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Corporate Identity Construction in the Kidult Era: A Discourse-Historical Analysis of the British Brand Jellycat

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Abstract

The plush toy market has undergone great transformation in recent years, with consumer demographics expanding from children to adults as the influence of Kidult culture (adult infantilization) continues to grow. However, existing research lacks investigation into how Kidult culture shapes corporate identity construction and drives strategic adjustments at a deeper level. This study employs a discourse-historical analysis of the Directors' Reports in the annual reports of Jellycat, a British company, spanning 1999 to 2023, with particular emphasis on the critical transition period from 2011 to 2016. The research decodes corporate identity construction strategies through textual discourse analysis across three analytical levels: micro (consumer positioning), meso (corporate strategy adjustment), and macro (global expansion). The analysis reveals that Kidult culture has driven three pivotal transformations in Jellycat's development: (1) Value orientation shifted from function-driven toy manufacturing to emotion-centered companionship products; (2) Market positioning expanded from a child-exclusive focus to an "all-age" consumer base; (3) Development trajectory evolved from a regional brand to a global cultural symbol, reinforcing brand identity through emotional narratives and cross-generational consumption scenarios. These transformations fundamentally represent strategic responses to the socio-psychological needs embedded in Kidult culture, particularly emotional compensation and identity reconstruction, demonstrating the dynamic coupling between business strategy and cultural trends. This study not only reveals how cultural subgroups drive iterations in corporate identity but also offers a practical pathway for corporate identity construction in the Kidult context. These findings provide valuable insights for domestic toy companies, particularly brands like Pop Mart, on balancing functional and emotional value while expanding cross-age consumption in an increasingly stratified consumer market.

Keywords

Corporate Identity, Discourse-Historical Approach, Kidult Culture, the British Brand Jellycat

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1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been a significant shift in the consumer demographic within the toy industry, with an increasing number of adults showing a keen interest in toys, games, and collectibles. According to a report by Fortune Business Insights (2024), the global toy market is projected to grow from $129.45 billion in 2020 to $230.64 billion by 2028, with an annual compound growth rate of 7.30%. This growth is largely driven by the rising proportion of adult consumers aged 18 and above (CMR, 2024). Adults engage in child-like activities or purchase related products to alleviate psychological stress (such as from work or economic burdens), seeking emotional comfort and psychological relaxation. This trend not only reflects the societal psychological changes in the post-pandemic era but also mirrors the rise of "Kidult" culture in recent years (Ji Hye et al., 2015; Lee & Jeon, 2023).

Against this cultural backdrop, the British plush toy brand Jellycat has emerged as a key case for examining the intersection of Kidult culture and corporate identity construction. Founded in 1999, Jellycat quickly rose to prominence due to its distinctive design style and emotional branding. Initially focused on manufacturing children's toys, the brand has gradually evolved into a globally beloved brand, especially favored by adult consumers. As a design-led company specializing in toys and gifts, Jellycat's products are renowned for their soft materials and unique designs, appealing to consumers across all age groups. For instance, emotional language is used in the descriptions in Amazon (2025), such as "Bashful Beige Bunny" being described as "Soft & Lovable," emphasizing the product's tactile appeal and friendliness. Phrases like "Irresistibly soft and oh-so-huggable" further reinforce the product's comforting and therapeutic qualities. Additionally, "Designed in London, Loved Worldwide" not only highlights the brand's international outlook but also expresses "luxurious quality, playful personality, and loveable characters," demonstrating the seamless integration of design and emotional expression. Details such as "Safety & Care" emphasize the brand's commitment to quality and consumer experience. These descriptions fully demonstrate how Jellycat has successfully positioned itself as a high-end gift brand that combines design-driven innovation with emotional value, solidifying its appeal and market position across all age groups. Recently, Jellycat has demonstrated strong growth in global markets, including China, with its corporate image and social media presence continuing to rise, thereby expanding its consumer base. Research has noted that one of the reasons Jellycat has gained popularity among younger Chinese consumers is that its products fulfill the demand for emotional connection and healing, particularly in the face of stress and loneliness (Li, 2023).

