0.080642) with low subjectivity (mean:

⁴⁰ In sentiment analysis, “mean” typically refers to the average sentiment score derived from a set of texts or documents.

0.172157), suggesting that discourse in this domain tends to be more objective, possibly reflecting the factual reporting of technological developments.

On the other hand, Topic 7 “sustainability and corporate responsibility” stood out with the highest sentiment positivity (mean polarity: 0.182546) and subjectivity (mean: 0.334554), indicating a discourse deeply infused with personal values and ethical considerations. Also, Topic 3 “financial services” is the second highest with a moderately positive sentiment (mean polarity: 0.164827) and moderate subjectivity (mean: 0.251771). It suggests a discourse rich in expert opinion blended with factual financial information.

The analysis indicates a significant shift in the sentiment and subjectivity associated with each topic. The heightened positivity and subjectivity in discussions on sustainability and corporate responsibility suggest an emotionally engaged and opinion-driven dialogue. Conversely, the low sentiment and subjectivity scores in strategic market positioning imply a more dispassionate and factual approach, which might align with the objective nature of strategic business decision-making.

Furthermore, this section shows how the presentation of companies’ attitudes has evolved over time. The sentiment analysis using the VADER library was performed on corporate profiles for the years 1998, 2005, and 2021. The results show the sentiment trajectory and provide insights into the evolving corporate narrative. The VADER sentiment analysis tool provides a compound score along with scores for the negative, neutral, and positive sentiments of text data. All scores other than compound range from 0 to 1, and a value close to 1 implies a higher negative, neutral, or positive score. *Compound* is an aggregated score that calculates the sum of all the lexicon ratings, which have been standardized to range between -1 (most extreme negative) and +1 (most extreme positive). The compound score can be used to get an overall sentiment of the text. Table 12 shows the evolution of sentiment in business profiles.

Table 12*Change in Sentiment across the Threes Years*

Year	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Compound
1998	0.012	0.833	0.156	0.9996
2005	0.01	0.791	0.199	0.9998
2021	0.006	0.762	0.232	0.9996

The sentiment analysis conducted on corporate profiles from 1998, 2005, and 2021 reveals a significant shift in sentiment composition over the years. While the overall sentiment remains strongly positive across all years, as indicated by the high compound scores close to 1, there is a noticeable trend towards increasing positive sentiment and decreasing neutral sentiment. Specifically, the positive sentiment increased from 15.6% in 1998 to 23.2% in 2021, accompanied by a decrease in neutral sentiment from 83.3% in 1998 to 76.2% in 2021. Negative sentiment remained minimal throughout the period, decreasing from 1.2% in 1998 to 0.6% in 2021. These trends suggest a growing positivity in the corporate profiles over the analyzed period, indicating possibly more optimistic corporate outlooks or enhanced positive messaging in corporate communications. This change in sentiment dynamics illustrates the evolving nature of corporate profiles, reflecting shifts in corporate strategies, market conditions, or communication practices over time.

The results of sentence-level sentiment analysis demonstrate this pattern, namely a decrease in neutral, negative mean, and an increase in positive mean, and provide instances.⁴¹ Although company profiles are typically written in a positive tone, Excerpts 1 and 2 show that in 1998, corporate profiles tended to be neutral. Both excerpts exhibit a complete absence of negative or positive sentiment, indicated by sentiment scores with a neutrality of 1 and a compound score of 0. Excerpt 1

⁴¹ Python script: https://github.com/Mana-north/Dissertation_ManaKitazawa

describes the company's extensive reach through agents and specialists, while Excerpt 2 touches on the company's commitment to shareholder returns. The factual and straightforward presentation of information without expressing any sentiment is indicative of the corporate communication style during this period.

Excerpt 1. Extensive Reach: A Neutral Corporate Profile

('neg': 0, 'neu': 1, 'pos': 0, 'compound': 0)

The company serves more than 14 million households through some 15,500 agents and 780 life specialists in the U.S. and Canada.

(Extracted from the AS annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 2. Shareholder Returns: Neutral Financial Commitment

('neg': 0, 'neu': 1, 'pos': 0, 'compound': 0)

Shareholders deserve a reasonable return on their investment in our company.

(Extracted from the TD annual report, 1998)

However, not all exchanges were completely neutral. Although negative emotion is rarely utilized in business profiles, those from 1998 contain more negative sentiment than any other year. Excerpt 3, with a slightly negative sentiment score of 0.072 and a positive sentiment score of 0.105, suggests cautious optimism or a spirit of challenge in the face of uncertain economic conditions. The compound score of 0.25 suggests a balanced, albeit slightly positive outlook, acknowledging external challenges while reaffirming commitment to growth and customer satisfaction.

Excerpt 3. Economic Challenges: A Slightly Negative Outlook

('neg': 0.072, 'neu': 0.822, 'pos': 0.105, 'compound': 0.25)

now is why we're confident about always

Even amid uncertain economic times, we refreshed more thirsty people with more of our products in 1998 than ever before.

(Extracted from the CC annual report, 1998)

A noticeable shift towards a more positive sentiment is observed in the excerpts from 2005 and 2021. Excerpt 4 from 2005 demonstrates a significant leap in positive sentiment, with a score of 0.839 and a compound score of 0.6369. The rhetorical question posed aims to stress the company's commitment to customer loyalty, suggesting an optimistic outlook and a strategic focus on customer satisfaction.

Similarly, Excerpt 5 from 2021 showcases an even stronger positive sentiment, with a score of 0.691 and a high compound score of 0.8807.⁴² The vision statement articulates a future-oriented, positive outlook emphasizing sustainability and brand love. This excerpt not only reflects an optimistic sentiment but also illustrates the evolving priorities towards sustainability and shared societal values.

Excerpt 4. Customer Loyalty: High Positive Sentiment

(‘neg’: 0, ‘neu’: 0.161, ‘pos’: 0.839, ‘compound’: 0.6369)

Create loyal customers?

(Extracted from the AS annual report, 2005)

Excerpt 5. Future Vision: Strong Positive Sentiment Towards Sustainability

(‘neg’: 0, ‘neu’: 0.309, ‘pos’: 0.691, ‘compound’: 0.8807)

VISION

LOVED BRANDS, DONE SUSTAINABLY, FOR A BETTER
SHARED FUTURE.

(Extracted from the CC annual report, 2021)

⁴² Excerpt 5 is presented in a form as close to the original text as possible.

6.3.3. Readability

This section of the dissertation delves into the readability of corporate profiles across the three investigated years. The objective was to assess how the comprehensibility and accessibility of corporate communications have evolved, reflecting changes in corporate strategies or societal expectations. Readability scores provide an objective metric to evaluate the complexity and clarity of written content, offering insights into the intended audience's educational level and the ease with which the content can be understood. The analysis utilized the Python library `textstat` to compute various readability scores for corporate profiles from the selected years. Three key readability metrics were employed: Flesch Reading Ease (Rates text on a 100-point scale; higher scores indicate easier readability), Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (Estimates the U.S. school grade level needed to comprehend the text), and Dale-Chall Readability Score (Assesses the years of education required to understand the content, incorporating a list of words familiar to 4th-grade students). Table 13 displays the results, and Figure 16 depicts the change over the three years.⁴³

Table 13

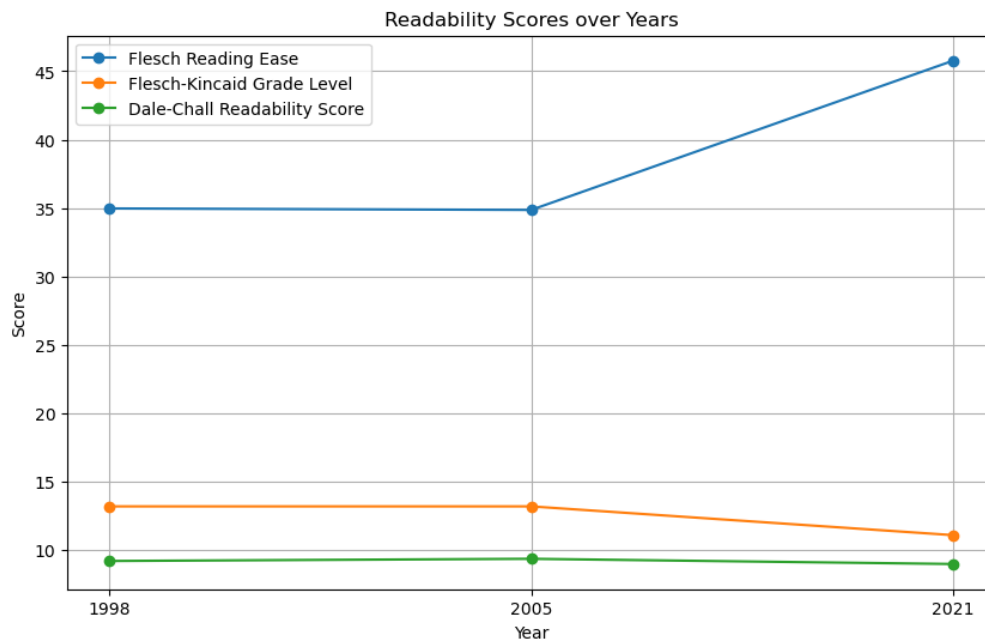
Readability Scores of Corporate Profiles in the Three Years

Year	Flesch Reading Ease	Flesch-Kincaid	Dale-Chall
		Grade Level	Readability Score
1998	34.97	13.2	9.21
2005	34.86	13.2	9.37
2021	45.76	11.1	8.99

⁴³ Python script: https://github.com/Mana-north/Dissertation_ManaKitazawa

Figure 16

Change in Readability Scores over the Three Years



In 1998, the corporate profiles displayed a Flesch Reading Ease score of 34.97, a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of 13.2, and a Dale-Chall Readability Score of 9.21, indicating content suitable for an audience with a higher education level, typically beyond high school. In 2005, the readability scores showed minimal variation from 1998, with a Flesch Reading Ease score of 34.86, a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of 13.2, and a Dale-Chall Readability Score of 9.37. This consistency suggests that the complexity and accessibility of corporate profiles remained stable during this period. In 2021, however, there was a significant change in readability, with a Flesch Reading Ease score of 45.76, a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of 11.1, and a Dale-Chall Readability Score of 8.99. These scores indicate a shift towards content that is easier to comprehend, targeting a broader audience.

The readability analysis reveals a significant trend towards more accessible corporate communications by 2021. The increase in the Flesch Reading Ease score alongside the decrease in the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and Dale-Chall Readability

Score in 2021 compared to 1998 and 2005 indicates a strategic move to make corporate profiles more comprehensible to a wider audience.

Next, this section provides samples that represent the trend by reporting on the readability of the overall texts as well as each sentence inside the documents. Table 14 illustrates the change in readability of Best Buy's business profiles between 1998 and 2021.

Table 14

Change in Readability of the Best Buy's Corporate Profiles

Year	Flesch Reading	Flesch-Kincaid Grade	Dale-Chall Readability
	Ease	Level	Score
1998	56.86	8.9	9.82
2021	71.85	7.3	9.3

The readability analysis of Best Buy's corporate profiles for the years 1998 and 2021 reveals significant changes in the documents' accessibility and comprehensibility over time. The Flesch Reading Ease scores indicate that the corporate profile of 2021 (71.85) is easier to read compared to that of 1998 (56.86). The Flesch Reading Ease scale ranges from 1 to 100, with higher scores suggesting the text is easier to read. A score between 60 to 70 is considered to be standard/average readability, which means the 2021 profile falls into a category that is easily understandable by 13- to 15-year-old students, whereas the 1998 profile is slightly more complex.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level provides an estimate of the U.S. school grade level required to comprehend the text. The results show a decrease from 8.9 in 1998 to 7.3 in 2021, suggesting that the corporate profile has become more accessible. A

lower grade level indicates that the text can be understood by individuals with a lower educational level, broadening the potential audience base.

The Dale-Chall Readability Score also shows a slight shift, decreasing from 9.82 in 1998 to 9.3 in 2021. This score evaluates the complexity of the text based on a list of words familiar to 4th-grade students. Scores above 9.0 indicate that the text is more suitable for college graduates, highlighting that while both documents are aimed at a highly educated audience, the 2021 profile has become slightly more accessible to those with a slightly lower level of education.

Additionally, this section also examined the evolution readability in Best Buy's corporate profiles between 1998 and 2021 by analyzing the readability scores of individual sentences within the documents. Table 15 is an entire document of Best Buy's corporate profiles from 1998, complete with three types of readability rankings, and Table 16 is the 2021 version.

Table 15

Readability of Sentence in Best Buy's 1998 Corporate Profiles

Line	Sentence	Flesch Reading Ease	Flesch- Kincaid Grade Level	Dale-Chall Readability Score
01	We Improve People's Lives by Making Technology and Entertainment Products Affordable and Easy to Use	39.33	11.5	9.64
02	"Behind the Yellow Tag"	75.88	3.7	0.2
03	Our Company is devoted to providing our customers the best value on the products they want.	55.24	9.5	8.38
04	More than 175 million customers visit our	77.23	5.2	9.92

	284 stores every year.			
05	They depend on our noncommissioned sales team to help them choose the right products for their lifestyles.	71.14	7.6	8.19
06	Best Buy is the nation's largest volume specialty retailers selling name-brand consumer electronics, personal computers, entertainment software and appliances.	9.89	16.6	16.21
07	Ranked 199th on the Fortune 500, the Company's stock is traded on the New York Stock Exchange, symbol BBY.	77.57	7.2	11.23

The readability analysis for the year 1998 reveals a varied readability landscape across different sentences in the corporate profile. For instance, the sentence “We Improve People’s Lives by Making Technology and Entertainment Products Affordable and Easy to Use” scored a Flesch Reading Ease of 39.33, a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of 11.5, and a Dale-Chall Readability Score of 9.64, indicating a relatively complex and challenging text. Conversely, the tagline “Behind the Yellow Tag” demonstrated a significantly higher ease of reading with a Flesch Reading Ease score of 75.88, a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of 3.7, and a notably lower Dale-Chall Readability Score of 0.2. Also, the objective information of their size (line 04) and positioning (line 07) tends to be described in easier terms, respectively Flesch Reading Ease of 77.23 and 77.57. The diversity in readability scores across sentences suggests a strategic mix of simplicity and complexity in conveying the company’s values and offerings. Table 16 displays the full statements from BestBuy’s 2021 corporate profiles.

Table 16*Readability of Sentence in Best Buy's 2021 Corporate Profiles*

Line	Sentence	Flesch Reading Ease	Flesch- Kincaid Grade Level	Dale-Chall Readability Score
01	About Best Buy	119.19	-2.7	0.15
02	At Best Buy, our purpose is to enrich lives through technology.	68.77	6.4	8.49
03	We do that by leveraging our unique combination of tech expertise and human touch to meet our customers' everyday needs, whether they come to us online, visit our stores or invite us into their homes.	52.87	14.6	10.79
04	We have more than 1,000 stores and about 100,000 employees in the United States and Canada.	80.62	6	10.35

In contrast, the 2021 corporate profile exhibits an overall enhancement in readability. The introductory sentence “About Best Buy” scored an exceptionally high Flesch Reading Ease of 119.19, with a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of -2.7 and a Dale-Chall Readability Score of 0.15, indicating an extremely accessible text. Other sentences such as “At Best Buy, our purpose is to enrich lives through technology” and “We have more than 1,000 stores and about 100,000 employees in the United States and Canada” also showed improved readability scores, indicating a clearer and more engaging presentation of information. Notably, the sentence “We do that by leveraging our unique combination of tech expertise and human touch to meet our customers’ everyday needs, whether they come to us online, visit our stores or invite

us into their homes” is more complex, but remained relatively accessible, with a balanced readability profile.

6.4. Discussion

This dissertation seeks to define public discourse in light of its diverse audience by examining three years’ corporate profiles, which reflect the change in audience as well as the change in media. This part serves as a precursor to conducting qualitative research (Chapters 7 and 8) to explore how companies see and characterize their surroundings (ideational aspect), as well as how they think about their audience and engage with them through their messaging (interpersonal aspect). Before examining implicit aspects that necessitate qualitative analysis, this chapter focused on explicit discourse characteristics of corporate profiles from the perspective of natural language processing (NLP), such as the types of topics that corporate profiles can cover, how emotional or subjective they are, and how easy or difficult they are to read. Furthermore, how the three types of traits altered over the three years was explored. Understanding corporate profiles objectively using a quantitative approach is critical for discussing findings obtained in Chapters 7 and 8 by examining structures that can be implicit, such as process type or evaluation, and removed in topic modeling as stop words, such as modality or personal pronoun.

This section conducted three types of assessment: LDA, sentiment analysis, and readability assessment. LDA is a type of unsupervised machine learning model used for identifying topics in a set of documents. It assumes that each document is a mixture of a small number of topics and that each word’s presence is attributable to one of the document’s topics. LDA is used for topic modeling and discovering abstract themes within a large volume of text. In this research, ten topics were extracted from the data set that consist of words or combinations of two or three words. The findings suggest possible themes for corporate profiles, such as a company’s market position, products, services, or actions, required qualities or attitudes, and relationships with stakeholders, including general society. These issues

are comparable to prior research findings (Swales and Rogers, 1995; Bartkus et al., 2004). Some research has found that corporate discourse, including annual reports, is critical to constructing a company's corporate identity or public image (Cheney, 1983; Fuoli, 2018), and the themes identified in this analysis, such as market position, products/services, and attitudes, contribute to identity construction. Furthermore, companies have a variety of stakeholders and must consider the communities and society in which they operate (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Fuoli, 2012; Fuoli & Hart, 2018; Koller, 2009; Suchman, 1995), resulting in the promotion of positive social interactions. It may be argued that social consciousness has grown greater now that corporate social responsibility is mandated all over the world (Barić, 2017; Carroll 1979; Neu et al., 1998).

When comparing the descriptions from the three years, the topic “sustainability and corporate responsibility” appeared more frequently, while references to “culture and partnerships” dropped. It may indicate that, in comparison to closer stakeholders such as partners or employees who share the culture, companies care more about society as a whole. The contemporary society-conscious tendency can be seen in the development of phrases such as “corporate social responsibility” and “corporate citizenship,” as well as a rise in related research (Barić, 2017; Sun et al., 2010). Although there is some variation in topic distribution, practically all of the themes may be observed in any three years, therefore they can be considered general characteristics of company profiles.

Additionally, clustering analysis based on each company's topic distribution reveals that the distribution of themes is influenced by its types of product/service (tangible or intangible, healthcare or infrastructure) and business model (business to business or business to consumer). Companies that use a business-to-consumer model, such as BestBuy and Coca-Cola, do not have themes like “culture and partnerships” or “management and performance” in some years. Aside from the variance created by

business model, there are no notable differences in themes between organizations, albeit topic distribution differs to some degree.

In terms of sentiment analysis, the degree to which company profiles express their opinions was investigated. This involved analyzing text to determine the sentiment behind it, typically classifying it as positive, negative, or neutral. Sentiment analysis is widely used in monitoring brand and product sentiment in customer feedback, social media, and review platforms (Fang & Zhan, 2015). It helps businesses understand consumer attitudes and emotional responses towards products, services, or topics. Rather than examining customer reactions, this study examined how companies express their attitudes through their corporate profiles. In the sentiment analysis of every topic obtained by LDA, all topics are described with a pleasant attitude, very close to neutral. According to some research, corporate discourse focuses on positive features of the organization and avoids negative ones (Breeze, 2013; Merkl-Davies & Koller, 2012), but this study found that corporate profiles use a far more neutral tone to introduce themselves. This neutrality may also be found in scientific communication, which is made up of facts (Myers & Myers, 1990; White, 2003), and appears to be effective for firms in gaining the trust of their audiences.

The theme in which companies most clearly demonstrate their subjectivity is “sustainability and corporate responsibility,” and companies appear to have active attitudes toward social needs, which leads to companies coming across as more sympathetic and emotional. This relates to the reality that corporate responsibility and sustainability are becoming increasingly important requirements for companies around the world (Barić, 2017; Carroll 1979; Neu et al., 1998). Given that the topics “financial services” and “consumer services” are both defined with a slightly more positive mood in 2021, compared to 1998 and 2005, companies prefer to adopt a more dialogic approach to the theme focused on the relationship between companies and the audience or society. Companies, on the other hand, take a more neutral attitude

when explaining their own products/services, as well as their qualities and market position.