Despite Jellycat's influence in global markets, research on its corporate identity remains relatively scarce. Corporate identity is a comprehensive reflection of a company's core attributes and external manifestations, closely linked to its strategic development and market competitiveness (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012). It encompasses both the internal spiritual values and external behavioral traits of the company, as well as its ability to respond to changes in the external environment. In a rapidly changing socio-cultural context, the construction and adjustment of corporate identity directly impact the company's interactions with stakeholders and its market adaptability. To explore how companies dynamically adjust their identity amidst socio-cultural changes, this study introduces the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). By analyzing macro-level socio-cultural topics, meso-level discourse strategies, and micro-level linguistic features, DHA uncovers the multi-layered structure and meaning of organizational discourse (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). Existing studies have shown that DHA is particularly effective in analyzing how corporate discourse constructs identity and strategy. For instance, Wu and Zhang (2019) used DHA to examine the discourse strategies employed by Chinese and American companies in constructing their corporate identities; Shi and Cheng (2021) explored the corporate identity discourse of Chinese and American banks using corpus-based methods; Hu and Xu (2023) focused on the construction of corporate identity through historical discourse analysis, developing a DHA framework to trace how corporate identity evolves in response to historical, social, and political contexts. These studies highlight the effectiveness of DHA in analyzing the construction of corporate identity across different contexts, providing a detailed understanding of how corporate identity is shaped through discourse.

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Thereby, this study, standing on Kidult culture, examines Jellycat's corporate identity construction through the Director's reports in the company's annual reports from its founding in 1999 to 2023. Using the DHA framework, the study analyzes the dynamic evolution of Jellycat's corporate identity over time. The aim of this research is to reveal how Jellycat, driven by Kidult culture, adapts to socio-cultural changes and market demands through discourse strategy adjustments, as well as to uncover the phased characteristics of its corporate identity construction.

To achieve this purpose, the study will focus on the following key research question: How do the macro-level topics, meso-level discourse strategies, and micro-level linguistic features in the Director's reports of Jellycat differ and evolve between two critical periods, 2011-2013 and 2014-2016, under the influence of Kidult culture?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Kidult Culture

The term "Kidult" is a compound word of "kid" and "adult", referring to adults who exhibit childlike interests and sense (Dvornyk, 2016). This concept first emerged in the 1950s to describe adults who were passionate about children's programs or who revisited childhood activities (Ji Hye et al., 2015). In recent years, as entertainment marketing and consumer culture have evolved, Kidult culture has gained increasing attention and popularity. Its core lies in adult consumers' yearning for the fading memories of childhood, with nostalgia driving their consumption behavior. As a highly socialized emotion, nostalgia connects the past and present and strengthens the sense of connection with others (Sedikides et al., 2016). Consequently, adult consumers tend to purchase products that evoke childhood memories, seeking individuality and uniqueness, and actively participate in online communities centered around toys and hobbies, searching for resonance and emotional connection through sharing. For these consumers, purchasing toys is not merely an entertainment activity but also an important way to relieve stress, restore vitality, and foster creativity (DBMR, 2024). Under the influence of economic pressures and the rapid development of technology, Kidult culture has become particularly prominent. Many adults engage in self-care by purchasing childhood-related products such as plush toys. At the same time, the widespread availability of the technology has made it easier to obtain childhood toys, while social media platforms provide a space for emotional exchanges among like-minded individuals (Wiederhold, 2024). The preferences of adult consumers significantly affect market trends, such as the increasing demand for nostalgia, individuality, and smart toys, prompting toy companies to adjust their strategies to meet these demands.

The global rise of Kidult culture has undergone significant historical and cultural evolution. From its early emergence in the 1950s to its prominence in the 1990s in Japan, adults gradually accepted and consumed childhood interests. The flourishing of kawaii culture in Japan during its economic downturn serves as a manifestation of this trend, offering adults an escape from reality and emotional comfort. By the 2010s, Kidult culture began to spread globally, seen as a cultural response to uncertain times (Alt, 2021). Much like the nostalgic behaviors during the Great Depression and the cultural trends of the Great Recession, the "Great Regression" is characterized by a return to childhood symbols, activities, and aesthetics. This phenomenon is not only reflected in personal consumption and entertainment practices but also permeates social governance strategies. Although Kidult has faced criticism as a cultural crisis—for example, the claim that "Britain Is A Nation Of Kidults" (Female First website, 2012), "the United States is experiencing a 'Peter Pandemic' (The Baltimore Sun, 2004)", and "The Death Of Adulthood In American Culture" (The New York Times, 2014)—some critics argue that this is not a failure of culture (Alt, 2021). On the contrary, it represents a complex intertwining of socio-cultural and economic dynamics, providing space for the reshaping of adult identities and the negotiation of meaning (Alt, 2021). Against this backdrop, the British company Jellycat

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has successfully adapted to the ever-changing market demands by integrating its brand image with the Kidult trend. This strategy not only attracts a diverse audience but also bridges the gap between nostalgia and consumerism, creating unique value for the company's development.