Sentiment scores on whole texts vary by year, although compound scores are nearly neutral in any year. From 1998 to 2005 and 2005 to 2021, negative and neutral scores dropped, while positive scores increased. This implies that by 2021, when communication is easier and more widespread, corporate profiles are used not merely to provide factual information about organizations but also to reflect their sentiments about the outside world. In fact, when comparing the sentiment of each sentence between 1998 and 2021, companies present their size and the economic situation around them objectively with neutral and negative sentiment, while they demonstrate positive sentiment with dialogic features such as interrogatives and phrases rather than full sentences. These form qualities are akin to the phenomenon of conversationalization caused by media dissemination (Fairclough, 1995), and it is possible that corporate profiles will shift towards dynamic and dialogic interactions.

Finally, organizations are more likely to align with their audience by making their content easier to read, as well as conveying a positive attitude. Readability measures how easy or difficult a text is to read. This involves various formulas that consider factors like sentence length, word length, syllable count, and specific word usage. Readability scores help in tailoring content to the appropriate audience, ensuring it matches their reading skills or education level.

Although corporate profiles are specialized discourse, not intended for the broad public, they are described at the same level of higher education. However, it became gradually easier between 1998 and 2005, and again between 2005 and 2021. This trend can also be seen in related types of discourse, such as political discourse, which is delivered by individuals with greater public access. For them, it is vital to be understood by a larger audience.

A detailed review of BestBuy's corporate profiles reveals that organizations disclose more information about their basic facts, such as size and financial

accomplishments, which is portrayed with neutral emotion, resulting in low readability. Sentences that invoke the relationship with the outside world and express more sentiment, on the other hand, have a higher readability. This shift may reflect an adaptation to changing societal expectations, where transparency and inclusivity in corporate communication have become increasingly important. By reducing the complexity of their profiles, companies may aim to engage more effectively with stakeholders, including customers, investors, and the general public, who vary widely in their educational backgrounds. This trend towards simplification and increased accessibility in corporate communication demonstrates the evolving nature of corporate identities and strategies in response to broader cultural and societal shifts. The move towards clearer language and more straightforward communication can be seen as part of a larger effort to build trust and foster stronger relationships with all stakeholders by ensuring that corporate messages are understood by a wider audience.

Some studies say that the readability of annual reports has decreased (Dyer et al., 2017) and that differences from regular language are increasing, but this study found that corporate profiles, the first section of an annual report, exhibit increased readability. Corporate profiles have become more prevalent in other media, such as websites and social media, and this trend may give these profiles a new role, including attracting the attention of a larger audience. In contrast, other sections of annual reports have become areas where firms present hard-sell information and objective statistics. In short, readability research results show that business profiles are becoming shorter and more engaging in order to appeal to a wider range of audiences.

6.5. Summary

This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the evolution of corporate profiles through the lenses of topic modeling, sentiment analysis, and readability assessments, offering insights into how these aspects of corporate communication

have transformed in response to increased publicness and shifting societal expectations.

Using LDA, the study identifies ten core themes within corporate discourse, such as technological advancements, management and performance, financial services, culture and partnerships, and sustainability and corporate responsibility. This thematic analysis reveals a nuanced understanding of corporate communication strategies, showcasing a blend of consistent elements and evolving focus areas. The analysis spans three significant years—1998, 2005, and 2021—showing how the prevalence of themes such as sustainability has increased and indicating a growing corporate emphasis on social responsibility.

The sentiment analysis component of the chapter provides a granular view of corporate attitudes towards these themes, using advanced NLP techniques to gauge the sentiment polarity and subjectivity associated with each topic. The findings reveal a generally positive tone across the corporate discourse, with variations in emotional expression and objectivity. Notably, topics related to sustainability and corporate responsibility exhibit the highest levels of positivity and subjectivity, reflecting an increasingly expressive and value-driven corporate stance on social issues. Over time, from 1998 to 2021, there is a noticeable trend towards more positive sentiment, suggesting that corporate narratives have become more optimistic and aligned with positive messaging strategies.

Readability assessments deepen the analysis by evaluating the complexity and accessibility of corporate profiles over the selected years. The trend observed indicates a significant shift towards more accessible communication, with readability scores improving over time. This suggests an intentional effort by companies to make their profiles more understandable to a broader audience and reflects an adaptation to changing societal expectations for transparency and inclusivity in corporate communications. The increased readability is particularly noteworthy in the context of

broader cultural and societal shifts, indicating a strategic move by companies to engage more effectively with stakeholders and the general public.

In summary, this chapter provides a comprehensive examination of the discursive evolution of corporate profiles, showcasing how increased publicness has influenced corporate narratives. Through a detailed analysis of topics covered, the sentiment expressed, and readability levels, the chapter illustrates the dynamic nature of corporate communication strategies. These strategies not only adapt to technological advancements and changing market conditions but also reflect a deeper alignment with societal values and expectations, particularly in the realms of sustainability and social responsibility. The findings highlight a significant transformation in corporate profiles towards more engaging, accessible, and socially aligned communications, indicating a strategic evolution in response to the changing corporate and societal landscape.

Chapter 7 Shaping Corporate Reality in Profiles

7.1. Introduction

This chapter, which focuses on the ideational function of language, examines how businesses craft narratives to shape their reality discursively in the public sphere. What is realized depends on the purpose of the speakers, and there are always other options (Halliday, 1973; 1978, Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, 2004). Based on this idea, critical discourse analysis (CDA) has attempted to expose what contributes to the reproduction of social structure, power relations, and some ideologies by focusing on the language of speakers with more power or access to the text and talk, such as politics and the news media.

Corporate discourse, as discussed in this study, is a type of message that companies publicly and unilaterally transmit to the public. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, corporate messaging has evolved from a one-way message to a platform communication in which everyone reacts to and provides feedback. Although corporate messaging has been emphasized as an important tool for building trust among external and internal stakeholders, there has been little research that examines the message in light of the changing public sphere.

This dissertation analyzes how companies construe and verbalize the realities around them and how this has changed over the three decades of the corporate profiles presented in Chapter 5. This chapter examines the ideational function, one of three functions of language (ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions), to determine how companies construe and realize events within and outside the firm, as well as their beliefs and ideas about those events.

This dissertation, unlike previous CDA and SFL, does not focus primarily on the outcomes of the speaker's choices of beliefs and values (although the social context and the processes of discourse production and interpretation have been addressed). Instead, it investigates how the speaker represents reality, taking into

account the listener and the social context. It attempts to clarify the relationships involved by conducting a comparative analysis over the three years.

7.2. Methodology

This chapter investigates how companies construct their message on their background histories, size, locations, products/services, goals, and philosophies in corporate profiles, as well as how the method of realizations has changed over the last two decades. The analysis was carried out using the process type categories proposed by SFL to explain ideational aspects of the language.

The data transcribed in MAXQDA, as mentioned in Chapter 5, were separated by clauses because clauses are a fundamental unit in SFL that constructs process types. In this analysis, clause is a minimum unit of signifying a process that mainly includes process (verbal group), participants (nominal group), and circumstances (prepositional phrase).⁴⁴ Thus, headings or bullet points, as seen in corporate profiles, that are simply constructed from nominal groups without verbal groups are separated as clauses but are not annotated with a process type.⁴⁵ Excerpt 6 is a corporate profile from Cardinal Health's 2021 annual report, which demonstrates how it is formatted in MAXQDA.⁴⁶ In this example, "Integrity" (line 02), "Inclusive" (line 04), "Innovative" (line 07), "Accountable" (line 12), and "Mission driven" (line 15) are transcribed as

⁴⁴ In English, "clause" and "phrase" both denote a unit somewhere between a single word and a sentence (Halliday, 1961). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (1999), a "figure," which refers to a process involving participants and circumstances, is realized by clause, and a "sequence" by clause complex. It is also a fundamental grammar element that incorporates some experience interpretation into a process configuration. In addition, "clause" serves as a parameter in the analysis (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, 2004).

⁴⁵ Because such headings have also some meaning, they are treated at the end of this chapter as ideational components distinct from process type.

⁴⁶ Although the distinction between upper- and lower-case letters will not be considered significant in this study, the descriptions in the examples have been left largely unchanged by the companies, as visual information may be used in future research.

separate clauses. However, these are not regarded as clauses that evoke process types within the context of this study.

Excerpt 6. Coding Example of Process Type on MAXQDA

- 01 What we **value** [mental]
- 02 Integrity
- 03 we **hold** ourselves to the highest ethical standards [material]
- 04 Inclusive
- 05 we **embrace** differences [mental]
- 06 to **drive** the best outcomes [material]
- 07 Innovative
- 08 we **develop** new ways [material]
- 09 of **thinking**, [mental]
- 10 **operating** [material]
- 11 and **serving** customers [material]
- 12 Accountable
- 13 we **bring** passion, determination and grit [material]
- 14 to **deliver** on our commitments [material]
- 15 Mission driven
- 16 we **serve** the greater goal of healthcare [material]

(Extracted from the CH annual report, 2021)

First, each clause is assigned one of six process types (material, behavioral, mental, verbal, relational, or existential), as indicated by the process verb in bold and the square bracket at the end of the clause. When the appropriate process type cannot be identified or several process types can be coded to the clause, “others” is coded or both process type codes are annotated; whether or not to create a new process type

will be considered after all data has been coded.⁴⁷ The coding process was repeated several times to increase the reliability of the results. Table 17 provides examples of each process type. Additionally, each document was annotated with the code “year,” which indicates the year of the annual report from which the corporate profiles were obtained. This “year” code helps to visualize the relationship between the year and the process types.

Table 17

Process Types and Examples in Corporate Profiles

Process Type	Examples in Corporate Profiles
material	McKesson supported over 14,000 specialty physicians through distribution and GPO services (MK_2021)
behavioral	By listening and collaborating, we can find out what solutions are needed next. (DC_2021)
mental	Consumers enjoy the Company’s beverages at a rate of more than 1.4 billion servings a day. (CC_2006)
verbal	In the following reports, we discuss the financial performance of our business units and investment operations. (NLI_1998)
relational	UnitedHealth Group Incorporated is a health care and well-being company with a mission (UHG_2021) We have more than 1,000 stores and about 100,000 employees in the United States and Canada. (BB_2021)
existential	More than 1,200 sales offices are located nationwide. (MM_1998)

⁴⁷ Since it was not confirmed to significantly impact the results, “others” and the new codes will not be discussed.

Note. In the examples, “Process,” the core element of process type, is bolded. The parentheses following the example indicate which company’s corporate profile it is from. For instance, a from McKesson’s 2021 corporate profile would be labeled “MK_2021.”

In the following step, the change in the descriptions of each participant (Process, Participants, and Circumstances) will be examined in relation to the three main process types.⁴⁸ The codes for each process type are listed below in square brackets in Excerpts 7 to 9.

Excerpt 7. Material Process and Main Participants

[We]_{Actor} [offer]_{Process (active)} [a complete portfolio of life and disability income insurance, asset accumulation products, and retirement and investment management services]_{Goal}.

(Extracted from the MM annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 8. Mental process and Main Participants

[You]_{Senser} [may know]_{Process} [The Coca-Cola Company]_{Phenomenon}... ..as the largest beverage company with the most extensive distribution system in the world.

(Extracted from the CC annual report, 2005)

Excerpt 9. Relational process and Main Participants

[We]_{Carrier} [have]_{Process} [more than 1,000 stores and about 100,000 employees]_{Attribute} in the United States and Canada.

(Extracted from the BB annual report, 2021)

⁴⁸ The three process types (material, mental, and relational) can be primarily observed in English (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

After coding the participants, the descriptions are qualitatively analyzed and organized into patterns. New codes generated using the patterns will be annotated again, and the code relationships between new codes and years will be investigated. Table 18 shows new codes designed to reveal how the way of describing has changed over the years.

Table 18

New Codes of Each Process Created in This Analysis

Process Type	New Codes of Participants
material	Actor (implicit) Actor (explicit): a) the company b) company name c) we d) inside stakeholders e) subsidiaries f) third party g) everyone, people, h) things
relational	Identified (implicit), Carrier (implicit), Carrier (inanimate)
mental	Senser: a) company name b) the company c) we d) internal stakeholder e) you f) customers (they) g) third party h) people (they) i) things

7.3. Results

7.3.1. Process type

This dissertation examines the process types from which each clause in a corporate profile is constructed and how the proportion of the occurrence of each type has altered over time. Table 19 indicates the extent to which the six process types appear in each year, and Figure 17 depicts the findings visually.

Table 19

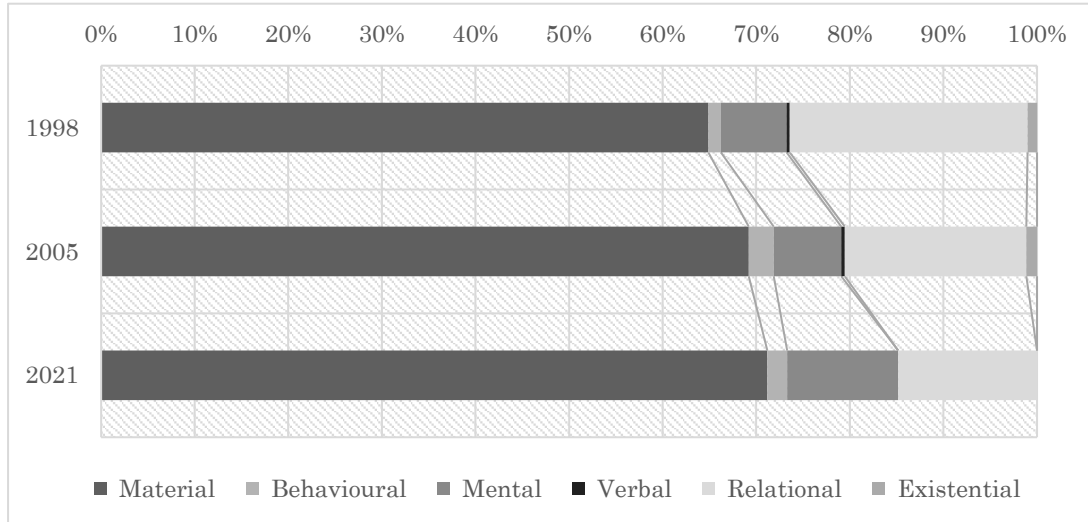
The Proportion of Process Types across the Three Years

Process type	1998	2005	2021
material	194 (57%)	182 (61%)	168 (56%)
behavioral	4 (1%)	7 (2%)	5 (2%)
mental	21 (6%)	19 (6%)	28 (9%)
verbal	1 (0%)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)
relational	76 (22%)	51 (17%)	35 (12%)
existential	3 (1%)	3 (1%)	0 (0%)

Note. Since the number of clauses varies from year to year, the percentages in parentheses indicate how much of each process type is included when the total of each process type is set to 100%.

Figure 17

Change in Proportion of Each Process Type of Corporate Profiles



Corporate profiles are primarily built from the three process types of material, relational, and mental in any of the three years. Material process accounts for approximately 60% of these process types and has the highest proportion in any given year. The second most common process type is relational process, though its proportion has been decreasing from 22% in 1998 to 12% in 2021. Furthermore, the use of mental process has increased from 6% in 1998 to 9% in 2021, though the proportion remains low, around less than 10%.⁴⁹

Businesses use material process dominance to communicate their actions to stakeholders, such as providing products and services. The following excerpts (10, 11,

⁴⁹ The chi-squared test was used to compare the distribution of process categories from 1998 to 2021. Although the traditional significance criterion of 0.05 was not met ($p = 0.069$), the study did show a slight trend toward significance. This shows that while the observed differences in process type distributions over time did not approach conventional thresholds of statistical significance, there is evidence of a possible shift in the data. Given the p-value's proximity to the 0.05 threshold and the exploratory nature of this research, these findings deserve additional investigation. The more lenient significance level of 0.1 may be deemed appropriate in this case, particularly given that the goal of this study is to discover developing trends rather than validate known hypotheses.

and 12) are Merck & Co's entire corporate profile for each of the three years and show a high frequency of the material process in each year. Each process type in the excerpts is described after each clause as follows: material process (Ma), behavioral process (B), mental process (Me), verbal process (V), relational process (R), and existential process (E). In the following excerpts, the letter representing each process type within parentheses, as well as the core element Process described by verbal group in each process type, are bolded.

Excerpts 10 and 11 contain common verbs used to carry out a sequence of actions for the company to provide their service, ranging from discovering to marketing the products (e.g., "discover," "develops," "manufactures," "markets")

Excerpt 11 divides the description of products "a broad range of human and animal health products" (line 06 in Excerpt 10) into two clauses: the product "a broad range of innovative products" (line 06 in Excerpt 11) and the goal "to improve human and animal health" (line 07 in Excerpt 11) accompanied by the action "improve."

Excerpt 10. Full Statements of the 1998 MC Corporate Profile

01 Profile

02 Merck & Co., Inc. **is** a global, research-driven pharmaceutical
company **(R)**

03 that **discovers**, **(Ma)** **(Me)**

04 **develops**, **(Ma)**

05 **manufactures**, **(Ma)**

06 and **markets** a broad range of human and animal health products, directly
and through our joint ventures, **(Ma)**

07 and **provides** pharmaceutical benefit services through Merck-Medco
Managed Care **(Ma)**.

(Extracted from the MC annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 11. Full Statements of the 2005 MC Corporate Profile

- 01 Description of Merck's business
- 02 Merck **is** a global research-driven pharmaceutical company **(R)**
- 03 that **discovers**, **(Ma)** **(Me)**
- 04 **develops**, **(Ma)**
- 05 **manufactures**, **(Ma)**
- 06 and **markets** a broad range of innovative products **(Ma)**
- 07 to **improve** human and animal health, directly and through its joint
ventures. **(Ma)**
- 08 Merck **sells** its products primarily to drug wholesalers and retailers,
hospitals, clinics, government agencies, and managed health care
providers, such as health maintenance organizations and other institutions.
(Ma)
- 09 The Company's professional representatives **communicate** the
effectiveness, safety, and value of our products to health care
professionals in private practice, group practices, and managed care
organizations. **(V)**

(Extracted from the MC annual report, 2005)

Excerpt 12 also contains more material process clauses than other process types, but the content is shorter, and the verbs used change. Unlike Excerpts 10 and 11, the material verbs “unlock” (line 03) and “take” (line 04) do not make the objects their products for the external stakeholders; rather, the company describes their actions in terms of their own ability “our full potential” (line 03) and themselves “Merck” (line 04). Additionally, the verb “create” (line 05)—which is similar to the verb “manufacture” in Excerpts 10 and 11—takes different objects. “Superior value” in clause 05 of Excerpt 12 is intangible and refers to attributes rather than the product

itself. Because of the changes in verbs and descriptions of the participants, these changes will be examined in greater detail in subsequent sections.

Excerpt 12. Full Statements of the 2021 MC Corporate Profile

- 01 **Looking** forward, **(Me)**
- 02 our priorities **are** clear: **(R)**
- 03 We want to **unlock** our full potential **(Ma)**
- 04 to **take** Merck to the next level **(Ma)**
- 05 by **creating** superior value for our patients, customers, colleagues, and society. **(Ma)**

(Extracted from the MC annual report, 2021)

As for relational process, the proportion of its occurrence has decreased over time. Excerpts 13 and 14 were taken from World Fuel Services' corporate profiles in 1998 and 2021, respectively. Excerpt 13 contains much company information, such as role ("marketer" in clauses 03 and 06), revenue (clause 04), and market occupancy (clause 05). In Excerpt 14, the objective information about the company is replaced by a description of their actions realized through material process (e.g., "maintain" (line 06), "deliver" (line 07), "do" (line 09), and "act" (line 11)).

Excerpt 13. Frequent Use of the Relational Process in 1998

- 01 Company Profile
- 02 **Serving** over 1,100 international locations, **(Ma)**
- 03 World Fuel Services Corporation **is** a leading worldwide marketer of aviation and marine fueling services and a leading recycler of used oil in the United States. **(R)**
- 04 In fiscal 1998, revenue **reached** a record \$801.8 million. **(R)(Ma)**

- 05 The Company **commands** about 1% of the worldwide market for
aviation fuel and approximately 6% of the global market for marine fuel,
(R)
- 06 and **is considered** a marketer of choice by the major oil companies.
(R)(Me)
- 07 A strong balance sheet **characterizes** the Company's conservative and
prudent approach to financial management. (R)(Ma)

(Extracted from the WFS annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 14. Frequent Use of Material Process in 2021

- 01 Our Vision
- 02 **Become** the world's leading provider of credit, finance, services, and
logistics to our business partners in the energy market. (R)(Ma)
- 03 Our Culture
- 04 **Embrace** sustainable, responsible growth (Me)
- 05 while **expanding** in capabilities and footprint. (Ma)
- 06 **Maintain** our entrepreneurial vision. (Ma)
- 07 Be committed to **delivering** value with integrity and ethics to our
customers, suppliers, and shareholders. (Ma)
- 08 Ethics & Compliance
- 09 We are committed to **doing** the right thing. (Ma)
- 10 We **communicate** this commitment to our customers, business partners,
investors, and communities (V)
- 11 by **acting** with honesty in all (Ma)
- 12 that we **do**. (Ma)

(Extracted from the WFS annual report, 2021)

Although the proportion is quite low, mental and behavioral processes have gradually increased. In Excerpts 15 and 16, companies are described not only as Actors of material process but also as Sensors of mental process, which includes the sense of sight (“find” in clause 17 of Excerpt 15 and “see” in clause 19 of Excerpt 16), and Behavior in behavioral process, seen in “listen” and “collaborate” in clauses 15 and 16 of Excerpt 15, respectively. Also, the use of the verb “need” in clause 18 of Excerpt 15 posits somebody’s internal judge as being a necessity for devising solutions, even though a sensor is not made explicit.

Excerpt 15. Increase in the Use of Behavioral and Mental Process

- 15 By **listening** (B)
- 16 and **collaborating**, (B)
- 17 we can **find** out (Ma)(Me)
- 18 what solutions **are needed** next. (Me)

(Extracted from the DC annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 16. Increase in the Use of Mental Process

- 19 We **see** great room (Me)
- 20 to **grow** our business (Ma)

(Extracted from the AE annual report, 2005)

The preceding analysis of process types demonstrates how companies construct their messages through corporate profiles and how they evolve over time. As a result, no changes were discovered in the main process types to be included, but there were differences in which and how many process types were included. The following section focuses on the differences in the participant descriptions that were previously mentioned. Companies may also select the noun group that represents their participants.

7.3.2. Participants in Material Process

Companies use material processes to carry out their actions, and the process consists of three main participants: Actor, Process, and Goal, as illustrated in Excerpt 17.

Excerpt 17. Diagraph of Material Process in Corporate Profile

We	're driving	energy progress essential to a growing, dynamic world.
Actor	Process (active)	Goal

(Extracted from the CV annual report, 2021)

This section investigates how the descriptions of the participants Actor and Process have evolved over three years.

7.3.2.1. Actor

Section 7.3.1 demonstrated that material processes are the most common type in corporate profiles. Table 20 shows the proportions of whether Actor is described or not in material processes used in each year.

Table 20

Actor Proportions and Changes in Material Processes

Type	1998	2005	2021
Actor (implicit)	20% (38)	17% (31)	30% (51)
Actor (explicit)	43% (83)	44% (80)	35% (58)

Note. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of times each type appears, and percentages are calculated using the total number of materials processed. It is important to note that if a sentence contains multiple or parallel material verbs, the software can only count the Actor once. In a clause complex like “...we must continue to find innovative ways to provide the energy...” (CV_2005), three material

verbs (“continue,” “find,” and “provide”) can be found, but Actor only appears once and counts as one.

Both percentages indicate a trend of not specifying Actor in 2021. In contrast, the 2005 company profile clearly mentions Actor. Excerpts 18, 19, and 20 are taken from the 2021 corporate profiles of Coca-Cola, Best Buy, and Cigna, respectively. Material verbs are highlighted in bold in the excerpts below.

Excerpts 18 and 19 have similar structures (“Our ... is to ...”). Material verbs following infinitive “to” do not explicitly describe Actor, but it can be understood from “our” in “our vision” (line 09 in Excerpt 18) and “our purpose” (line 02 in Excerpt 19). In Excerpt 19, the company is backgrounded as a place by being described with a preposition *at* (“At Best Buy” at line 02 in Excerpt 19), and the focus is on the action itself rather than the subject of the action.

Excerpt 18. Backgrounded Actor in Material Process

09 Our vision is to
10 **craft** the brands and choice of drinks that
11 people love,
12 to **refresh** them in body and spirit.

(Extracted from the CC annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 19. Backgrounded Actor as a Place in Material Process

02 At Best Buy, our purpose is
03 to **enrich** lives through technology.

(Extracted from the BB annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 20 also lacks a description of Actor, instead focusing on their actions (“empowering”) and values (“prioritizing”).

Excerpt 20. Backgrounded Actor in a Phrase in Material Process

01 Prioritizing health at all stages of life.

02 **Empowering** generations of growth.

(Extracted from the CN annual report, 2021)

Next, Table 21 depicts who is the subject of the action as Actor within the corporate profile, as well as how the representation has changed over time. The list is organized from top to bottom, from corporate to internal corporate stakeholders, external corporate stakeholders, and things metaphorically referred to as Actors.

Table 21

Distribution of Descriptions for Each Actor

Actor (explicit)	1998	2005	2021
the company	22% (22)	5% (5)	3% (2)
company name	18% (18)	16% (15)	6% (4)
we	18% (18)	36% (33)	55% (38)
inside stakeholders	4% (4)	3% (3)	0% (0)
subsidiaries	7% (7)	5% (5)	6% (4)
third party	1% (1)	2% (2)	0% (0)
everyone, people	2% (2)	3% (3)	9% (6)
things	27% (27)	27% (25)	22% (15)

Note. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of times the description appears, while the percentages represent the ratio of each representation to the total number.

This result demonstrates that Actor is highly likely to be the company itself and its members—i.e., internal stakeholders such as employees and subsidiaries. And

there has been a significant increase in the use of the first-plural pronoun “we” to describe actors, from 18% in 1998 to 55% in 2021. Instead, the practice of referring to oneself by the company name or as “the company” is becoming less common. “The company” has dropped from 22% in 1998 to 3% in 2021, as has the company name, which has fallen from 18% to 6%. The excerpts below are taken from Cardinal Health’s 1998 and 2021 corporate profiles. Material verbs are highlighted in bold, and Actors are underlined. Excerpt 21 describes actors as “Cardinal Health” (line 16) and “the company” (line 17), who aim to take action for employees and shareholders.⁵⁰ In Excerpt 22, however, Actors are referred to as “we.”

Excerpt 21. Appearance of “Company Name” and “the Company” as Actor

- 16 Cardinal Health **employs** approximately 15,000 associates worldwide.
- 17 The company actively **fosters** a spirit of ownership among its employees
and directors
- 18 to **maximize** their focus on
- 19 **creating** long-term value for shareholders.

(Extracted from the CH annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 22. Appearance of “We” as Actor

- 12 Accountable
- 13 we **bring** passion, determination and grit
- 14 to **deliver** on our commitments
- 15 Mission driven
- 16 we **serve** the greater goal of healthcare

(Extracted from the CH annual report, 2021)

⁵⁰ If considered from an ergative interpretation, the company itself is inanimate, and the Agent, such as workers who actually engage in actions, are backgrounded. In this case, the company can also be viewed as a Medium.

Furthermore, the appearance of internal stakeholders as stand-alone actors not included in ‘we’ is decreasing, although in a smaller proportion. In 1998, four cases were identified, including Excerpts 23 and 24. Excerpt 23 refers to the actor as “our noncommissioned sales team,” which assists customers in selecting products, while Excerpt 24 refers to the actor as “our employees,” implying that it is the employees who make the company stand out.

Excerpt 23. Employees as Actor in the 1998 BB Corporate Profile

04 More than 175 million customers visit our 284 stores every year.

05 They depend on our noncommissioned sales team

06 to **help** them

07 choose the right products for their lifestyles.

(Extracted from the BB annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 24. Employees as Actor in the 1998 TD Corporate Profile

06 Our employees **make** the difference!

07 We will invest in the development of our employees

08 and provide a professionally challenging and rewarding environment.

(Extracted from the TD annual report, 1998)

On the other hand, the number of inclusive actors “everyone” and “people” is slightly increasing, rising from about 2% in 1998 to about 9% in 2021. Excerpt 25 depicts “people” as actors who create opportunities by discovering insights for themselves, and Excerpt 26 depicts “everyone” who uses CVS Pharmacy’s services as actors.

Excerpt 25. Appearance of “People” as Actor

01 Our mission is

02 to help people
03 see data in new ways,
04 **discover** insights,
05 **unlock** endless possibilities.

(Extracted from the OC annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 26. Appearance of “Everyone” as Actor

12 Our 148,000 colleagues work hard
13 so that everyone can “expect something extra”
14 whether **entering** one of our stores,
15 **shopping** at CVS.com,
16 or **using** PharmaCare’s services.

(Extracted from the CVS annual report, 2005)

Finally, one approach that has seen no major changes but has remained consistent is to present objects, rather than people or institutions, as Actors. Excerpt 27 depicts Oracle’s application, while Excerpt 28 shows business growth as a catalyst for change. It demonstrates a proclivity to allude to companies in a metonymic manner, though not directly.⁵¹

Excerpt 27. “Things” as Actor in the 1998 OC Corporate Profile

10 Oracle applications **do** more than automate back office business processes.
11 Our sales and service applications **capture** critical customer information
from the front office.

(Extracted from the OC annual report, 1998)

⁵¹ Actor “things” can also be Medium from the perspective of ergative interpretation in transitivity, just like “the company” and “company name.”

Excerpt 28. “Things” as Actor in the 1998 CN Corporate Profile

- 21 The profitable growth of our businesses **makes** career opportunities and personal growth possible

(Extracted from the CN annual report, 1998)

7.3.2.2. Process verb

The component “process verb” is the central element of each process, providing information on the perspectives from which businesses communicate their own initiatives. Table 22 shows the results of lemmatizing what was tagged on MAXQDA as material process, as well as the frequency of use of each verb.⁵²

Table 22

Top 10 Type Frequency of Material Verbs

Rank	1998		2005		2021	
	Verb	Freq.	Verb	Freq.	Verb	Freq.
1	provide	16	provide	9	deliver	8
2	operate	6	create	6	do	8
3	serve	6	deliver	5	create	6
4	make	6	do	4	provide	6
5	deliver	5	serve	4	serve	5
6	help	4	offer	4	make	5
7	enable	4	grow	4	leverage	5
8	maintain	3	expand	3	achieve	5
9	market	3	strengthen	3	help	4
10	improve	3	meet	3	empower	4

⁵² This study used Python scripts to read verbs from files, lemmatize them, and then quantify their occurrences. It also highlighted the top 10 most frequently used material verbs for each year. Python script: https://github.com/Mananorth/Dissertation_ManaKitazawa

Note. The frequency refers to the number of times a word appears in corporate profiles. The total word types of material verbs for each fiscal year are 114 in 1998, 115 in 2005, and 92 in 2021.

First, in all three years, companies are positioned as product/service senders, as evidenced by the high proportion of the use of “provide,” “deliver,” and “serve,” as well as creators, as evidenced by the use of “create” and “make.” The following excerpts demonstrate how each company strives to provide their customers with their distinguishing products or services (for example, “the best value on the products they want” in Excerpt 29, “fuel and services” in Excerpt 30, and “affordable, simple, and connected protection solutions” in Excerpt 31). Process verbs are highlighted in bold, and the participant “Goal” is underlined.

Excerpt 29. Principal Material Verb Identified Across Years

Our Company is devoted to **providing** our customers the best value on the products they want.

(Extracted from the BB annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 30. Principal Material Verb Identified Across Years

As the marketer of choice in the aviation and shipping industries, World Fuel Services **provides** fuel and services at more than 2,500 airports and seaports worldwide.

(Extracted from the WFS annual report, 2005)

Excerpt 31. Principal Material Verb Identified Across Years

We **provide** affordable, simple and connected protection solutions.

(Extracted from the AS annual report, 2021)

The following are the typical uses of material verbs for each year. In 1998, the verbs “operate” in Excerpt 32 and “enable” in Excerpt 33 are more common, used to describe a company’s influence (e.g., “operates five refineries”) and the benefit gained from its structure (e.g., “our structure enables each business to maximize opportunities.”)

Excerpt 32. Material Verb “Operate” in 1998 Corporate Profile

The company currently owns and **operates** five refineries in Texas, Louisiana and New Jersey with a combined throughput capacity of approximately 735,000 barrels per day, making it one of the nation’s largest independent refining companies.

(Extracted from the VEC annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 33. Material Verb “Enable” in 1998 Corporate Profile

19 Growth — Our structure **enables** each business
20 to maximize opportunities vertically within primary markets
21 and expand horizontally into naturally adjacent market spaces.

(Extracted from the UHG annual report, 1998)

In 2005, the verb describing the company’s growth is characteristics, as shown in Excerpt 34 with the verbs “grow” and “expand.”

Excerpt 34. Material Verbs “Grow/Expand” in 2005 Corporate Profile

Our unique spend centric business model gives us strong competitive advantages to **grow** our share of the payments industry and **expand** the category.

(Extracted from the AE annual report, 2005)

Finally, Excerpt 35 of the 2021 corporate profile shows that the companies attempt to encourage stakeholders (e.g., “empower”) and achieve the goal (e.g., “achieve”). Excerpts 36 and 37 use the verb “leverage” to explain how they intend to use their individual skills. In addition, the general verb “do” is used more frequently than in previous years as shown in Excerpt 38.

Excerpt 35. Material Verbs “Empower/Achieve” in 2021 Corporate Profile

We **empower** our global partners to **achieve** great outcomes with technology.

(Extracted from the TD annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 36. Material Verbs “Leverage” in 2021 Corporate Profile

We do that by **leveraging** our unique combination of tech expertise and human touch to meet our customers’ everyday needs, whether they come to us online, visit our stores or invite us into their homes.

(Extracted from the BB annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 37. Material Verbs “Leverage” in 2021 Corporate Profile

Inclusive Diversity & Equity values and **leverages** unique identities with equitable opportunity and rewards.

(Extracted from the AS annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 38. Material Verbs “Do” in 2021 Corporate Profile

We communicate this commitment to our customers, business partners, investors, and communities by acting with honesty in all that we **do**.

(Extracted from the WFS annual report, 2021)

7.3.3. Relational Process

Section 7.3.1 shows that the use of relational processes decreases over the course of three years. This section focuses on the participants in the relational process,

which can be classified into two types: Carrier and Attribute, and Identified and Identifier. The following diagram (Excerpt 39) shows what characteristics the companies (“we”) possess, in this case flexibility.

Excerpt 39. Diagram of Relational Process in Corporate Profile

We	have become	more flexible	to better respond to changing market conditions.
Carrier	Process	Attribute	

(Extracted from the AE annual report, 2004)

In contrast, Excerpt 40 identifies the key to business success by explaining the details (“having a clear vision of the future”). This type of relational process is classified as Identified and Identifier, which can be used interchangeably.

Excerpt 40. Diagram of Relational Process in Corporate Profile

the key to success in business	is	having a clear vision of the future
Identified	Process	Identifier

(Extracted from the DC annual report, 2000)

Although the proportion of relational processes has decreased, they can still be found in corporate profiles. In the following, how the quality changes will be observed based on the results obtained from coding each participant. Table 23 depicts the proportions of main participants (Carrier and Identified) in the two types of relational processes, including the case of not expressing explicitly.

Table 23*Shifts in Participant Proportions within Relational Processes*

Participants	1998	2005	2021
Identified (implicit)	1% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Identified (explicit)	32% (24)	16% (8)	20% (7)
Carrier (implicit)	5% (4)	4% (2)	11% (4)
Carrier (inanimate)	18% (14)	22% (11)	37% (13)
Carrier (explicit)	36% (27)	57% (29)	37% (13)

Note. The numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of codes for each participant, and the percentage indicates the proportion of these frequencies when the total is considered to be 100%.

The findings indicate that the expression of Identified–Identifier relations has gradually decreased, from 32% in 1998 to 16% in 2005 and 20% in 2021. Instead, Carrier–Attribute relations, including the impersonal Carrier, have increased from 59% in 1998 to 85% in 2021.

Excerpt 41, taken from Allstate’s 1998 corporate profile, shows that in 1998, companies used Identified–Identifier relations to show their positions or roles. The clause in Excerpt 41 consists of the participants: “The Allstate Corporation” (Identified), “is” (Process) and “the parent Allstate Insurance Company, the nation’s largest publicly held personal lines insurance company” (Identified).

Excerpt 41. Participants in Relational Process in Case of Identified–Identifier
The Allstate Corporation_{Identified} **is** the parent of Allstate Insurance Company, the nation’s largest publicly held personal lines insurance company_{Identifier}.

(Extracted from the AS annual report, 1998)

Companies are more likely to use Identified–Identifier relationships to explain their objectives or missions than to introduce their market positions. Excerpt 42 is from CCM’s 2005 corporate profile and introduces their goal in relational process, which includes “our goal” (Identified), “is” (Process), and “to be the first choice” (Identifier).

Excerpt 42. Participants in Relational Process in Case of Identified–Identifier
With our innovative product offerings and customer service emphasis, our goal_{Identified} **is to be the first choice**_{Identifier} for entertainment and communications services in every market we serve.

(Extracted from the CCM annual report, 2005)

The Carrier–Attribute type in relational processes is most likely used by businesses to introduce their attitude toward their actions, such as how they should behave to achieve their goals. As a result, this type of process can be observed alongside material processes.

In Excerpt 43, Chevron uses a relational process to introduce the attitudes they have toward their actions, such as “producing safe, reliable energy,” where “we” is a Carrier and “relentlessly focused” is an Attribute. Excerpt 44, from 2021 Dow Company’s corporate profile, expresses the attitudes that “we” should take (“easy, enjoyable, and effective”) when conducting business. Excerpt 45 depicts impersonal participants, “Valero” playing the roles of Carrier, “committed,” and Attribute, expressing their attitudes toward the following action, “advancing the future of energy.”

Excerpt 43. Participants in Relational Process in Case of Carrier–Attribute
At Chevron, we_{Carrier} **are** relentlessly focused_{Attribute} on producing safe, reliable energy now and for the future.

(Extracted from the CV annual report, 2005)

Excerpt 44. Participants in Relational Process in Case of Carrier–Attribute
We_{Carrier} aim to **be** easy, enjoyable and effective_{Attribute} to do business with through all our digital and personal interactions.

(Extracted from the DC annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 45. Participants in Relational Process in Case of Carrier–Attribute
Valero_{Carrier} **is** committed_{Attribute} to advancing the future of energy through innovation, ingenuity and unmatched execution.

(Extracted from the VEC annual report, 2021)

7.3.4. Mental Process

Between 1998 and 2021, mental processes have increased. This process involves sense, knowledge, and thoughts, and the primary participants are Senser, Process, and Phenomenon. Excerpt 46 defines “we” as a Senser with subjective sense, and “our diversity” as a Phenomenon that the Senser considers important.

Excerpt 46. Diagraph of Mental Process in Corporate Profile

we	value	our diversity	as a source of strength
Senser	Process	Phenomenon	

(Extracted from the PZ annual report, 1997)

The following sections explain who appears to have sense, what process Senser is involved in corporate profiles, and how the description has evolved.

7.3.4.1. Senser

Table 24 shows the proportion of each description of Senser and how it changed over three years. The descriptions are nearly identical to those for Actors in 7.3.2.1, with the exception of the absence of “subsidiaries” and the addition of “you.”