2.2 Corporate Identity

Corporate identity encompasses a company's core traits (such as vision, mission, and values) and external manifestations (such as market positioning, public image, and brand communication) (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012). It is closely intertwined with the company's strategic development (He & Balmer, 2007) and has a fundamental impact on its market position and long-term competitive advantage (He, 2012). These identity features collectively constitute the company's unique positioning in the market, allowing it to distinguish itself from competitors. A clear, consistent, and positive corporate identity can build brand trust among customers and directly affect the company's reputation (Abratt & Mingione, 2017).

In a rapidly changing market environment, the flexibility and adaptability of corporate identity are especially crucial. Companies need to adjust their identities based on market dynamics and socio-cultural trends to maintain competitiveness and meet stakeholders' demands (Balmer, 2001). For example, as consumer interest in sustainability increases, many companies have incorporated sustainability into their core values and business practices to adapt to market trends and meet stakeholder expectations (Battaglia et al., 2015). However, corporate identity is not static but dynamic (Balmer, 2001). This evolution is driven by both internal factors (such as strategic adjustments and business expansion) and external factors (such as changes in market competition, technological innovations, and socio-cultural shifts) (Abratt & Mingione, 2017). For instance, Jellycat has transformed from a manufacturer focused on children's toys to a company that offers emotional value to adult consumers, illustrating how its identity has evolved in response to socio-cultural changes and how it has adjusted its strategies and business expansion.

Corporate identity reflects a company's strategy, culture, and public perception, with profound implications for its market position and long-term development. A deeper exploration of corporate identity construction and its dynamic evolution not only reveals how companies respond to external environmental changes but also offers important insights for corporate management and corporate communication studies.

2.3 DHA Framework

Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is an effective approach for studying how corporate identity evolves over time (Hu & Xu, 2023). DHA emphasizes the integration of historical context and socio-cultural environments, focusing on the analysis of discourse at three levels: macro content, meso discourse strategies, and micro language features, to uncover the multi-layered structure and meaning of discourse (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). Within this framework, researchers not only examine the content and structure of discourse but also investigate how external contexts shape the production and dissemination of discourse, thereby revealing the construction logic and dynamic evolution of organizational identity. At the macro level, the focus is on socio-cultural and historical backgrounds, analyzing how external contexts influence the content of discourse. The meso level primarily examines discourse strategies, such as reference, predication, and argumentation, to explore the construction patterns and communicative effects of discourse. At the micro level, the analysis focuses on language features (such as keywords, collocations, and tone) to study the role of specific linguistic forms in the identity-building process (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). This framework has been widely applied in the field of corporate discourse research.

This study applies the DHA analysis framework proposed by Hu and Xu (2023) to analyze the process of Jellycat's corporate identity construction. First, at the macro level, the analysis focuses on the historical background and socio-cultural context, particularly examining how external factors shape the company's discourse. These factors include the rise of the Kidult economy, changes in post-pandemic consumer be-

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havior, the influence of globalization, and the economic impact of Brexit. These contextual factors collectively form the socio-cultural background for the construction of Jellycat's identity. Secondly, at the meso level, the study examines the discourse strategies used in the director's reports of Jellycat. The use of discourse strategies directly affects the presentation of corporate identity, including nomination strategies (how the company, its products, and stakeholders are named), predication strategies (how the company and its products are characterized and valued), argumentation strategies (how arguments are used to justify the construction of identity), perspectivization strategies (the subjectivity of discourse expression), and intensification/mitigation strategies (ways of strengthening success or downplaying risks). By analyzing these strategies, the study reveals the transformation of Jellycat's corporate identity from a singular focus to a multi-value approach. Finally, at the micro level, the analysis delves into language features, focusing on keywords, collocations, and language style to uncover how language specifically contributes to the construction of identity. This study conducts a keyword analysis to assess the frequency of keywords and changes in context. It also uses collocation analysis to explore the shifts in commonly used expressions, further investigating how linguistic patterns reflect adjustments in corporate identity in response to changes in the socio-cultural context. Tone analysis focuses on the stylistic shifts in language, such as the transition from early functional and technical descriptions to later, more emotional and experience-driven expressions.

By combining these three levels, this study not only reveals the dynamic process of Jellycat's identity evolution but also explores how the company uses discourse to respond to socio-cultural changes. The significance of this research lies in its integration of DHA's theoretical framework with corporate identity studies. This enriches the theoretical perspectives on corporate discourse and provides practical insights for companies engaged in corporate identity construction in the context of globalization and cultural change. This research aims to contribute to the understanding of corporate identity as an evolving concept. By examining how companies like Jellycat adapt their identity in response to cultural shifts and market dynamics, it offers valuable perspectives for businesses striving to maintain relevance and competitiveness in an ever-changing global landscape.

3 Methodology

3.1 Corpus

This study examines the dynamic construction of the corporate identity of Jellycat, a UK-based company, through the Directors' Reports in its annual reports (1999–2023; see Table 1), a key discourse platform for articulating identity and strategic positioning.

The research corpus exhibits several characteristics. First, it should be noted that reports from 2024 onwards are not open to the public; therefore, the corpus is limited to the full texts of annual reports from 1999 to 2023, covering all key stages of Jellycat's development, providing historical continuity and representativeness for the analysis. Second, the Director's Reports serve as critical texts for conveying corporate identity and strategic information, reflecting changes in discourse strategies and identity positioning over time. Finally, the corpus, spanning 25 years, offers a robust foundation for exploring the temporal evolution of corporate identity.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Jellycat Corporate Identity Corpus

Research Corpus		Number of Documents	Tokens	Total
Phase I (1999–2010)		12	7,453	18,167
Phase II	(2011–2013)	3	3,365	
	(2014–2016)	3	3,521	
Phase III (2017–2023)		7	3,828	

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Preliminary exploratory analysis revealed that consumer groups were explicitly mentioned in Jellycat's reports only between 2011 and 2016, making this period the focus of analysis. Based on the research purposes and corpus characteristics, the annual reports are divided into three stages to analyze the patterns of corporate identity transformation. The early transition phase is from 1999 to 2010, when Jellycat transitioned from a distributor to a manufacturer. Corporate discourse was primarily functional, with no explicit references to specific consumers. The second phase (2011–2016) marks a gradual clarification and expansion of target consumers, evolving from a focus on "children" to "all age groups," reflecting Jellycat's adaptation to the rise of the Kidult culture. 2017-2023 is the phase where the company further adjusted its discourse strategies in response to globalization, Brexit, and the COVID-19 pandemic, incorporating new themes such as social responsibility and sustainability.

3.2 Focus of Analysis

To underscore the characteristics of 2011–2016 as a critical period for Jellycat's corporate identity construction and discourse transformation, as well as the necessity of researching this period, this study conducted a keyword analysis through the corpus (see Tables 2–4).

Table 2: Keyword Comparison (Phase II vs. Phase I)

No.	Keyword	Frequency (II, Target Corpus)	Frequency (I, Reference Corpus)	Keyness Value (LL Value)
1	Our	104	0	153.389
2	We	106	3	132.764
3	Growth	73	9	62.441
4	Markets	43	3	44.949
5	Brand	29	2	30.384

Table 2 shows that keywords in the 2011–2016 corpus (such as Our, We, and Growth) barely appeared or had low frequencies in 1999–2010, indicating a significant shift in the company's discourse during this period. The high-frequency use of the keywords Our and We reflects that the company's narrative gradually shifted from a functional orientation to emphasizing teamwork and emotional connections with consumers, further enhancing the enterprise's approachability and sense of collective value. At the same time, the emergence of keywords like Growth and Markets highlights the company's narrative strategy of focusing more on growth goals and market expansion during this stage, suggesting that Jellycat had begun to lay out its global market layout and laid the foundation for subsequent global discourse.