Table 24

Distribution of Senser Types in Corporate Profiles

Senser	1998	2005	2021
company name	8% (1)	0% (0)	7% (1)
the company	15% (2)	7% (1)	7% (1)
we	46% (6)	57% (8)	40% (6)
internal stakeholder	8% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)
you	0% (0)	21% (3)	13% (2)
customers	15% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)
third party	8% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)
people	0% (0)	14% (2)	27% (4)
things	0% (0)	0% (0)	7% (1)

Note. The use of mental process was originally at a low rate, so the overall number is small. The numbers in parentheses are the actual occurrences for each Senser, and the percentages represent the ratio to the total for each year.

In any given year, the use of “we” is the highest. Customers are referred to as the Senser in 1998, unlike the others (15%). In Excerpt 47, “they [our customers]” are defined as those who want to buy BestBuy’s products and companies strive to provide the best value for them. Just like Actor, in 1998, the company name and “the company” as Senser were higher than any other year. In Excerpt 48, the company name “Pfizer” appears as a Senser and is proud of its long history as “celebrates” (Process) shows.

Excerpt 47. Appearance of “Customer” as Senser in Mental Process

Our Company is devoted to providing our customers the best value on the products they **want**.

(Extracted from the BB annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 48. Appearance of the Company Name as Senser in Mental Process

In 1999, Pfizer **celebrates** its 150th anniversary.

(Extracted from the PZ annual report, 1998)

The use of “you” and “people” has been more common in 2005 and 2021, but it was not seen in 1998. In Excerpt 49, “you” refers to a Senser who uses the company’s products. Who this second-person plural pronoun refers to varies by clause; for example, “you” could be an employer at line 10, a partner at line 11, or a customer at line 12. Excerpt 50 claims that “people,” like the company, believe in “living mutual” as a Senser.

Excerpt 49. Appearance of “You” as Senser in Mental Process

10 Whether you work at Dow,
11 do business with us or
12 **experience** our materials in your favorite brands,
13 we are relentlessly working
14 to make things better.

(Extracted from the DC annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 50. Appearance of “People” as Senser in Mental Process

It [living mutual]’s not a concept we invented, but one we champion for the simple reason that people **take it for granted** today.

(Extracted from the MM annual report, 2021)

7.3.4.2. Mental verb

Although the proportion of mental process in corporate profiles is relatively low, it has recently increased. Table 25 shows the most commonly used mental verbs in each year.⁵³

Table 25

Top 10 Type Frequency of Mental Verbs

Rank	1998		2005		2021	
	Verb	Freq.	Verb	Freq.	Verb	Freq.
1	believe	2	see	3	value	2
2	focus	2	may know	2	prioritize	2
3	discovers	1	ensure	2	embrace	2
4	celebrate	1	believe	1	focus	1
5	discover	1	committed to	1	look	1
6	is considered	1	expect	1	evaluate	1
7	are focused on	1	find	1	challenge	1
8	find	1	are ... focused	1	anticipate	1
9	want	1	envision	1	focus on	1
10	is recognized	1	can easily determine	1	discover	1

Note. The frequency refers to the number of times a word appears in corporate profiles. The total word types of mental verbs for each fiscal year are 18 in 1998, 15 in 2005, and 25 in 2021.

⁵³ This study also used Python scripts to read verbs from files, lemmatize them, and then quantify their occurrences. It also highlighted the top 10 most frequently used mental verbs for each year. Python script: https://github.com/Mana-north/Dissertation_ManaKitazawa

In 1998, mental verbs related to sight were commonly used, including “focus” and “discover.” In the following excerpts from 1998, mental verbs such as “focus” in Excerpt 51 and “discover” in Excerpt 52 are used to indicate paying attention to market demand and exploring new products, respectively.

Excerpt 51. Mental Verb “Focus on” in 1998 Corporate Profile

Our organization compels each business to **focus on** the needs of its markets.

(Extracted from the UHG annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 52. Mental Verb “Discover” in 1998 Corporate Profile

We **discover**, develop, manufacture, and market innovative medicines for humans and animals.

(Extracted from the PZ annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 53 from a 2005 corporate profile, like the 1998 examples above, uses the mental verb related to sight “see,” but the orientation appears to be future, as “a promising future” (Phenomenon) has shown. Furthermore, another mental verb related to forward thinking, “ensure,” was more frequently used in 2005, as shown in Excerpt 54.

Excerpt 53. Mental Verb “See” in 2005 Corporate Profile

And we **see** a promising future by combining these capabilities with our critical role as a health advocate for consumers and the companies that employ them.

(Extracted from the CN annual report, 2005)

Excerpt 54. Mental Verb “Ensure” in 2005 Corporate Profile

And we are passionately working, along with our bottling partners, to **ensure** the sustainable growth of our business.

(Extracted from the CC annual report, 2005)

In 2021, there are more subjective mental verbs related to judging what is important for businesses. In Excerpt 55, the company believes outcomes are important (see “prioritize”), and in Excerpt 56, what is essential for the company (see “value”) appears in the heading, with details described below.

Excerpt 55. Mental Verb “Prioritize” in 2021 Corporate Profile

Collective Success is achieved through empathy and **prioritizing** enterprise outcomes ahead of individuals.

(Extracted from the AS annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 56. Mental Verb “Value” in 2021 Corporate Profile

What we **value**

Integrity

we hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards

(Extracted from the CH annual report, 2021)

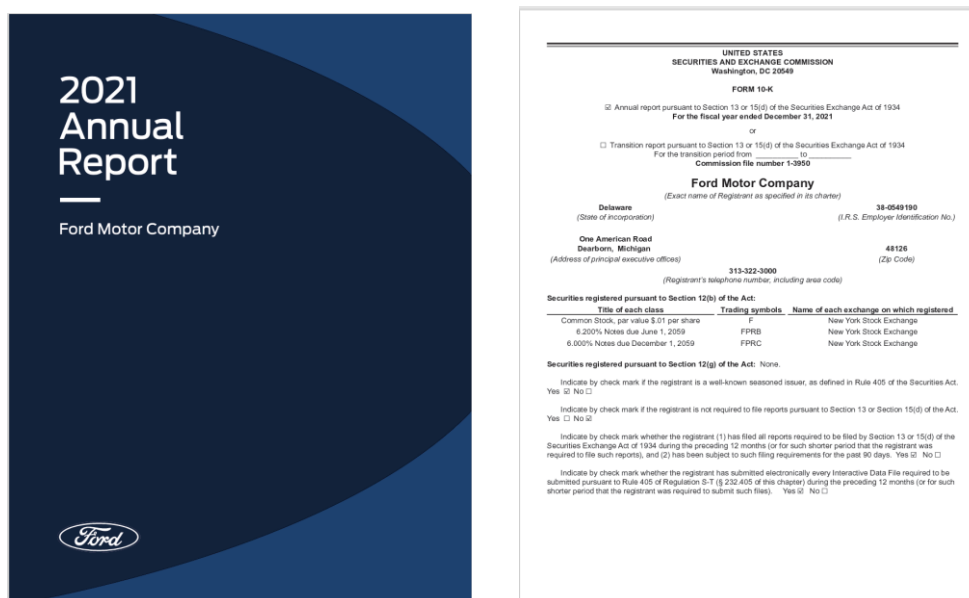
7.4. Discussion

Corporate profiles are primarily defined by descriptions that center on material processes articulating corporate actions, relational processes explaining basic corporate information, and mental processes indicating corporate intentions. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) identified these three as the most important process types in English, implying a link between the corporate and real worlds. Across all time periods examined, material processes were most prevalent, followed by relational and mental processes, indicating a prototypical composition in corporate messaging.

Over the years, there has been a significant shift in the use of relational processes, which points to a decreasing emphasis on explaining a company's own information (such as size, financial status, number of employees, number of stores, and products) in corporate profiles. This shift may be influenced by the evolving role of annual reports, in which corporate profiles are found. Annual reports were a primary source of corporate information in 1998, but by 2021, there were numerous channels for corporate communication (e.g., the company's website and social media). This may have led to a shift in expectations for annual reports and the corporate profiles they contain. Indeed, recently, some companies have not been publishing their own annual reports, instead opting to post only the Form 10-K style submissions to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), as shown in Figure 18.

Figure 18

Ford Motor Company's 2021 Annual Report for SEC



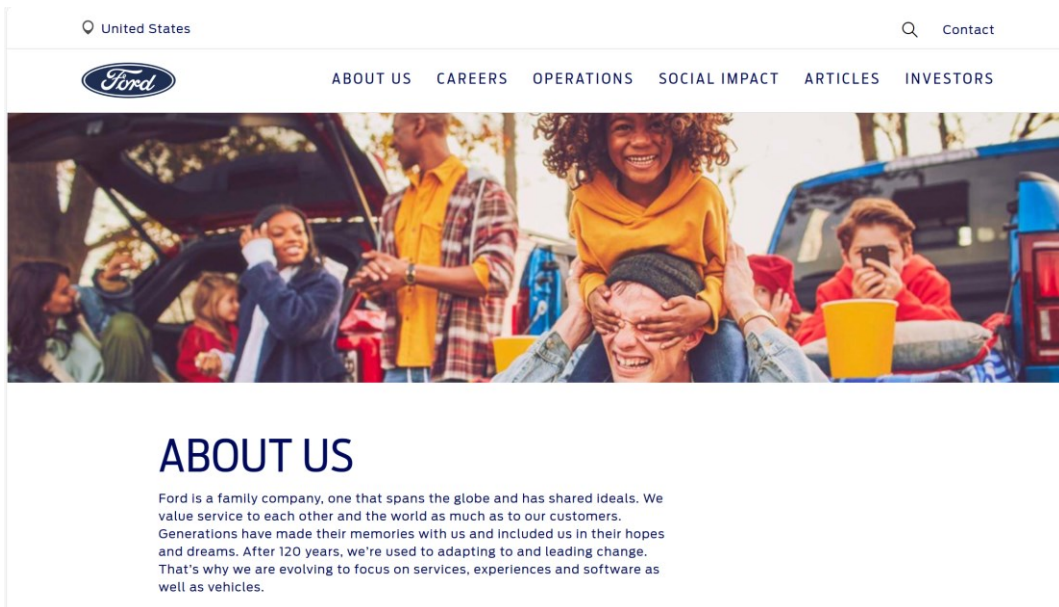
The figure displays two documents side-by-side. On the left is the cover of the '2021 Annual Report' for Ford Motor Company, featuring a dark blue background with the Ford logo at the bottom. On the right is the 'Form 10-K' filing for Ford Motor Company, dated for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2021. The form includes the company's name, address (One American Road, Dearborn, Michigan), and registration details with the SEC. It also lists securities registered pursuant to Section 12(b) of the Act, including Common Stock, 6.200% Notes due June 1, 2059, and 6.000% Notes due December 1, 2059.

In such cases, corporate profiles have disappeared from annual reports and are being published through websites, such as on the “About Us” page, and other means

(Figure 19).⁵⁴ With the proliferation of media outlets, the importance of the descriptive function in corporate profiles has diminished, resulting in a greater emphasis on the company's actual initiatives and activities.

Figure 19

Ford Motor Company's 2023 Corporate Profile on the Website



The slight increase in the use of mental and behavioral processes implies that businesses are being portrayed as entities with perception and physiological functions, indicating a shift toward portraying companies as more human-like and closer to the audience. The changes in actor descriptions also indicate a transition from institutional to human-like entities. The analysis of Actor descriptions within material processes revealed that in 1998, Actors were frequently referred to by the company name or as “the company,” emphasizing actions taken by the institution and sometimes described as distinct from its internal stakeholders, such as employees. Also, the usage of the institution’s name may be identified as the Medium rather than

⁵⁴ On March 24, 2024, the website was adapted from <https://corporate.ford.com/about.html>.

the Actor. This scenario likewise shows a focus on institutions rather than workers as the Agent. However, by 2021, there was a significant increase in the use of “we,” including employees, as well as a tendency to collectively refer to Actors customers or employees as “everyone” or “people.” This shift could be influenced by the rise of online media, which has increased the public nature of corporate messages, potentially affecting the abstraction in descriptions of product and service recipients.

The analysis of process verbs within material processes revealed that verbs like “provide,” “deliver,” and “serve” were frequently used across all years, indicating that companies were consistently positioned as providers. Similarly, the uses of “create” and “make” imply that companies’ roles as creators have remained consistent over time. However, the presence of era-specific verbs indicates that the characteristics required of companies have changed over time. In 1998, verbs like “operate” and “enable” portrayed companies as managers or enablers; in 2005, verbs like “grow” and “expand” portrayed companies as entities in the process of growing; and by 2021, verbs like “empower” and “achieve” described companies as challengers striving for a goal.

The image of companies as challengers is also reflected in the shift in descriptions within the relational process of Identified–Identifier, from explanatory uses of self-labeling to a preference for stating objectives, as seen in expressions like “Our goal is to...” While the overall use of relational processes has decreased over time, there has been an increase in descriptions involving the Carrier–Attribute relationship, signifying more cases in which companies are described in terms of the attitudes they adopt toward their endeavors. This implies that businesses are portrayed as entities with human-like characteristics, capable of acting with emotion and intention.

In the analysis of mental processes, the use of “you” as a Senser in 2005 and 2021 acknowledges the reader’s senses, implying that corporate profiles are perceived as spaces for interaction of a dialogic nature. Furthermore, the shift in verb usage

from verbs such as “see” and “find,” which focus on visual information, to mental verbs such as “prioritize” and “value” in 2021 indicates a shift toward portraying companies as perceivers capable of complex emotions and judgments.

Finally, there appears to be an increase in the proportion of implicit Actors in material processes. This could imply that the Actor, typically the company, is taken for granted, or that the actions described are intended to draw attention to them. Furthermore, there has been a trend towards reducing the word count in corporate profiles, with the language often appearing as part of slogans on websites, demonstrating an increased poetic aspect. This aligns with the claims made by Schmitz (2014) regarding the reduction in verbal explanations due to the rise of multimodal media. While CDA has pointed out that omitting Actors can imply an evasion of responsibility, it is critical to carefully consider era and media changes when investigating the reasons for this trend. Furthermore, the shift from explanatory functions to a focus on actions, combined with the omission of Actors, implies that readers intend to understand companies through the description of their actions. This change suggests that readers’ cognitive load has increased in comparison to when information was obtained directly.

7.5. Summary

In Chapter 7 of this dissertation, the ideational function of language in corporate narratives is explored to understand how companies construct reality through their public profiles. The study examines changes in corporate profiles over three decades (1998, 2005, and 2021), focusing on the ideational function among the three language functions. Unlike previous studies, this research does not primarily focus on the outcomes of the speakers’ choices but investigates how companies represent reality, considering the listener and social context through a comparative analysis over the years.

The methodology involves analyzing corporate profiles using SFL to categorize clauses into process types (material, behavioral, mental, verbal, relational,

existential) and examining changes in the descriptions of participants within these processes. The analysis reveals that corporate profiles predominantly utilize material, relational, and mental processes to convey messages.

Results show a consistent use of material processes, showing company actions such as providing services or creating products. However, there is a significant decrease in relational processes over time, suggesting a reduced emphasis on detailing company information in favor of activities and initiatives. There is also a slight increase in mental and behavioral processes, which portray companies as entities with perception and action capabilities, reflecting a more humanized image.

The study finds shifts in actor descriptions, with a notable increase in the use of “we,” representing a move from institutional to more human-like portrayals. Process verbs such as “provide,” “deliver,” “create,” and “make” remain constant, showing companies as providers and creators. However, there’s an evolution in the verbs over the decades that reflects changing corporate characteristics and roles.

The dissertation discusses these findings within the context of evolving corporate communication, influenced by the rise of online media and changing public expectations. The decrease in relational processes and the humanization of corporate discourse reflect a broader shift towards more interactive, audience-engaged, and human-like corporate communication strategies.

In summary, this chapter demonstrates how corporate profiles have evolved to emphasize action and engagement over descriptive information, reflecting changes in communication channels and audience expectations. The study highlights the importance of considering the social context and media evolution in analyzing corporate discourse and shows a shift towards a more dynamic and humanized portrayal of companies in their public profiles.

Chapter 8 Engagement Evolution in Corporate Profiles

8.1. Introduction

The previous chapter focused on how companies capture and articulate what happens around them or what they do in corporate profiles from different perspectives—i.e., process types. This chapter aims to shed light on how companies have attempted to engage with their audiences over time through the descriptions in their corporate profiles, with a focus on the interpersonal function of language, which is one of three functions (ideational, interpersonal, and textual) that language possesses. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), language is a system network of choices that result in utterances or texts. Attempting to organize how these three functions are performed, their analysis focuses on dialogue to develop a system of mood and modality for realizing interpersonal meanings. This chapter investigates how companies use corporate profiles to engage with readers, including expressions that demonstrate attitudes toward propositions or proposals and the implicit embedding or micro level of company evaluations by observing changes in content and form.

For companies, the corporate profile is not just a tool for conveying information but a narrative platform extensively studied for its potential to attract reader interest, enhance customer purchasing desire, and build trust with their audience. Research has been conducted to elucidate the construction of corporate image and corporate identity (Koller, 2009), including studies focusing on rhetorical language use (Cheney, 1983; Fuoli, 2018; Swales & Rogers, 1995). CDA has also highlighted the shift in corporate discourse from information transmission to a promotional function in line with marketization (Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 1995a; Saichaie, 2011), revealing that companies are implicitly engaging in such linguistic acts.

Martin and White (2005) argued that the selection of ideational meanings can elicit evaluation with an interpersonal function and imply that this function can exist

even when attitudinal lexis does not explicitly express how one feels. They also state that in the absence of such markers, clarifying the analyst's perspective or reading position is necessary. This analysis does not seek to expose the benefits or drawbacks of a specific company's narrative, but rather to reveal how the relationship between speakers and audiences has evolved over time, in tandem with societal and media evolution, through the examination of public language resources, specifically corporate profiles.

8.2. Methodology

This chapter examines how companies attempt to establish their relationships with their audience through looking at corporate profiles for the aforementioned three years (1998, 2005, and 2021), based on Halliday (1985)'s notion of modality. Modality is considered to have an interpersonal function and is responsible for intermediate degrees of meaning—that is, meanings that exist between positive and negative (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Intermediate expressions play an important role in communicating information, maintaining relationships, persuading, and making utterances valid. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) divided modality into two types: modalization and modulation. Intermediate possibilities in a proposition about certainty can be realized by using expressions related to probability (e.g., *may/will* in modal verbs and adverbs like *possibly/probably/certainly*) and usuality (e.g., *sometimes/usually/always*). Modalization refers to the scales of probability and usuality. Additionally, modulation refers to the scale of obligation and inclination in proposals. The intermediate points of obligation can be observed in modal verbs *should / must* and the phrases *allowed to / supposed to / required to*, as well as inclination in modal verb *will* and the phrases *willing to / anxious to / determined to*. This study analyzed the modality of corporate profiles by coding clauses based on the classifications in Table 26.

Table 26*Examples and Expressions in Two Types of Modality*

Type	Meaning	Examples
modalization	probability	will, may certainly, probably, possibly
	usuality	sometimes, usually, always
modulation	obligation	should, must allowed to, supposed to, required to
	inclination	will anxious to, keen to, willing to
	ability	can, be able to

Note. The examples of the modal expressions in this graph are based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 147); “ability” was newly added to the modulation section in reference to Palmer (2014) and Hayakawa (2012), since there were some corporate profiles including expressions related to ability.

For example, Excerpt 57 demonstrates the company’s orientation (“is devoted to”) for the proposal that it provides the best value on its products. In this step, only the company’s attitudes toward the propositions and proposals are examined.⁵⁵

Excerpt 57. Modulation in Corporate Profile

Our Company is devoted to [providing our customers the best value on the products they want]_{proposal}.

(Extracted from the BB annual report, 1998)

⁵⁵ Fuoli (2017) examined stance expressions in addition to modality to investigate how companies position or identify themselves in relation to their audience via annual reports and CSR reports. In the analysis, stance expression was classified into two types (grammatical stance and lexical stance), and Fuoli focused solely on the former type because lexical stance is difficult to identify due to its highly context-dependent nature.

The above modality analysis was based on the degree of commitment to the propositions or proposals, but in the following step, broader interpersonal aspects of corporate profiles are considered using the idea of appraisal theory.⁵⁶ Martin and White (2005) defined “appraisal” as an interpersonal system at the level of discourse semantics that includes three categories—engagement, attitude, and graduation—and attempt to improve the system of interpersonal function in SFL. Because engagement and graduation refer solely to the presence of others in discourse and the degree or clarity of emotions and feelings, this study focuses primarily on attitude. Attitude can be classified into three types of feeling: affect, judgment, and appreciation. Affect refers to emotional reactions to things and events, judgment evaluates behaviors using various normative principles, and appreciation refers to the value of things.

Because it is uncommon for companies to demonstrate their affect in corporate profiles, the concepts of judgment and appreciation are mainly employed in this analysis. First, all expressions relating to company evaluations⁵⁷ are coded. For example, Excerpts 58 and 59 show that companies have a positive attitude toward

⁵⁶ Modality, as explored in linguistic studies, refers to the expression of personal feelings, attitudes, value judgments, or assessments within propositional content (Biber et al., 1999). This concept is alternatively labeled as “stance,” encompassing a variety of linguistic resources for expressing opinions. Scholars have employed several terms to describe these nuances, including “modality” for opinion expression (Halliday, 1994), “evaluation” for judgment aspects (Hunston & Thompson, 2000), and “appraisal” for evaluative language (White, 2001). Additionally, the linguistic manifestation of modality spans a broad spectrum of functions such as polarity, evidentiality, hedging, concession, intensification, attribution, and consequentiality. These terms highlight the diverse lexico-grammatical strategies through which speakers or writers articulate their subjective positioning or assessments, demonstrating the terminological and conceptual richness in the study of modality (Orta, 2010; White, 2003). These interpersonal meanings (Halliday, 1994) are used to manage interpersonal roles and relationships, elicit empathy, and negotiate solidarity and alignment (Fuoli, 2012).

⁵⁷ Du Bois (2007) maintained that stance plays an interpersonal role in speakers’ constructing their own identity while also demonstrating (dis)alignment with listeners. Evaluation is similar to stance and serves an interpersonal function (Bednarek, 2006; Martin & White, 2005). According to Merkl-Davies and Koller (2012), companies use evaluation to convey specific attitudes toward themselves; their audiences, such as customers and suppliers; and social, economic, or political issues.

“the highest ethical standards” and “affordable, simple, and connected protection solutions,” respectively.

The evaluation term is in italics, and the phrase including the term is underlined. In this case, the nature of what should be the posture (“standards”) and the services provided (“solutions”) indicates the evaluation of the company, and because explicit markers such as those found in modal expressions cannot be confirmed, identifying appraisal expressions must be done qualitatively due to a lack of explicit markers indicating attitudes.

Excerpt 58. Appraisal in Corporate Profile

we hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards

(Extracted from the CH annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 59. Appraisal in Corporate Profile

We provide affordable, simple and connected protection solutions.

(Extracted from the AS annual report, 2021)

In alignment with the characteristics of corporate profiles, appraisal expressions are coded into two categories, based on ‘judgment’ and ‘appreciation’ from appraisal theory: the evaluation that society demands from companies as a whole, and the evaluation that companies should seek on their own. Excerpt 58 demonstrates the company’s stance toward social requirements rather than its distinctiveness and implicitly expresses agreement with being ethical. In Excerpt 59, the company, taking into account the audience, such as customers, expresses an affirmative attitude toward a shared ideal aspect of their own products/services: “affordable, simple, and connected.” Thus, the two categories listed below will be coded.

a. societal judgment:

refers to expressions that align with societal expectations and norms, such as ethical standards

b. self-appraisal

could be used for expressions where companies assess their unique offerings or values

Next, in *societal judgment*, this chapter considers how required characteristics change over time by categorizing the codes into eleven categories, as shown in Table 27.

Aside from observing the change in socially required characteristics, this chapter investigates the form of interpersonal aspects in corporate profiles using the coded data provided above. There are five different forms for expressing their attitudes. The types and examples are provided in Table 28, and the coding process is based on them.

Finally, this chapter focuses on the first- and second-person plural pronouns, which have an interpersonal function (Chen, 2018). As for the first-person plural pronoun, companies use “we” in corporate profiles in three ways. First, they use the *exclusive* “we” to refer to internal stakeholders (shown in Excerpt 60). Second, they use the *management-exclusive* “we” when referring to top managers only (so, in this case, other employees are not included) (Excerpt 61). Finally, companies use the *inclusive* “we,” which refers to both companies and audience. An example of a second-person plural pronoun is shown in Excerpt 62. Every use of the first- and second-person plural pronouns is marked in bold.

Excerpt 60. Exclusive “We” in Corporate Profile

We want to unlock **our** full potential ... to take Merck to the next level

... by creating superior value for **our** patients, customers, colleagues, and society.

(Extracted from the MC annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 61. Management-Exclusive “We” in Corporate Profile

We’ve implemented extensive training courses for **our** employees, and **we**’ve also given them the tools they need to succeed.

(Extracted from the CCM annual report, 2004)

Excerpt 62. Second-person Plural Pronoun “You” in Corporate Profile

On the following pages, we invite **you** to learn more about these innovations and meet the people who helped bring them to life.

(Extracted from the NLI annual report, 2004)

To summarize, the analysis in this chapter is divided into three steps: 1) examining the use of modality toward propositions or proposals, 2) what companies evaluate and how the way of describing has changed, and 3) the use of first- and second-person pronouns. All steps take into account how companies attempt to engage with their public audiences.

Table 27*Subjects of 'Societal Judgment' Evaluations in Corporate Profiles*

Subject of Evaluation	Examples
strategic partnership	<u>Strategic business partnerships with customers, vendors and suppliers</u> produce benefits for all of our business partners. (TD_1998)
community, social impact	In everything we do, we strive for <u>positive impact on society and the planet</u> . (DC_2021)
employee, team focus, workplace emphasis	We will invest in <u>the development of our employees</u> and provide <u>a professionally challenging and rewarding environment</u> . (TD_1998)
organizational excellence, quality, operational excellence	we embrace differences to drive <u>the best outcomes</u> (CH_2021)
financial performance, shareholder value, financial goals	The mission of World Fuel Services Corporation is to sustain <u>profitable growth for its shareholders over the long term</u> (WFS_1998)
sustainability, future orientation	Embrace <u>sustainable, responsible growth</u> while expanding in capabilities and footprint. (WFS_2021)
inclusivity, diversity	We champion <u>a fully inclusive workforce</u> that reflects the world in which we do business, because it's the right thing and smart thing (DC_2021)

innovation, performance, growth, adaptability, change	we develop <u>new ways of thinking, operating and serving customers</u> (CH_2021)
customer-centric values, consumer focus	Increasing <u>our focus on consumers</u> is now the basis of everything we do, and the foundation of the company's vision and strategy pyramid. (FM_1998)
corporate responsibility, ethics, values, integrity	Be committed to delivering <u>value with integrity and ethics</u> to our customers, suppliers, and shareholders. (WFS_2021)
market position, size, global presence, customer base, leadership	Ford Motor Company's vision for the future is to deliver superior shareholder returns and to become <u>the world's leading consumer company</u> that provides automotive products and services. (FM_1998)

Note. The underline in the examples indicates the phrase indicating appraisal, and the text within parentheses shows which company's corporate profiles and from when.

Table 28

Forms of Evaluation and Examples in Corporate Profiles

Type of Form	Examples
noun phrase	we bring <u>passion, determination and grit</u> to deliver on our commitments (CH_2021)

	To achieve this vision, we are guided by the five interlocking values of our Guiding Principles – <u>Safety</u> , Environment, Community, Employees and Governance. (VEC_2021)
	MassMutual is <u>a life insurance company of impeccable integrity, indisputable financial strength and operational excellence</u> . (MM_1998)
verb phrase	<u>Collaborate early and often</u> to develop and implement comprehensive solutions and share learnings. (AS_2021)
	Our mission is to <u>help people see data in new ways, discover insights, unlock endless possibilities</u> . (OC_2021)
	At Best Buy, our purpose is to <u>enrich lives</u> through technology. (BB_2021)
	Our business continues to <u>evolve</u> based on ever-changing market conditions. (TD_1998)
prepositional phrase	AIG companies serve commercial, institutional and individual customers <u>through the most extensive worldwide property-casualty and life insurance networks of any insurer</u> . (AIG_2005)
adjective phrase	<u>Sustainable</u> (DC_2021)
	McKesson’s mission and focus are <u>clear</u> (MK_1998)
adverb phrase	<u>Each day of the year</u> , McKesson delivers prescription pharmaceuticals, over-the-counter drugs and medical-surgical supplies to 45,000 customers, for use by patients in all 50 states. (MK_1998)

Note. The underlining in the examples indicates the phrase signaling appraisal, and the text within parentheses shows from which company’s corporate profile the example was taken and what year it was published. In this analysis, each part of speech is classified as a phrase even when it appears alone (e.g., evolve, sustainable).

8.3. Results

8.3.1. Modality

Corporate profiles can be published in any media—printed or online—and writers are, to some extent, conscious of their audience. Halliday (1985) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) focused on speakers' attitudes toward listeners as an interpersonal function of language and suggests two categories of modality (modalization and modulation), which can express intermediate degrees between positive and negative and which plays an important role in our communication. Table 29 shows the results gained from coding corporate profiles based on modality; proportions are calculated from the number of all sentences in each year.

Table 29

Three-Year Trends in Modality Use within Corporate Profiles

Type	Meaning	1998	2005	2021
modalization	probability	9% (8)	5% (5)	2% (2)
	usuality	3% (3)	1% (1)	3% (3)
modulation	obligation	3% (3)	1% (1)	1% (1)
	inclination	10% (9)	6% (6)	9% (9)
	ability	0% (0)	2% (2)	2% (2)
SUM		26% (23)	16% (15)	18% (17)

Note. Each number in parentheses represents the number of sentences, including the expression of modality, and the percentage is calculated using the total number of sentences in each year (1998: 88, 2005: 96, 2021: 97). In this analysis, headlines and titles are counted as sentences.

According to the data, the proportion of companies using modality expressions in their corporate profiles has decreased from 26% in 1998 to 16% in 2005 and 18% in 2021. Even in 1998, the highest of the three years, the use of modality appears to

be uncommon, accounting for less than 30% of all sentences. This may indicate that corporate profiles are not where companies express their subjective attitudes or that they may use another method of communicating their stance to the audience.

Considering the proportion of modality in each year, any three years use the modality expression inclination the most (1998: 10%, 2005: 6%, and 2021: 9%). The excerpts below provide examples of the inclination, which are bolded. Excerpt 63 is from 1998's corporate profile, and "will" demonstrates the company's commitment to its employees by providing them with a comfortable environment. This usage of "will" for inclination appears four times⁵⁸ in 1998 and is also regarded as probability, which reduces the proposition's certainty. The "will" in Excerpt 63 was also coded as probability and tends to be ambiguous. Excerpt 64, from 2005, uses the phrase "remain committed to," indicating the company's willingness to be "the easiest pharmacy" for customers. In 2021, the use of "committed to" and "want to" as inclination has become common, and Excerpt 65 is an example of using "want to" to indicate how the companies desire to be.

Excerpt 63. Inclination in 1998 Corporate Profile

We **will** invest in the development of our employees and provide a professionally challenging and rewarding environment.

(Extracted from the TD annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 64. Inclination in 2005 Corporate Profile

We **remain committed to** being the easiest pharmacy for customers to use.

(Extracted from the CVS annual report, 2005)

⁵⁸ In 1998, other modality expressions for inclination included "continue to," "intend to," and "dedicate to."

Excerpt 65. Inclination in 2021 Corporate Profile

We **want to** become the most innovative, customer-centric, inclusive and sustainable materials science company in the world.

(Extracted from the DC annual report, 2021)

Table 29 also shows a decrease in the use of the modalization *probability*, which refers to the company's attitudes toward proposition certainty, from 9% in 1998 to 5% in 2005 and 2% in 2021. In 1998 and 2005, the probability proportion was the second highest. In Excerpt 66, companies highlight the possibility that satisfying customers makes a company's reputation. Excerpt 67 is an example from 2005, and the use of "may" indicates the company's perception of how well the general public knows the company. The following sentence, "But we are so much more," demonstrates that the company's general image is insufficient to fully understand the company and encourages readers to read the rest of the annual report.

Excerpt 66. Probability in 1998 Corporate Profile

Satisfying customers is the key to meeting employee needs and shareholder expectations, and **will** enable CIGNA to build on our reputation as a financially strong and highly respected company.

(Extracted from the CN annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 67. Probability in 2005 Corporate Profile

You **may** know us simply as Coca-Cola—the world's most valuable brand and a global icon. But we are so much more.

(Extracted from the CC annual report, 2005)

8.3.2. Appraisal in Corporate Profiles

The previous section revealed that explicitly expressing their attitude toward a proposition or proposal through modality is not a major tool for companies to

demonstrate their stance in relation to public readers. Thus, this section attempts to analyze the data in a more context-dependent manner in order to reveal the company's attitude embedded in the discourse.

Codes were assigned to the areas in which the companies were perceived as showing a positive stance with the reader in mind, and the codes were further divided into *societal judgment* and *self-appraisal* codes, the results of which are shown in Table 30.

Table 30

Three-Year Appraisal Trends in Corporate Profiles

Type of Appraisal	1998	2005	2021
self appraisal	42 (20%)	59 (37%)	76 (42%)
societal judgment	164 (78%)	97 (61%)	98 (55%)

Note. The percentage in parentheses represents the proportion of two individual types among the expressions that reflect the company's attitudes. There were also evaluations about the surrounding environment (1998: 5 (2%), 2005: 2 (1%), 2021: 5 (3%)), but they are not included for discussion due to their small proportion.

The findings show that in 1998, company messages heavily focused on the outside world and included societal judgement (78%). There is a significant gap when compared to the proportion of self-appraisal (20%); however, in 2021, companies tend to contain both types of stances and try to show their own evaluation of their company (42%, self-appraisal).

Excerpt 68 is the entire Cigna corporate profile from 1998, with italics referring to self-appraisal and underlining corresponding to societal judgment. The company's attitudes toward what they should be as a healthcare and insurance company are only described at the beginning ("the best at helping our customers enhance and extend

their lives and protect their financial security”). Although there is no explicit indication of the company’s positive attitude toward it, the adjective “the best” in the phrase indicates that the following phrase refers to what the company wishes to be. In terms of societal judgment, businesses describe what the general public, including stakeholders such as shareholders and customers, expects of them, such as “satisfying customers,” “financially strong and highly respected company,” and “profitability,” rather than their distinguishing characteristics. These are traits required for not only Cigna, but all companies in society at that time.⁵⁹

Excerpt 68. Appraisal Expressions in Cigna’s 1998 Corporate Profile

Our Vision

At CIGNA, we intend to be *the best at helping our customers enhance and extend their lives and protect their financial security*. Satisfying customers is the key to meeting employee needs and shareholder expectations, and will enable CIGNA to build on our reputation as a financially strong and highly respected company.

We believe:

- Providing customers with products and services they value more than those of our competitors is critical to our success;
- Talented, well-trained, committed and mutually supportive people — working to the highest standards of performance and integrity — are what make success possible;
- The profitable growth of our businesses makes career opportunities and personal growth possible; and
- Profitability is the ultimate measure of our success.

(Extracted from the CN annual report, 1998)

⁵⁹ Excerpt 68 is presented in a form as close to the original text as possible.

In 2021 profiles, however, companies are more likely to include both types of attitudes. Excerpt 69 is Cigna’s 2021 corporate profile, which contains significantly less content than Excerpt 68 from 1998. In this excerpt, the company acknowledges what it can offer (“health at all stages of life”) and what it can do (“empower generations of growth”) as a healthcare and insurance company and expresses a positive attitude toward them.⁶⁰

Excerpt 69. Appraisal Expressions in Cigna’s 2021 Corporate Profile

Prioritizing *health at all stages of life*.

Empowering generations of growth.

(Extracted from the CN annual report, 2021)

Also, Excerpt 70 from Chevron’s 2021 corporate profile focuses primarily on the ideal characteristics of their products and services (“lower carbon energy” and “energy progress,” for example), and by describing them with “deliver,” “lead,” and “drive,” it implies a positive attitude toward the readers. The underlined items are also what companies believe are important, but this applies to any company in society, not only Chevron.

Excerpt 70. Frequent Use of Self-Appraisal in the 2021 CV Corporate Profile

leveraging our strengths to deliver *lower carbon energy* to a growing world

Our capabilities, assets and customers are distinct advantages.

We are building on these strengths as we aim to lead in *lower carbon intensity oil, products and natural gas* and advance *new products and solutions that reduce the carbon emissions of major industries*. We’re driving *energy progress* essential to a growing, dynamic world

(Extracted from the CV annual report, 2021)

⁶⁰ Excerpt 70 is also presented in a form as close to the original text as possible.

8.3.2.1. The Evolution of Corporate Values

What companies value in relation to the society in which they operate has evolved over time. This section examines the content and evolution of the previous section's code *societal judgment*. Table 31 displays the findings on what companies care about in society each year. It demonstrates that in 1998, companies focused more on what internal stakeholders, such as shareholders and employees, desired, whereas in 2021, companies became more conscious of external stakeholders, such as customers and society at large.

Table 31

Change in Types of Societal Judgment in Corporate Profiles

Type of Societal Judgment	1998	2005	2021
a) strategic partnerships	3% (6)	1% (1)	3% (3)
b) community, social impact	1% (1)	1% (1)	3% (4)
c) employee, team focus, workplace emphasis	9% (16)	3% (3)	5% (6)
d) organizational excellence, quality, operational excellence	14% (26)	22% (24)	23% (27)
e) financial performance, shareholder value, financial goals	11% (21)	5% (5)	4% (5)
f) sustainability, future orientation	1% (1)	5% (6)	8% (9)
g) inclusivity, diversity	1% (1)	0% (0)	5% (6)
h) innovation, performance, growth, adaptability, change	7% (12)	12% (13)	13% (15)
i) customer-centric values, consumer focus	5% (10)	6% (7)	10% (12)
j) corporate responsibility, ethics, values, integrity	5% (9)	0% (0)	7% (8)

k) market position, size, global presence, customer base, leadership	35% (64)	39% (43)	10% (11)
l) others	9% (16)	6% (7)	8% (9)

Note. The numbers in parentheses represent the count of codes assigned to each type within *societal judgment*, and the percentage is calculated using the total number of type codes in each year.

Since this is a corporate profile introduces a company, the proportion of companies introducing their general excellence and positive attitude toward it is the most frequently seen in any year (“d) organizational excellence, quality, operational excellence” 1998: 14%, 2005: 22%, 2021: 23%). As “exceptional” in Excerpt 71 demonstrates, unlike *self-appraisal*, the description is so broad that it cannot be used to identify a specific company. However, general society expects companies to be “exceptional,” and companies recognize this and include it in their profiles. The coded words and phrases are underlined in the following excerpts.

Excerpt 71. Societal Judgment Regarding “Organizational Excellence”

Through these people, this structure and the core assets of our company, we believe the future of UnitedHealth Group will be d)exceptional.

(Extracted from the UHG annual report, 1998)

The characteristics of 1998 are “c) employee, team focus, workplace emphasis,” “e) financial performance, shareholder value, financial goals,” and “k) market position, size, global presence, customer base, leadership,” which are in greater proportion than the other two years. Excerpt 72 from 1998 highlights a company’s positive attitude towards employees as their “number one asset,” emphasizing the importance of continuous development and a rewarding work

environment. In 1998, World Fuel Services prioritized shareholder value (“profitable growth” and “over the long term”), leadership (“a global leadership position” and “a regional leadership position”), excellence (“exceptional value”), and employees (“a corporate environment that...”) (see Excerpt 73).

Excerpt 72. Societal Judgment Regarding “Employee”

- e) Continued development of all employees, our number one asset.
- Providing c) a challenging, rewarding work environment that facilitates creative thinking, teamwork and open communications.