Table 3: Keyword Comparison (Phase I vs. Phase II)

No.	Keyword	Frequency (I, Target Corpus)	Frequency (II, Reference Corpus)	Keyness Value (LL Value)
1	Directors	149	45	51.519
2	Company	188	83	34.516

Table 3, by contrast, reveals that the high-frequency appearance of keywords (such as Directors and Company) in 1999–2010 indicates that the discourse focus in this foundational stage was mainly on corporate governance and internal management. No specific consumer groups were explicitly mentioned during this period, and the discourse strategy centered on functional descriptions. In comparison, Jellycat's brand narrative in 2011–2016 placed greater emphasis on brand value, market adaptability, and a teamwork perspective, reflecting a significant transformation in Jellycat's discourse strategy from internal governance to gradual external expansion.

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Table 4: Keyword Comparison (Phase III vs. Phase II)

No.	Keyword	Frequency (III, Target Corpus)	Frequency (II, Reference Corpus)	Keyness Value (LL Value)
1	Revenue	25	4	31.815
2	Uncertainty	14	0	28.851
3	Measures	11	0	22.663
4	Effective	17	3	20.777
5	Pandemic	10	0	20.601

Table 4 presents emerging keywords (such as Revenue, Uncertainty, and Pandemic) during 2017–2023. These keywords indicate that Jellycat expanded its brand narrative during this period to cover themes such as global expansion and sustainable development. Especially when facing challenges like Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and global economic uncertainty, the brand narrative retained the emotional resonance and cross-age group characteristics established in 2011–2016, demonstrating strong adaptability and consumer connections. This continuity shows that the discourse strategy established in 2011–2016 provided important support for Jellycat's long-term brand image building and its response during subsequent special periods (e.g., the pandemic).

Therefore, the data confirms that 2011–2016 was a critical period for Jellycat's brand to transition from functional description to globalized and emotional narrative, as well as a key node in the company's identity transformation. Analyzing the corpus characteristics of this period not only helps reveal the laws governing the evolution of Jellycat's corporate discourse but also provides important insights for exploring corporate brand narrative strategies amid the trends of globalization and cultural adaptability. The cross-age group and emotional narrative established in 2011–2016 not only provided important guidance for the brand's subsequent development direction but also laid a continuous foundation for its narrative strategies during special periods such as the pandemic. Given keyword comparison analysis, this study confirms the core position of 2011–2016 in Jellycat's corporate identity construction and highlights the theoretical value and practical significance of this research. Through a structured and comparative analysis across these periods, the study reveals the dynamic processes of Jellycat's corporate identity construction driven by the Kidult culture, offering insights into the differentiated outcomes of its identity-building strategies.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Corporate Identity Construction Under Kidult Culture

To address the core research question, this study centers on analyzing macro-level topics, meso-level discourse strategies, and micro-level linguistic features in Jellycat's Director's Reports, with a refined focus on the two sub-periods of 2011–2013 and 2014–2016.

4.1.1 Linguistic Analysis

This study conducts a micro linguistic analysis of corporate discourse through three dimensions: keywords, collocations, and language style, to explore the evolution of Jellycat's corporate discourse (Baker et al., 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

The analysis reveals that keywords such as design and new designs appear frequently during 2011-2013, indicating that the company emphasized innovative design as a key strategy to attract customers. For example, product introductions and marketing materials consistently highlighted new design concepts and product styles to meet consumer demand for novel toys and gifts. Additionally, the high frequency of "international" and "export sales", such as in the phrase "exports grew by 31%", underscores the company's strong focus on expanding global markets and its commitment to increasing its share of the international market. Similarly, terms like "growth" and "profitability" are closely tied to the company's financial per-

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formance, as reflected in frequent mentions of growth statistics and profitability indicators in annual reports and business promotions. These references aimed to enhance the company's credibility in the market and demonstrate its solid performance and growth potential to investors, partners, and consumers.

"Jellycat focuses on toys and gifts for younger children" demonstrates the fixed collocation between Jellycat and "younger children", clearly defining the company's target audience as the young children's market. This provided clear direction for product development, marketing strategies, and brand positioning. Similarly, the collocation of "exports grew by" with specific figures (e.g., 31%) uses concrete data to reinforce the company's significant achievements in international market expansion, making its market growth more convincing. However, collocations such as "brand identity and reputation" mainly appear with common verbs like "enhance", indicating the company's focus on reputation building. Nevertheless, the lack of emotionally resonant language in these collocations suggests a missed opportunity to fully explore emotional connections between the brand and consumers.