(Extracted from the UHG annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 73. Societal Judgment in the 1998 WFS Corporate Profile

Mission Statement

The mission of World Fuel Services Corporation is to sustain e) profitable growth for its shareholders e) over the long term; to maintain a global leadership position in aviation and marine fueling services and k) a regional leadership position in oil recycling by providing d) exceptional value to customers and suppliers; and to maintain c) a corporate environment that provides employees with opportunities for personal and professional advancement.

(Extracted from the WFS annual report, 1998)

The profiles in 2005 and 2021 are similar, with the exception of “g) inclusivity, diversity” and “j) corporate responsibility, ethics, values, integrity.” In 2021, certain elements of the report, such as focusing on shareholder value and providing financial achievement, have disappeared, and “f) sustainability, future orientation,” “g) inclusivity, diversity,” “h) innovation, performance, growth, adaptability, change,” and “j) corporate responsibility, ethics, values, integrity” have emerged. Excerpt 74 contains Cardinal Health’s entire corporate profile, and the company expresses

positive attitudes towards these elements under the main heading “what we value.” Each subheading explains what the company believes is important (such as “Integrity”) and includes specifics (“we hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards”). In this example, the first, “Integrity,” corresponds to the code “j) corporate responsibility, ethics, values, integrity,” the second, “Inclusive,” to the code “g) inclusivity, diversity,” the third, “Innovative” to the code “h) innovation, performance, growth, adaptability, change,” and the fourth, “Accountable,” to the code “j) corporate responsibility, ethics, values, integrity.”

Excerpt 74. Societal Judgment’ in the 2021 CH Corporate Profile

What we value

j) Integrity

we hold ourselves to j) the highest ethical standards

g) Inclusive

we g) embrace differences to drive d) the best outcomes

h) Innovative

we develop h) new ways of thinking, operating and serving customers

j) Accountable

we bring d) passion, determination and grit to deliver on our commitments

Mission driven

we serve the greater goal of healthcare

(Extracted from the CH annual report, 2021)

8.3.3. Change in Expression of Appraisal

This section looks at the ways companies communicate their attitudes and how those ways have changed over time. Unlike modality, which speakers express themselves relatively explicitly through modal verbs or adverbs, appraisal in the preceding sections can take any form or size. Even alone noun as a heading can be interpreted as an indication of companies’ attitudes, as in Excerpt 74 (for example,

“Integrity” and “Inclusive”). Table 32 displays the patterns of form showing attitudes in corporate profiles, as well as their proportions over the three years.

Table 32

Change in Forms of Evaluation in Corporate Profiles

Form of Appraisal	1998	2005	2021
noun phrase	64% (138)	54% (86)	56% (113)
verb phrase	22% (48)	29% (46)	30% (61)
prepositional phrase	10% (22)	16% (26)	7% (14)
adjective phrase	3% (7)	1% (2)	5% (11)
adverb phrase	1% (2)	0% (0)	1% (2)

Note. The numbers in parentheses represent the count of codes assigned to each form, and the percentage is calculated using the total number of type codes in each year.

In any year, the most common way for companies to express their attitudes through their corporate profiles is the form *noun phrase*, which includes combination of noun and adjective or modification. This way accounted for 64% in 1998, 54% in 2005, and 56% in 2021. In the examples below, underlining refers to the coded parts of this analysis, and italics show specific positive appraisal elements. Excerpt 75 from 1998 shows the company’s positive attitude towards “superior shareholder returns” (noun with adjective). The phrase “superior shareholder returns,” even without descriptions such as “vision ...is to...” and “deliver,” accompanied by a positive adjective, suggests the company’s attitude. The phrase “the world’s leading...” (noun with adjective and modification) includes a positive modification of the noun, indicating the company’s desired image.⁶¹ Similarly, in Excerpt 76 from 2005, each of the three

⁶¹ The verbs “deliver” and “become” followed by the codes in Excerpt 75 represent material and relational processes, respectively. The former code corresponds

underlined noun phrases includes a positive adjective or noun, such as “innovative,” “development,” and “quality,” which refer to what companies value in relation to their audience.⁶² Excerpt 77 from 2021, like Excerpts 75 and 76, shows that the company values innovation in their service through “innovative solutions and logistics” (adjective + noun).

Excerpt 75. Noun Phrase Appraisal in the 1998 FM Corporate Profile
Ford Motor Company’s vision for the future is to deliver superior shareholder returns and to become the world’s leading consumer company that provides automotive products and services.

(Extracted from the FM annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 76. Noun Phrase Appraisal in the 2005 CV Corporate Profile
Together, we must continue to find innovative ways to provide the energy that will fuel economic development and improve the quality of life for people everywhere.

(Extracted from the CV annual report, 2005)

Excerpt 77. Noun Phrase Appraisal in the 2021 WFS Corporate Profile
Create value for our business partners by delivering innovative solutions and logistics through a global team of local professionals.

(Extracted from the WFS annual report, 2021)

to Goal in the material process, while the latter corresponds to Attribute in the relational process. In 1998, the proportion of the use of “noun with adjective” relating to relational processes (29%) was higher than 2021 (16%).

⁶² Excerpt 76 further reveals the company’s stance through “fuel” and “improve,” therefore, codes are also assigned to the verb phrase (“fuel economic development” and “improve the quality of life”).

Next, what distinguishes 2005 is the method of expressing companies' attitudes through *prepositional phrases* (16%). Excerpt 78, "in 200 markets across six continents" (prepositional phrase), appears to be objective information about the company, but it is based on the company's assumption that the number or size of the company is critical and that the audience shares this belief.

Excerpt 78. Prepositional Phrase Appraisal in the 2005 FM Corporate Profile
Ford Motor Company, a global automotive industry leader based in Dearborn, Michigan, manufactures and distributes automobiles in 200 markets across six continents.

(Extracted from the FM annual report, 2005)

Finally, in 2021, the proportion of the code *verb phrase* was higher than any other year (30%). In Excerpt 79, the company's attitudes are embedded in the combination of the verb "embrace" and its direct object "differences," and unlike a noun phrase, which has a positive adjective or noun, the company's stance cannot be determined without the verb. The also applies to Excerpts 80 and 81, where the word "opportunities" alone cannot convey the company's positive attitude. The verb "pursue" is critical, and the combination effectively communicates the company's intention of "pursuing opportunities." In Excerpt 81, the verb "empower" demonstrates the company's attitudes toward its partners, and the audience values this commitment.

Excerpt 79. Verb Phrase Appraisal in the 2021 CH Corporate Profile
we embrace differences to drive the best outcomes

(Extracted from the CH annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 80. Verb Phrase Appraisal in the 1998 CV Corporate Profile

pursuing opportunities...

(Extracted from the CV annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 81. Verb Phrase Appraisal in the 2021 TD Corporate Profile

We empower our global partners to achieve great outcomes with technology.

(Extracted from the TD annual report, 2021)

In this section, companies tend to embed their own evaluations in noun phrases and implicitly indicate their evaluations by offering products and services associated with those evaluations. Recently, the practice of implicitly embedding their evaluation into verbs such as “empower” and “embrace” has gained popularity.

8.3.4. First- and Second-Person Plural Pronouns

When examining the interpersonal function of discourse, the way the Actors are described is crucial to revealing the relationship between writers and readers. This section focuses particularly on the first- and second-person plural pronouns “we” and “you,” coding the data—including any cases of pronouns such as “our” and “your”—per clause. Regarding the first-person plural pronoun, three subcategories were considered: management-exclusive “we,” exclusive “we,” and inclusive “we.”

Whether “we” is management-exclusive or not mostly depends on whether or not it includes non-manager employees in the description. Table 33 shows the proportion of the four types of personal pronouns over the three years.

Table 33*First- and Second-Person Plural Pronoun Use: Three-Year Trends*

Pronoun	1998	2005	2021
you	1% (1)	2% (4)	1% (2)
management-exclusive “we”	2% (3)	3% (6)	1% (2)
exclusive “we”	24% (40)	31% (59)	42% (74)
inclusive “we”	0% (0)	1% (2)	2% (3)

Note. This analysis focuses on the personal plural pronoun appearing as Actor in material processes and Senser in mental processes (refer to Tables 21, 24). The numbers in parentheses indicate the counts for each pronoun, with percentages derived from the aggregate counts of all Actors and Sensers (1998: 166, 2005: 189, 2021: 178).

Across time, the exclusive “we” appeared more often, as evidenced by the figure of 42% for the years 2021. Excerpts 82 and 83 reflect the frequent use of the exclusive “we”; in 1998, the agent of the verb, “Merck & Co., Inc.,” was replaced with the exclusive “we,” referring to the company in general. In the excerpts below, the relevant sections of the personal plural pronoun are underlined.

Excerpt 82. Company Name Reference in Corporate Profile
Profile

Merck & Co., Inc. is a global, research-driven pharmaceutical company that discovers, develops, manufactures, and markets a broad range of human and animal health products, directly and through our joint ventures, and provides pharmaceutical benefit services through Merck-Medco Managed Care (Ma).

(Extracted from the MC annual report, 1998)

Excerpt 83. Exclusive “We” Reference in Corporate Profile

Looking forward, our priorities are clear: **We** want to unlock our full potential to take Merck to the next level by creating superior value for our patients, customers, colleagues, and society.

(Extracted from the MC annual report, 2021)

Other personal plural pronouns were not used quite as often; the proportion is, at most, 3%. The use of “you” and management-exclusive “we” can be seen slightly more frequently in 2005 than in the other years. In Excerpt 84, from the Coca-Cola Company’s report, the second-person plural pronoun “you” (2%) refers to readers, and the company says that through its annual reports it introduces readers to facts about the company they may not know. The second appearance of “you” appears as a Senser of mental process with a mental verb, “know.” This can be applied to the use of “you” in Excerpt 85 with a mental verb, “learn.” Excerpts 86 and 87 demonstrate the management-exclusive “we”; this pronoun differentiates the writers, or the representatives of the company, not only from the readers but also from internal stakeholders— “employees.” In both examples, “we” is described as a provider of extensive training courses (Excerpt 86) or as providing a motivating company culture (Excerpt 87), with the subordinate employees as receivers.

Excerpt 84. Second-Person Plural Pronoun Reference in Corporate Profile

Let us introduce you to The Coca-Cola Company **you** may not know.

(Extracted from the CC annual report, 2005)

Excerpt 85. Second-Person Plural Pronoun Reference in Corporate Profile

On the following pages, we invite **you** to learn more about these innovations and meet the people who helped bring them to life.

(Extracted from the NLI annual report, 2004)

Excerpt 86. Management-Exclusive “We” Reference in Corporate Profile
We’ve implemented extensive training courses for **our** employees, and **we**’ve also given them the tools they need to succeed.

(Extracted from the CCM annual report, 2004)

Excerpt 87. Management-Exclusive “We” Reference in Corporate Profile
Creating a company culture that inspires performance excellence among **our** employees: a people-centric performance culture

(Extracted from the DC annual report, 2005)

The category *inclusive* “we” could be observed in 2021; this type of “we” never appeared in 1998. In Excerpt 88, “our,” used with the noun phrase “human existence,” refers to all of humanity, regardless of the difference between writers and readers. The same is true of the first-person plural pronoun “our,” accompanied by “planet,” in Excerpt 89. The planet is not the company’s but belongs to all living things.

Excerpt 88. Inclusive “We” Reference in Corporate Profile
Living mutual has always been at the core of **our** human existence

(Extracted from the MM annual report, 2021)

Excerpt 89. Inclusive “We” Reference in Corporate Profile
Count on us to put our values—integrity, respect for people and protecting **our** planet—at the core of all that we do.

(Extracted from the DC annual report, 2021)

8.4. Discussion

This chapter examined how companies attempt to connect with their audiences through corporate profiles, using modality, appraisal, and self-reference analysis.

Companies rarely use modality; in other words, they assert their actions or behaviors without hedging their certainty (modalization) or intention (modulation). This tendency can help companies be perceived as more reliable. Indeed, the lack of modality—i.e., of bare assertion—can be seen in scientific discourse that emphasizes facts and established knowledge (Myers 1990). Myers (1990) also claimed that modality can be unnecessary when it is assumed that the audience shares the same knowledge, beliefs, and values (Martin & White, 2005). They also point out the possibility that bare assertion without any hedge, including modality, strengthens the speaker's authority among speakers and readerships. As a result, it functions rhetorically to assert their absolute position; bare assertion (the lack of modality) is a type of modal (Martin and White, 2005). Tatsuki (2006) also maintained that, based on the polarity of negative and positive, propositions without modality, such as the present or past tense, are the most certain. As a result, companies are likely to avoid using modality to make their statements credible and persuade their audience to believe them. On the other hand, companies employ modality at a rate of 20–30% per year. The decrease in showing their attitude toward the certainty of information (probability) correlates with the decline in relational process that convey the company's basic information. Furthermore, the use of “inclination,” which refers to a company's willingness to engage in actions or behaviors, remains high each year, forming a register of corporate public messages, particularly corporate profiles. According to Martin and White (2005), the choice of the label is motivated by the organization's role in committing to people, particularly customers. Companies, in relation to their audience, believe it is critical to demonstrate their attitude toward what they do.

Because companies' attitudes do not appear through modality, this chapter examined the data at a more micro level, using the concept of appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005). A close examination of the data revealed the existence of two types of attitudes that companies exhibit: one is toward what society including stakeholders

wants the companies to be, and the other is related to the company's products/services and performance. This expression of attitudes, with other similar terms like stance (Biber & Finegan, 1989) and evaluation (Bednarek, 2006), is intersubjectively determined in relation to listeners, resulting in the construction of the speaker's identity and image. The finding of this analysis showed that companies have attempted to convey a different image in their corporate profiles over time. In 1998, companies were more concerned with the demands of the general public to which they belonged than with their market distinctiveness. This proclivity for displaying an attitude concerned with the outside world may be attributed to the audience's high homogeneity, as readers were limited to those interested in companies, such as shareholders and partners (Fuoli, 2012; Neu et al., 1998; O'Donovan, 2002). This is due in part to the fact that online media had not yet developed, and print media was still the primary means by which businesses communicated their messages. Additionally, this situation may shape the expectations of what annual reports should contain, such as the size of the company, its location, financial performance, and employee welfare. On the other hand, as time has passed, consciousness of the outside world has decreased, while the distinctiveness of companies has begun to be highlighted. In the corporate profiles of 2021, the proportion of both types of attitudes is nearly identical. It may be the result of more possible readers due to the increase of media, such as online and social media (Barić, 2017). At the same time, this change has resulted in a more diverse audience, necessitating the need for companies to introduce their characteristics and distinctiveness, as well as awareness of the larger society. This awareness of two attitudes, namely meeting the needs of society and expressing one's individuality, may be characteristics of today's public society, implying a link between globalization and localization.

Significant shifts in content and emphasis were identified while studying the evolution of the societal ideal image of companies between 1998 and 2021. In 1998, the emphasis was primarily on the outcomes delivered by companies, with particular

attention paid to shareholder value, the size and financial status of the company, and the quality of the internal environment provided to employees. Elements indicating a company's prosperity, such as financial success and workplace environment, were frequently mentioned.

However, in subsequent years, the emphasis on these characteristics, which were distinctive in 1998, decreased while that on the ideal image of companies increased. This shift entails a greater sense of importance around the quality of corporate initiatives, their proactive nature, and their potential for transformation. Furthermore, there has been an increasing awareness of social ethics, environmental responsibility, and accountability, indicating a broadening and generalization of societal consciousness.

The shift in societal engagement, as communicated through corporate profiles, implies that messages designed with an audience in mind have evolved in response to the changing social environment. While corporate profiles were arguably public in 1998, they were only of interest to those who had a strong interest in the company, with a primary focus on outcomes rather than processes. In contrast, by 2021, in an era when corporate information is available to all, companies must incorporate a sense of responsibility to society and an awareness of their external impact, positioning themselves more as members of society. This evolution reflects a broader shift in corporate expectations, from a focus on financial results to a thorough examination of their role and impact within the larger societal context.

The way companies embody their stance has seen both continuity and change over the last three years, with distinct modes of communication that remain typical of corporate discourse as well as aspects that evolve over time. In all three years, companies have embedded their attitudes within propositions or proposals by incorporating combinations of adjectives and nouns into actions (material process) and descriptions (relational process); the former involves companies acting as providers, while the latter concerns their self-positioning, each using noun phrases

that carry evaluations. This technique of incorporating positive expressions has been noted previously; embedding these within propositions allows for the presentation of the corporate stance as fact to the readers.

In 2021, a trend emerged of embedding the corporate stance directly within verbs. This approach, unlike embedding assessments in nouns, incorporates the company's posture into its action rather than entities such as products/services. Such integration, while formally an indirect expression of their attitudes, fosters a more direct sense of involvement, in contrast to the more traditional method of defining corporate identity through descriptive attributes. This evolution in corporate communication strategy represents a shift toward portraying companies' active engagement and values through their actions, making the corporate identity and values more tangible and engaging to the audience.

The evolution of how companies refer to themselves is linked to a shift toward describing initiatives from a more human-centric perspective rather than solely as institutional entities. This approach allows for a more evident demonstration of a company's proactivity. Furthermore, an examination of the change in personal pronouns reveals that in 1998, companies frequently distinguished employees with the use of "company name," emphasizing the institutional nature of the entity. However, this feature has diminished over time, giving way to a trend in which companies explain their initiatives from a position of equality with the reader, including their employees (using "exclusive we"), or adopt a perspective that includes the reader as a fellow member of society (using "inclusive we"). This shift, like the previously discussed aspects, represents a change in the relationship with the audience.

Companies engaged readers as institutions in an era when the audience was small and interaction was minimal. However, the widespread availability of messages and the growing need to present initiatives have resulted in a more dialogic nature of corporate communication, one that portrays companies as members of the same community as readers. This shift in communication style is analogous to how media

communication has conversationalized political discourse, implying that changes in the audience and context have had a significant impact on these trends (Fairclough, 1995).

8.5. Summary

In Chapter 7 of the dissertation, the focus shifts to the interpersonal aspects of corporate profiles, exploring how companies have sought to engage with their audiences over time through language. Utilizing SFL, specifically Halliday's notion of modality, the study delves into expressions of attitudes (modality) and company evaluations (appraisal) within corporate profiles across three selected years (1998, 2005, 2021). The analysis reveals shifts in corporate communication strategies, emphasizing the evolving relationship between companies and their audiences in light of societal and media changes.

The methodology employed involves analyzing modality to understand the degrees of commitment to propositions/proposals and using appraisal theory to identify how companies express attitudes towards societal expectations and their own products or services. This multifaceted approach reveals not only the explicit stances companies take but also the subtle ways in which they communicate values, objectives, and identities to their audiences.

Results indicate a decrease in the use of explicit modal expressions over time, suggesting a shift towards more assertive communication. Despite this, the analysis of appraisal expressions shows an increasing focus on presenting ideal company characteristics alongside societal expectations. This dual focus reflects a nuanced strategy to balance portraying a unique corporate identity with aligning with broader societal values.

The analysis further identifies significant content shifts over the studied periods. Initially, corporate profiles emphasized outcomes, financial performance, and internal environments catering to stakeholders such as shareholders and employees. Over time, there has been a noticeable shift towards highlighting corporate initiatives,

social ethics, environmental responsibility, and a broader societal engagement, reflecting a more holistic approach to corporate identity in the public sphere.

Additionally, the study explores the evolution of communicative forms used in corporate profiles to express attitudes. While early profiles predominantly used noun phrases with positive modifications, more recent profiles embed attitudes directly into verbs, making their attitude appear implicit, signaling a more active and engaging portrayal of corporate values and actions. This evolution in communication strategies aligns with a broader trend towards making corporate values more tangible and relatable to audiences.

A notable finding is the changing use of first- and second-person plural pronouns, which indicates a shift from institutional self-reference towards more inclusive language that encompasses both the company and its audience. This change points to a move towards a more dialogic and community-oriented corporate communication style, reflective of the changing landscape of corporate-audience relationships in a more connected and public-oriented media environment.