The language style during this period is characterized by objectivity and professionalism. The text makes extensive use of data and descriptive language, providing detailed explanations of product design features, production processes, and sales figures. This approach aims to convey product information and market performance in a clear and precise manner. However, the discourse lacks emotional or cultural rhetorical devices, resulting in an objective yet somewhat rigid tone. The emphasis on product functionality and tangible market benefits limits the warmth and depth of the corporate identity, making it harder to establish closer emotional connections with consumers.

During 2014-2016, "design-led" emerges as one of the core keywords, frequently emphasized in expressions such as "design-led branded toys and gifts". This shift reflects the company's transformation from focusing solely on design to adopting an innovation-driven, design-led approach, highlighting design as a leading force in brand development and enhancing the brand's uniqueness and competitiveness. Keywords like "global" and "international" appear frequently, often in conjunction with phrases such as throughout the world and local distribution facilities, reflecting the brand's deepened globalization efforts and its enhanced ability to integrate resources and establish market presence on a global scale. The emergence of "ecommerce", in expressions like "new ecommerce websites", demonstrates the company's keen awareness of the growing trend of digital commerce and its proactive adoption of this emerging channel to expand customer reach and sales avenues, thereby adapting to the changing market dynamics of the digital age.

The collocation of "design-led" with "branded toys and gifts" further reinforces the company's new positioning as a design-driven gift brand, emphasizing its competitive differentiation. Similarly, the pairing of "new ecommerce websites" with "extend customer service offering" clearly outlines the company's initiatives to enhance customer service through e-commerce platforms, reflecting a customer-centric development philosophy that strengthens interaction and communication between the company and its consumers, thereby increasing customer loyalty. The collocation of "sales growth" with regional segmentation, such as "Rest of the World sales growth of 110%", vividly and specifically showcases the company's expansion achievements in various global market regions, providing solid evidence for its successful globalization and making the path of its international development more tangible and comprehensible.

The language style during this phase undergoes a significant transformation. By using phrases such as "highest quality and safety standards", the company skillfully highlights its strategic direction toward premiumization, enhancing its quality image in the minds of consumers. In the context of globalization, the frequent use of optimistic and positive terms such as "opportunity" and "growth" conveys a confident corporate attitude toward international market prospects and brand development opportunities, enhancing the brand's appeal and resonance. Furthermore, the discourse extends beyond mere descriptions of product functionality to address corporate values and strategies, as seen in expressions like "creating demand and building the brand's reputation". By articulating the brand's goals and value pursuits at a higher level, the company constructs a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional corporate image, fostering deeper emotional and value-based connections with consumers.

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Jellycat's linguistic features in corporate identity construction underwent a significant transformation. In the first phase, the company positioned itself as a traditional toy manufacturer, focusing on functionality and market expansion. In the second phase, it transitioned into a design-driven premium gift brand, emphasizing "design-led" narratives and global storytelling to reinforce its emotional and cultural value. Additionally, a shift in narrative focus was observed: the first phase concentrated on market expansion and financial performance, while the second phase prioritized design innovation, globalization strategies, and brand-added value, ultimately establishing the image of a globalized, emotionally resonant enterprise. Lastly, linguistic style evolved from emphasizing functional descriptions to incorporating emotional and cultural expressions, reflecting the company's successful transformation from a traditional to a modern brand. These micro-level linguistic changes further validate the pathway of Jellycat's corporate identity discourse from function-oriented to emotionally driven storytelling, strongly supporting its global and emotionally resonant brand transformation (Abratt & Mingione, 2017).

4.1.2 Topic Analysis

DHA emphasizes the importance of analyzing discourse within sociocultural and historical contexts. This macro-level analysis seeks to understand how broader structures, norms, and historical dynamics shape discourse, demonstrating the effectiveness of incorporating sociocultural factors into discourse analysis (Kwon et al., 2014).