In summary, this chapter uncovers a complex interplay between corporate communication strategies and evolving societal expectations. It highlights a shift from a focus on financial and internal outcomes towards a more engaged, responsible, and community-oriented corporate presence. This evolution reflects a broader trend in corporate discourse, moving from information transmission to building relationships with a diverse and global audience. This shift creates a need for companies to navigate the delicate balance between maintaining a unique identity and aligning with societal values in their communication practices.

Chapter 9 Discussion

9.1. Synthesis of Findings from Studies 1, 2, and 3

The examination of ideational and interpersonal aspects in corporate profiles over three decades (represented by years 1998, 2005, 2021), as well as objective characteristics derived from quantitative approaches, provides significant insights into the changing landscape of corporate communication in the public sphere. This synthesis draws on the results of Chapters 6, 7, and 8 to explain how companies have altered their narratives to meet shifting public expectations and technical advances in media communication.

Chapter 6 serves as a foundational investigation into the explicit narratives within corporate discourse through the application of natural language processing techniques, including topic modeling, sentiment analysis, and readability assessments. In an analysis using latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA), topics that are common across all years (e.g., technological advancement, financial services, and sustainability and corporate responsibility) and aspects that differ by industry were revealed. Additionally, sentiment analysis unveiled the changes in corporate sentiments for each topic and an increase in positive sentiments among companies over the decades. Readability assessment confirmed that the readability of corporate profiles has been increasing over time. This objective lens provides a precursor to the more refined, qualitative explorations of Chapters 7 and 8, which examine the ideational and interpersonal functions of language within corporate profiles.

Chapter 7, focusing on the ideational function, examines how companies articulate their reality, presenting a shift from descriptive to dynamic portrayals of corporate activities and values. This analysis dovetails with findings from Chapter 6, where topic modeling reveals an array of central themes in corporate discourse, such as technological advancements, management performance, and sustainability. These themes reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of corporate identities and strategies, suggesting a broadening of focus to include societal and environmental concerns,

which aligns with the shift toward more engaging and action-oriented communication identified in Chapter 7.

Chapter 8's exploration of the interpersonal function of language in corporate discourse, particularly through the lens of assertiveness and engagement with audiences, complements the sentiment analysis and readability assessments conducted in Chapter 6. The decrease in explicit modal expressions and the rise in appraisal expressions found in Chapter 8 reveal a trend towards more authoritative yet socially responsive narratives. This mirrors Chapter 6's sentiment analysis results, indicating a general positive tone in corporate discourse and an evolution towards more positive messaging over time. The readability assessments in Chapter 6 provide further evidence for this trend, revealing an effort to make corporate profiles more accessible and understandable to a broader audience, thus facilitating a more inclusive and engaging dialogue with stakeholders.

Together, these chapters present a picture of a corporate communication narrative that is not only adapting to technological advancements and changing societal expectations but also increasingly focused on engaging with a diverse and global audience in a meaningful and responsible manner. The synthesis of findings across these chapters sheds light on a significant evolution in corporate discourse strategies. Companies are moving away from a purely informational and descriptive approach towards one that emphasizes action, values, and societal engagement. This shift is characterized by a strategic balance between maintaining a unique corporate identity and demonstrating a commitment to broader societal values, indicating a deep understanding of the company's role within a wider social and environmental context.

In conclusion, the integration of Chapter 6's findings with the analyses presented in Chapters 7 and 8 provides a holistic view of the transformation in corporate communication over the years. This comprehensive perspective shows the complex interplay between the objective characteristics of corporate profiles and the

subtle, qualitative aspects of corporate discourse, revealing a strategic evolution that reflects changing corporate and societal landscapes.

9.2. New Ways of Interpersonal Communication

This section discusses the evolution of interpersonal function in language. Interpersonal function (Halliday, 1985; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004) has primarily referred to binary relations between speakers and listeners or writers and readers. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), speakers (or writers) assign some roles to themselves through speaking (or writing), while listeners (or readers) supplement the roles. For example, when speakers ask a question, speakers are positioned as information seekers, and listeners are positioned as providers of information required by the speakers. Based on the complementary relationship between speakers (writers) and listeners (readers), the majority of previous research investigating interpersonal functions of language has assumed the presence of listeners and readers. However, with the advancement of the internet and digital technology, as well as the ability to communicate immediately via social media, the audience often cannot be identified (Androutsopoulos, 2014; Coupland & Coupland, 2009; Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Fairclough, 1989, 1998; Marwick & Boyd, 2011), and the line between speakers and listeners has become blurred.⁶³ Unlike traditional mass media, which is based on a one-way relationship between producers and receivers, Web 2.0 (which was first used in 2004) and user generated content (which gained popularity in 2005) have enabled all users to participate in collaborative projects such as blogs and wikis, as well as use social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In the corporate world, these digital transformations enabled passive stakeholders to become

⁶³ Breeze (2013) maintained that much of the earlier research on corporate messages focused on messages that organizations convey to external audiences, particularly customers or the general public, but recently both external and internal audiences have had to be considered due to a blurring of organizational boundaries.

powerful producers and transferers of information (Lee et al., 2013), which has led to the movement toward platform governance (Fenwick et al., 2019).

With producers now unable to identify their audience, some research on media communication has employed the idea of imagined/expected, implied, stereotyped listeners and readers based on shared knowledge, beliefs, norms, and values to understand interpersonal relations in speakers' and writers' text and talk (Bednarek, 2006; Bell, 1991). In CDA, the influence of listener variation is seldom questioned, with a default listener often assumed (Fairclough, 1995b; Hart, 2010). The aim is to elucidate the speaker's language choices and the impact of these choices on the listener. Consequently, the focus has been predominantly on the language choices of the speaker, and the actual interpretations made by the listener overlooked. While there have been efforts to counter this criticism from perspectives of cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics (Hart, 2014), in these instances, too, the listener merely appears as just that—a listener.

However, there exists critical research that opposes the lumping together of all listeners as one and the same. Shanahan (2017) suggested that stereotyped listeners/readers no longer exist, and that the concept of the general public is fading away. Based on this background, this dissertation attempted to examine how corporate discourse, which is likely to be influenced by the transformation of communication, has changed in description (ideational aspect) and relationship with the audience (interpersonal aspect) by looking at corporate profiles from three years: 1998 (prior to web development), 2005 (the start of web-based collaborative communication), and 2021 (the realization of platform communication).

The difficulties in identifying readers can have an impact on the forms and contents of corporate profiles. In terms of explicit changes in discourse, shifts in topics, sentiment, and readability were observed through an approach utilizing natural language processing. The application of LDA in Chapter 6, for instance, identifies key themes that have evolved over time, reflecting a broader trend towards incorporating

societal values and expectations into corporate discourse. Moreover, sentiment analysis from Chapter 6 provides empirical evidence of how corporate discourse has become more positive and assertive over the years, particularly in expressing attitudes towards ethics and sustainability. This aligns with the observation here that by 2021, companies started to more explicitly demonstrate their stance on broader societal issues, moving away from the more constrained focus on shareholder interests characteristic of earlier periods. The sentiment analysis results indicate a strategic shift in corporate communication towards embedding evaluations within independent actions, signifying a move towards more humanized and relational discourse. Readability assessments in Chapter 6 further complement the discussion here on the transformation of interpersonal communications by highlighting how the accessibility of corporate profiles has improved over time. This reflects an intentional effort to engage a wider and more diverse audience and acknowledgment of the impossibility of predicting an exact readership in the digital age.

Subsequently, an analysis was conducted to qualitatively assess how the same elements are interpreted and verbalized in different contexts, as well as how awareness of the audience manifests in relation to what and in what form. The results revealed that, despite an active transformation in engagement with the broader society through quantitative methods, corporate discourse itself has become more indirect. The relational process by which companies show who they are directly has decreased, while the tendency for companies to introduce themselves indirectly by showing their action using material processes has increased. As the audience becomes more unspecified, companies have shifted from providing information in a precise and succinct manner, with clear explanations about themselves, to a discourse that, without directly asserting their identity, presents their initiatives, thereby inviting the audience to supplement their understanding of the company.

From the analysis of interpersonal functions, it was observed that the intended audience for corporate profiles traditionally had a clear image, centering around

shareholders and evoking a binary relationship between the company and its shareholders. However, with changes in media and the expansion of the audience, this distinct contour has begun to fade. In conjunction with the focus on indirect actions observed through process types, the modality expressions that accompany propositions have also shifted from representing the certainty of information to indicating the intentionality of actions. Based on appraisal theory, an analysis was conducted on the corporate evaluations that do not appear with explicit markers, and here again, results reflective of the ambiguity of the audience were obtained. In 1998, companies attempted to demonstrate their alignment with their shareholders by evaluating the contents, such as size, financial situation, and working conditions; in 2021, they demonstrate their stance on ethics and sustainability based on awareness of general society as well as current stakeholders. Furthermore, in 1998, when the readers were mostly shareholders who were already interested in the companies, the companies did not need to show their evaluations of their own products/services, whereas by 2021, they began to show their attitudes toward both themselves and the society they belonged to. This could suggest that, considering the possibility of individuals who were originally not interested in the company becoming part of the audience, there has been a shift towards more explicitly mentioning the value of the company. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the methods of expressing evaluations based on interpersonal awareness have become more implicit and indirect compared to the past. In terms of expressing their attitudes, in 1998, companies typically contain their evaluation in an adjective or noun, and then place the noun phrase containing evaluation in a direct object (e.g., “deliver innovative solutions”). It can be assumed that companies are positioned as providers, and readers are expected to be receivers. However, by 2021, binary relationships between providers and receivers have become less common, and companies have embedded their evaluation into their independent actions, as evidenced by verb phrases (e.g., “embrace differences”).

As the boundaries between companies (writers) and readers have blurred and they have shared communicative spaces, the companies have shifted from being institutions or organizations to being “human beings” who share a community with the readers. This trend can be seen in the change in the Actor’s description from the company’s name in 1998 to the first-person plural pronoun “we” in 2021. At the same time, mental processes that recognize the companies’ sense and modality of expression, such as “committed to” and “devoted to,” have become more common. In terms of first-person plural pronouns, it can be noted that the lines between companies, readers, and society may be blurring, as evidenced by the use of terms such as “our planet,” which includes the entire human race, as opposed to a time when even company employees were sometimes excluded. Additionally, the findings of readability assessment demonstrated the increasing simplicity and directness in corporate profiles, moving from formal institutional language to more inclusive and engaging discourse, mirror the evolution towards a “humanization” of corporate entities, where the use of first-person plural pronouns and expressions of commitment and devotion become more prevalent. It can be said that the findings from the sentiment analysis, which showed a shift from a primarily neutral attitude to gradually increasing positive emotions, are also related to this trend.

The possibility of the message reaching those who have no interest in the speakers can have an impact on the forms and contents of the discourse; in this way, this analysis implies a new way of interpersonal relating. Indeed, companies now seem to care more about raising public awareness (Fuoli, 2012) and the norms of acceptable behavior in the larger social system of which they are part (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975), and there have been tensions generated between profit-oriented activities and broader social values (Fuoli, 2012). They are now required to disclose more information about the social and environmental impacts of their operations, as well as their efforts to enforce social responsibility principles (Fuoli, 2012). Furthermore, in the study of identity construction, public speakers are aware of not

only their speech but also other audience members, and the audience is no longer passive receivers but active negotiators of interpretations and alignments with the speakers' and other audience members' positions (McIlvenny, 1996).

9.3. New Ideology in Public Discourse

This section proposes that a new ideology based on the mass audience is emerging in public discourse. This dissertation uses CDA as a theoretical foundation, and previous CDA research has focused on public discourse related to media, politics, and business, in which speakers or producers have greater access or power relations than the audience, and has attempted to expose their beliefs, values, or ideologies embedded in their discourse that have the potential for reproduction. Fairclough (2003) contended that in the context of marketization, business and university discourse have a tendency to express their exchange of performance in terms of supplying or requiring, as if they were simply exchanging information or knowledge. Wernick (1991) also argued "promotional culture," and all forms of literature, including annual reports, appears to deliver information while simultaneously promoting it. Thus, CDA has attempted to show how producers' intentions are implicitly encoded in discourse. To date, conversations have portrayed public speakers as being in a more powerful position than listeners, either because the latter unconsciously absorb the information or because they are powerless to oppose it. This dissertation, on the other hand, emphasizes the alteration of power relations between producers and audiences as communication technology advances and the variety and indefinite nature of audiences grows, resulting in discourse construction based on mass audience consciousness.

The increase in awareness towards external matters, including sustainability and corporate responsibility, revealed through quantitative methods (LDA for topic modeling, sentiment analysis, and readability assessments), demonstrates how corporate entities adapt their messaging to resonate with the mass audience's evolving expectations and values. Additionally, the presence of positive emotions in this area

suggests a strategic shift in corporate discourse. This shift toward a more engaged and positive portrayal of corporate roles in societal issues exemplifies the emergence of a new ideology that prioritizes social responsibility and ethical considerations in business practices. Improved readability of corporate profiles over time, as shown in Chapter 6, suggests an attempt by companies to make their communications more accessible to a broader audience. This trend towards simplification and clarity in corporate messaging reflects an acknowledgment of the diverse and expanding public audience.

As previously stated, the increase in indirect and inclusive expressions in corporate profiles is associated with the change in audience due to an evolution of communication methods. In terms of indirectness orientation, companies have chosen to highlight their real performance based on material processes rather than identifying themselves through relational processes in corporate profiles. Furthermore, the way companies express their judgments in connection to the audience has become more indirect, since their attitude is integrated into their action—i.e., verb—even though the judgments are primarily stated with explicit stance markers such as adjectives.

The shift in description of Actor and Senser, the backgrounded Actor, and the range of vocabulary demonstrate the current state of comprehensiveness or inclusiveness in corporate profiles. Compared to the frequent usage of the company name or “the company” in 1998, the increased use of “we” over the last 20 years indicates that companies have blurred the relationship between institutions (providers) and stakeholders (receivers). In 1998, companies saw employees as receivers and treated them separately from the company, even when they used the word “we” to explain what they were doing. This shift can be seen in the progressive rise of phrases, as Actors or Sensers, such as “you,” “people,” and “everyone,” which do not accurately describe the individuals. Furthermore, there have been more companies that do not explicitly state Actors, and there is a possibility that companies cannot position themselves properly when considering an ambiguous or diverse audience

because there is no clue for determining their own relative positioning. This movement toward more comprehensive and inclusive statements can be linked to a decrease in vocabulary variance. Readability assessment revealed that companies may have begun to communicate the same amount of information with fewer words. On the other hand, there has been an increase in companies' expressions about the evaluation of their own products/services because containing their distinctive characteristics has become more important as the statements have become more comprehensive and homogeneous based on their shared awareness of the mass audience. Okai (2012) contended that media genres, formats, and technologies are becoming more globalized and homogenized. Fetzer and Weizman (2006) also proposed technology, globalization, and internationalization as sources of effect on communication performance.

The reason this dissertation identifies this transition as the birth of a new ideology is that public discourse, which consists of language selection impacted by a large audience, can have an unobserved influence on the real audience, such as the lesser extent of knowledge when they see the message. The indirectness and comprehensiveness seen in this analysis make it more difficult for readers to fully understand the message. According to Merkl-Davies and Koller (2012), descriptions that lack certain information, such as Actors or tenses, increase readers' cognitive work. This increase in cognitive effort can lead to a scenario where readers may give up on interpreting the text, in turn amplifying the text's status and the speaker's power in a way that the speaker gains more control over the interpretation of the message (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). According to the findings of this dissertation, companies begin to rely on abstract messages not just because they intend to do so, but also because the presence of a large audience forces them to.

It is beneficial when readers notice the lack of information and attempt to fully understand it. However, as findings from sentiment analysis indicate, with an emphasis on companies' positive aspects and an increase in readability, readers

struggle to recognize the differences in the amount of information due to the generalization and indirectness of the information. Furthermore, while the Internet appears to allow anyone to participate in interactions, there is less availability than imagined because a message's readers are confined to those who have a significant interest or connection to it or its producers (Sims, 2004). Companies try to tailor their messages to a broad audience, but only those who are interested in the companies read them. Sims (2004) further highlighted the persistence of conventional media as a source of knowledge and curiosity. Although non-members rarely read the message (Fuoli & Hart, 2018), the message's public nature and the evolution of platform communication push companies to create their discourse with a large audience in mind.

Thus, the decline in the power of companies, which originally should have been in a superior position in terms of power relations, and their shift towards pleasing, indirect, and abstract discourse as a result of constraints imposed by mass consciousness, suggest that speakers are, in fact, abandoning specific explanations, increasing the responsibility of listeners in interpretation. It may indicate that in public discourse, reader responsibility (Hinds et al., 1987) has been increasing.

This section discussed the notion that a large audience can have an impact on public discourse, resulting in indirectness, comprehensiveness, and homogeneity of discourse and requiring greater processing effort from readers. It suggests that a new ideology has slowly evolved in public discourse.

9.4. More Comprehensive Discourse Analysis

This dissertation takes a novel and enriched approach to discourse analysis by merging the analytical depth of CDA with the precision of quantitative techniques. The mixed method approach in this dissertation applied a coding process established by the author based on earlier research to the entire set of texts, without eliminating any words or phrases. Through this fusion, the approach uncovers the intricate

dynamics of corporate communication and its influence on public ideologies and social structures.

CDA investigates how the structures and qualities of elite discourse, which can access or communicate a message in public discourse and use power through it, are related to the (re)production of social power and the manipulation of people's cognition (Noro & Yamashita, 2009). CDA has been criticized for data selection in that it tends to choose data or examples to meet the researcher's purpose, for decontextualization caused by extracting specific examples rather than taking a holistic approach, and for over-interpretation as a result (Hart, 2014). CDA has a clear aim to confront global inequity and openly declaring its political stance from the beginning (Noro & Yamashita, 2009), but focusing only on individual data or samples is problematic. Particularly now that the media landscape has shifted and become more complex, it is critical to assess the impact on public discourse. This study pioneers an integrated methodological framework, addressing CDA criticisms—such as selective data usage, decontextualization, and potential over-interpretation—by incorporating quantitative methods alongside qualitative analysis. This harmonized approach is pivotal in dissecting corporate discourses, particularly in how they shape and are shaped by societal power dynamics.

Thus, this dissertation took a holistic approach in order to avoid over-interpretation of the findings and to use data that reflect the transition in the media environment.

First, this dissertation adopted quantitative methods—LDA for topic discovery, sentiment analysis for emotional tone mapping, and readability assessments to gauge textual complexity. This methodology provides a robust, data-driven foundation to the qualitative insights traditionally explored in CDA, offering a sophisticated lens through which corporate strategy in communication is observed. Employing LDA for topic modeling brings to light the core themes within corporate discourse and grounds the ideational and interpersonal strategies in empirical evidence. This unveils the

strategic narrative constructions companies use to navigate or influence societal norms and values. Sentiment analysis quantitatively captures the emotional undertones within corporate communications. This unveils how companies articulate their stance on issues such as social responsibility and sustainability, enriching an understanding of their role in societal discourse. Readability metrics assess the evolution of corporate language towards greater inclusivity and comprehension. This trajectory reflects an adaptive response to the public's growing demand for transparency and engagement, highlighting shifts in communication strategies to accommodate a broader demographic.

This examination of ideational or interpersonal components in corporate profiles was carried out using a mixed method approach. Based on categories suggested by prior studies, codes were created and manually assigned to every data set component. The qualitative program MAXQDA allows for a mixed method approach in which descriptive models may be constructed and validated, and the resulting models are expected to contribute to associated theory (Creswell, 2014; Sato, 2008). In this study, initial codes were produced based on preset categories, and further codes or subcodes were added after a thorough evaluation of the description in each code to fully comprehend the target topic. Although this study only looked at code relationships between each code and the year in which corporate profiles were published, other attributes of companies, such as industry type or company size, can be added and code relations revealed.

The integration of quantitative techniques with CDA methodologies in this dissertation transcends traditional limitations in several impactful ways. Firstly, by systematically analyzing a comprehensive corpus of corporate profiles, this approach overcomes the criticism related to selective data use. It accomplishes this by presenting a more holistic view of corporate discourse practices, thereby expanding the scope of data under consideration. Secondly, this mixed-method framework deepens the contextual understanding of corporate discourse by positioning it within

the broader societal and media context. This strategic placement addresses the challenge of decontextualization and ensures a rich interpretation of the data. Lastly, the empirical data provided by quantitative methods enhances the credibility of qualitative interpretations. This not only significantly reduces the risk of speculative conclusions but also strengthens the analysis's overall validity, grounding the insights derived from qualitative analysis in robust empirical evidence.

By blending the analytical strengths of CDA with the methodological advancements of quantitative analysis, this dissertation sets a new standard in the field of discourse studies. It uncovers the multifaceted ways corporate discourse intersects with public ideology and social power, presenting a comprehensive model for future research. This integrated approach not only deepens our understanding of corporate communications' societal impact but also paves the way for improved, interdisciplinary analyses in the evolving landscape of media and public discourse.

9.5. Limitations

This dissertation investigated corporate speech, with a particular emphasis on corporate profiles, and proposed a unique paradigm for interpersonal communication aimed at an undetermined public audience, as well as calling for a new ideology characterized by mass consciousness. Nonetheless, it is essential to acknowledge that these propositions do not suffice to broadly characterize the nuances of contemporary public discourse. This is principally due to the scope of analysis being confined to corporate discourse, and more narrowly, to corporate profiles. While corporate discourse has been shown to be relatively stable over the past 20 years, marked by a uniformity in company positions driven by profit imperatives, it remains uncertain whether these findings hold true across different facets of public discourse, such as news media and political communications. This necessitates further inquiry into whether these other forms of discourse share similar characteristics or differ in their narrative approaches.

The seminal work of Okai (2012) brought to light the significance of examining peripheral texts to fully comprehend the focal text. This suggests that a comprehensive understanding of media discourse, for instance, requires an investigation into texts not directly related to mass media, including personal diaries, notes, and everyday conversations, as well as an analysis of the intertextual relationships between preceding and subsequent texts.

Moreover, this study's analytical framework did not account for various company attributes, such as industry sector, the nature of products or services offered, organizational size, and financial health. The distinction between companies dealing in physical goods, such as electronics, versus those offering intangible services, such as internet technologies, or the target market for their products/services, significantly influences discursive patterns. In fact, topic modeling using LDA showed that the characteristics of products and who the customers are contributed to some differences in topic distribution rates. Furthermore, the literature suggests that company size and the extent of public engagement correlate with an increased reference to ethical considerations in annual reports (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Lentz & Tschirgi, 1963).

The incorporation of multimodal elements into discourse analysis, particularly given the modern propensity towards the inclusion of imagery and typographical effects in communications, is another aspect that warrants attention. Van Leeuwen (1996) and Schmitz (2014) highlighted the emergent focus within CDA on both verbal and visual elements. Fuoli and Hart (2018), referencing the Group (2016), illustrated how companies utilize visual elements, such as imagery of smiling employees and the use of primary colors, to convey a persona that is approachable, ethical, and caring. The analysis obtained in this study, regarding the backgrounding of actors and the indirectness and abstraction of language, may be compensated by such alternative visual information (Kitazawa, 2023, see Appendix D).

Furthermore, the examination of ideational and interpersonal functions within corporate profiles faced challenges in maintaining objectivity, as the analysis of

process types, modality, and appraisal is inherently influenced by contextual factors (Biber & Finegan, 1989; Martin & White, 2005; Halliday & Matthiessen 2004).

Despite the rigorous application of coding procedures, the potential for subjective bias cannot be entirely negated. Given these limitations, the subsequent section outlines potential avenues for future research, aiming to extend the breadth and depth of understanding in this domain.

9.6. Directions for Future Research

The findings and trends obtained in this dissertation should be reconsidered in terms of how they are influenced by the type of industry or the current financial situation of the companies, aside from their publicness. Mergent Online, which was used to obtain annual reports for this dissertation, also provides a wide range of company information, such as the company's history of management, revenue, and expansions. In light of the limitations identified in the current study, future research directions are proposed to extend the understanding of how corporate attributes influence public discourse. Specifically, it is recommended that subsequent studies employ Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to conduct a more thorough analysis of the correlation between company characteristics—such as industry type, financial condition, and organizational size—and the variation in messaging strategies. This approach will enable a quantitative assessment of the extent to which these attributes affect the ideational and interpersonal functions of corporate communication. By leveraging SPSS for advanced statistical analyses, including regression models and ANOVA, researchers can uncover patterns and insights that were not accessible through the qualitative methods employed in this dissertation. Such investigations are crucial for developing a comprehensive framework that accounts for the multifaceted nature of corporate discourse and its impact on public perception and engagement.

Furthermore, based on the findings and trends of corporate profiles, it is necessary to investigate whether similar tendencies can be found in other corporate

discourse, such as entire annual reports, CSR reports, and messages on websites and social media. Aside from that, other forms of public discourse should be examined in order to fully comprehend the nature of the public message. Given the difficulty of qualitatively analyzing everything, the aim would be to harness quantitative methods to grasp the overall trends and apply them to qualitative analysis. In qualitative analysis, the findings presented in this dissertation will provide some analytical perspectives for future research. Moreover, because this dissertation focuses solely on English phenomena, it is hoped that the characteristics of other languages, including Japanese, will be investigated in the public sphere.

Additionally, the investigation will extend to how actual audiences interpret messages in the public sphere, as previous studies have indicated that the stage of interpretation has yet to be fully explored (Hart, 2014; O'Halloran, 2006; Widdowson, 2004). The sentiment analysis adopted in this analysis, often used in analyzing social media and review evaluations, allows for examining how readers' responses to corporate discourse and other forms of public discourse are changing, as well as what they are evaluating, by incorporating approaches such as topic modeling. More research has been conducted using a cognitive linguistic approach, focusing on how listeners/readers interpret what speakers/writers say in their minds using metaphor or conceptualization (Hart, 2010; Santa Ana, 2002). Besides that, an empirical approach based on psycholinguistics will be effective in determining how the audience interprets and evaluates the message and how their responses vary depending on their level of interest in the speakers (Manuti & Mininni, 2013).

Finally, there are more likely to misunderstandings between speakers and audiences in the public sphere due to the complicated context surrounding media, including not only organizations' but also individuals' messages on social media, as evidenced by the backlash phenomenon. Understanding the nature of public discourse, including the relationship between speakers and listeners, has become increasingly important in recent years. As a result, future research could examine the relationship

of language, society, and audience through the analysis of various types of public discourse other than corporate discourse, and the risk or possibility of language in the public sphere, which has become a more common language activity, should be discussed from the perspective of welfare linguistics.

Chapter 10 Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to uncover the current characteristics of accessible public discourse through an analysis of corporate profiles, a component of corporate discourse. Despite the growth of media as a primary source of public discourse and increased audience engagement in communication, research dealing with the impact of such changes in the audience is still limited. While CDA emphasizes the importance of context, focusing on how speakers' values, beliefs, and ideologies are manifested in discourse without considering the impact on the listener, audience design looks at how the involvement of the listener affects the speaker but does not include the influence of the general public or masses. This study, therefore, examined how changes in media and audience dynamics due to these changes affect discourse, using corporate overviews from three representative decades of transition (1998, 2005 and 2021).

This research, utilizing quantitative methods, first observed the objective characteristics of corporate profiles and their changes over the years. Subsequently, it delved into how companies depict the reality surrounding them and the nature of their relationship with the external world through their messaging.

This examination focused on the ideational and interpersonal functions of language, exploring how corporate communication evolves to reflect shifts in societal and audience dynamics. Topic modeling revealed that corporate profiles are increasingly mentioning topics that suggest a connection with society, indicating that the emotional aspect of companies towards these topics has also grown. Moreover, it became clear that there is a shift towards easier-to-read text, reflecting an awareness of a broader readership. The analysis of the ideational and interpersonal aspects of corporate overviews revealed a shift from direct communication in 1998, in which companies primarily addressed shareholders with information they presumed shareholders wanted, to a message in 2021 that is more aware of a broader audience. Despite the main audience remaining those interested in the company, there is a

noticeable shift towards indirect communication through action-oriented messages. This transition acknowledges a broader, more empowered potential audience, influenced by the platformization of communication, leading to more inclusive and conversational messages that blur the internal and external boundaries of companies.

This research contributes novel perspectives on the interpersonal functions and emergence of new ideologies within the frameworks of SFL and CDA. It challenges the adequacy of SFL's conceptualization of speaker-listener relationships for understanding contemporary⁶⁴ public discourse, advocating for the inclusion of the public's presence. Additionally, the influence of this public is identified as a new ideology, suggesting a reversal in the power dynamics between discourse producers and receivers as posited by CDA. This shift towards public-aware language choices potentially impacts negatively on information accessibility for readers. The potential concern arises from the possibility that an increase in positive emotions and enhanced readability could obscure the observed impact.

The findings of this dissertation, while focused on the discourse of companies, echo a broader observation in public discourse: messages are often constrained by the influence of the masses. This effect is particularly subtle in corporate messages, which tend to exclusively highlight positive aspects, making changes and their impacts less noticeable. Readers must be aware of this characteristic of public discourse to accurately interpret the information presented. Furthermore, the companies studied here, all with histories of being listed in the Fortune 500, exemplify the challenge of balancing the representation of their uniqueness with the need to cater to public sensibilities. This balancing act may well become a sought-after model in the evolving landscape of public discourse.

⁶⁴ Companies in 1998 anticipated shareholders to be the primary readers, while other studies on public discourse, such as media, tend to use stereotyped audiences as representative listeners/readers.

While the data analyzed in this dissertation offer valuable insights, they are not sufficient for generalization, quantitatively or qualitatively. It is necessary to explore whether similar results can be obtained from other forms of public discourse, including mass media such as newspapers and television, as well as personal expression on social media. Additionally, experimental analysis might be required to grasp how audiences truly interpret these messages and to what extent audience interests influence interpretation. The quantitative approach employed in this study also proves useful in analyzing audience responses. Future research should build upon the findings presented here, broadening the types and volume of data for a more extensive qualitative and quantitative analysis.

In conclusion, this dissertation illuminates the impact of changes in communication methods on public discourse through an analysis of corporate profiles. It highlights the emergence of new interpersonal relationships between companies and the external environment, and a new ideology centered around the public. Traditional powers held by media, businesses, and politicians are diminishing in a landscape where everyone can freely express themselves. However, while the democratization of speech is evident, the increasing influence of the public imposes constraints on the information shared in public spaces. In the evolving landscape of contemporary communication, this dissertation uncovers nuanced interactions within corporate discourse, particularly how it navigates the complex interplay between companies and audiences against the backdrop of changing public discourse platforms. The use of a quantitative approach to grasp the nature and changes in objective data, combined with the critical examination of the ideational and interpersonal language functions within corporate profiles, not only sheds light on strategic shifts in messaging but also enhances the understanding of broader discourse dynamics. This research serves as a foundational piece in the ongoing exploration of language, power, and society, emphasizing the importance of continuous reevaluation of discourse in shaping and being shaped by the realities of our world.

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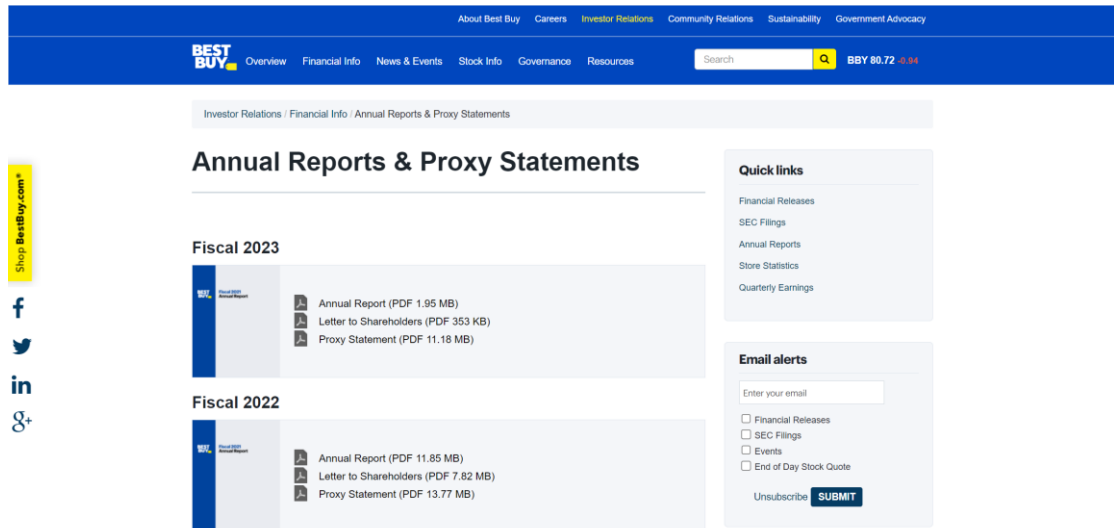
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Appendices

Appendix A

Archive of BestBuy's Annual Reports on Website



Note. This page was retrieved on 26th March 2024

(<https://investors.bestbuy.com/investor-relations/financial-info/annual-reports-and-proxy-statements/default.aspx>).

Appendix B

Data Set in This Dissertation and Brief Company Introductions

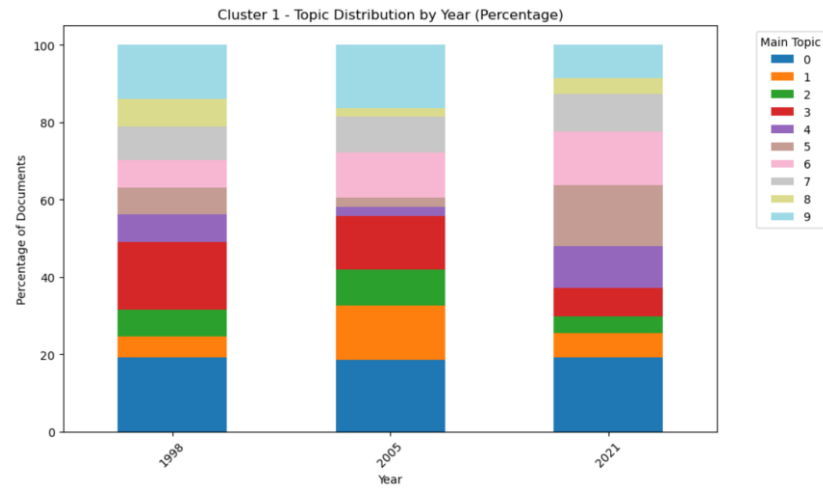
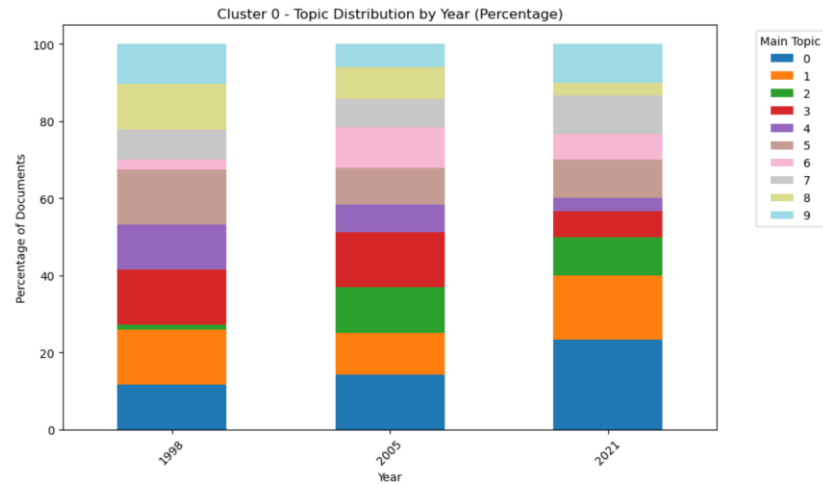
No.	Company Name	Data ID	Brief Overview
1	Charter Communications Inc.	CCM	Telecommunications and mass media
2	New York Life Insurance Company	NLC	Life insurance and financial services
3	Merck & Co., Inc.	MC	Pharmaceutical and healthcare products
4	Allstate Insurance Company	AS	Insurance and financial services
5	American Express	AE	Financial services, payment, and credit

6	Pfizer Inc.	PZ	Pharmaceutical and biotechnology
7	American International Group, Inc.	AIG	Insurance, financial services, and retirement
8	World Fuel Services	WFS	Energy, commodities, and services
9	Oracle	OC	Technology, software, and cloud solutions
10	Tech Data Corp.	TD	Technology products and distribution
11	Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company	MM	Life insurance and financial services
12	Dow	DC	Chemicals, plastics, and agricultural products
13	Best Buy	BB	Consumer electronics and retail
14	The Coca-Cola Company	CC	Beverages and consumer goods
15	Cardinal Health	CH	Healthcare services and products
16	Cigna	CN	Health services and insurance
17	Costco Wholesale Corporation	CS	Membership warehouses, retail
18	CVS Pharmacy	CVS	Healthcare, retail, and prescriptions
19	Chevron Corporation	CV	Energy and oil company
20	Ford Motor Company	FM	Automobile manufacturing
21	Mckesson corporation	MK	Healthcare services and distribution
22	Unitedhealth group	UHG	Healthcare services and insurance
23	Valero	VEC	Energy and petroleum products

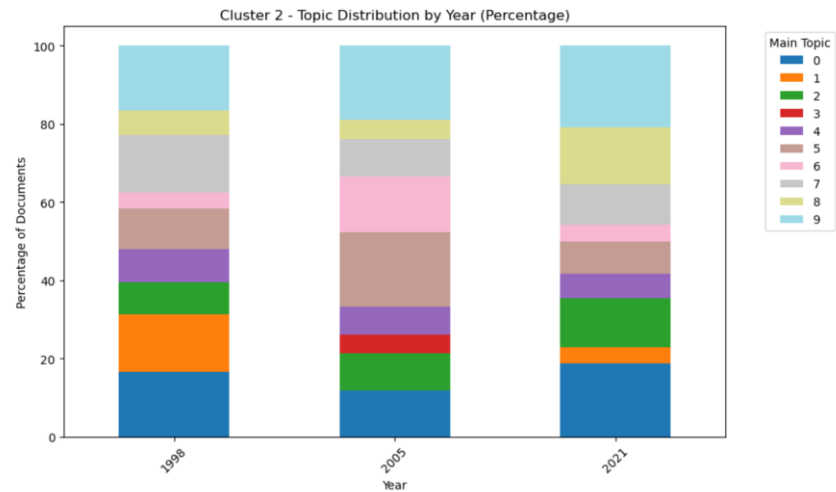
Note. Company names, their operational focus, or other corporate information may have changed after the data collection period for this dissertation. For example, companies may undergo rebranding, mergers, acquisitions, or significant shifts in business strategy, which could lead to changes in their names or the nature of their operations. This table reflects the company names and descriptions as they were known during the years of data collection (1998, 2005, and 2021).

Appendix C

Topic Distribution in Cluster 0, 1, and 2



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Note. Within the text, Topic 0 indicates Topic 1. Among 1 to 10, only in cluster 2, descriptions of Topic 4 in 1998 and 2021, and Topic 1 in 2005 were not confirmed.

Appendix D

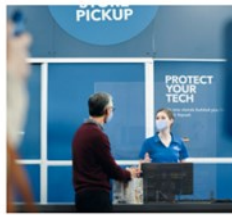
Message Combined with Visual Information on Website

About Us



At Best Buy, our purpose is to enrich lives through technology.

We do that by leveraging our unique combination of tech expertise and human touch to meet our customers' everyday needs, whether they come to us online, visit our stores or invite us into their homes. With over 1,000 stores and over 100,000 employees in the United States and Canada, we solve key human needs in the areas of productivity, security, health, entertainment, connectivity, and more.



Note. This page was retrieved on 16th September 2022

(https://jobs.bestbuy.com/bby?id=item_detail&content=corporate_responsibility). It is not possible to determine whose “lives” are being enriched through technology from the phrase “enrich lives through technology” alone. However, the message is presented alongside photographs of employees at work and customers consulting sales staff. From these photographs, it can be inferred that it applies to both customers and employees.