Jellycat's corporate identity construction during 2011–2016 reflects its sensitivity to global Kidult trends and its strategic responses. This phenomenon arises from adults' rediscovery of childhood symbols and experiences, which not only influences consumer behavior but also drives corporate adjustments in brand positioning and product design (He & Balmer, 2007). By analyzing texts from different stages during 2011–2016, this section reveals how Jellycat adapted to Kidult culture to transform its identity and expand globally.

Between 2011 and 2013, Jellycat concentrated on the traditional children's market while experimenting with product diversification. The texts frequently mentioned the target audiences of its two main brands: Jellycat, targeting "younger children", emphasized its role as a traditional toy manufacturer, while Catseye covered "all ages/all age groups". Although Catseye made initial forays into the adult market, it lacked an emotional appeal tailored to adult consumers. During this period, corporate strategies focused on "introducing new designs" and expanding the "international customer base". This highlights an emphasis on product innovation and market expansion, though the lack of emotional connection strategies limited the appeal to adult consumers. The market positioning of Jellycat remained primarily child-focused, with adult consumers serving as a secondary extension target. The distinction between brands was evident: Jellycat remained dedicated to the children's market, while Catseye had a broader but less emotionally resonant appeal for adults. Additionally, the phrase "international customer base" primarily indicated early attempts at market expansion without reflecting a mature global corporate strategy.

From 2014 to 2016, Jellycat's discourse and brand positioning underwent significant shifts, moving toward an all-age audience and incorporating emotional design to meet the needs of adult consumers, particularly younger demographics. The explicit mention of "for all ages" in the texts marked a shift from being confined to the children's market to expanding through cross-age positioning. Specifically, Jellycat transitioned from a traditional toy manufacturer to a design-led branded toys and gifts company, aligning closely with the Kidult trend. For example, the Bashful series incorporated global cultural symbols and minimalist design styles, attracting international adult consumers and addressing their desires for comfort and nostalgia (Li, 2023). The company also employed emotionally resonant language, such as "highest quality" and "original gift concepts", and leveraged soft materials (e.g., soft toys) and comforting elements (e.g., cushions, textile accessories) to deepen connections with adult consumers (Fournier, 1998; Sago, 2023). Unlike the emphasis on "international customer base" in 2011–2013, the 2014–2016 elevated globalization to a core strategic level. The "throughout the world" conveyed a clear global corporate identity, while product

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design facilitated cross-cultural adaptability. These shifts were not only reflected linguistically but also manifested through design language that appealed to consumers from diverse cultural backgrounds (Biz-community, 2024).

Jellycat's responses to the Kidult trend involved three main transformations. The first is from single to diverse audiences. The company transitions from a focus on the children's market to cross-age positioning, meeting the emotional needs of adult consumers through soft materials and nostalgic design. The second is from functional to emotional narratives. It moves from toys and gifts to original and design-led storytelling, emphasizing emotional design and product personalization to attract adult consumers. The last is from local to global enterprise. Using globalized language and product design, Jellycat showcased cultural adaptability and universal appeal. Between 2011 and 2016, Jellycat successfully transformed from a traditional children's toy manufacturer to a globalized emotional design enterprise. This shift expanded its target audience and established deep emotional connections with consumers through corporate narratives.

4.1.3 Discourse Strategy Analysis

An analysis of texts from 2011–2013 and 2014–2016 reveals that Jellycat employed differentiated discourse strategies at various stages (Abratt & Mingione, 2017) to construct and shape its corporate identity in response to the rise of Kidult culture. These strategies reflect the brand's gradual adjustments in terms of target audience, market positioning, and globalization strategy. The table below summarizes the discourse strategies employed during the two periods, focusing on dimensions such as naming, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation (see Table 5). This comparison provides a clear depiction of Jellycat's identity discourse evolving from functionality to emotionality, from a children-focused market to a cross-age market, and from regional expansion to global development.

Table 5: Discourse Strategies in Corporate Identity Construction (2011–2016)

Dimension	2011–2013	2014–2016
Nomination	Emphasizing brand differentiation: Jellycat targeting younger children, and Catseye covering all age groups.	Emphasizing all-age positioning: Jellycat transforming into a brand for all ages, and launching design-led branded toys and gifts. Launching the new "Bashful" brand as a featured product line, including travel accessories and soft toys.
Predication	Primarily highlighting functionality: using terms like new designs and international customer base to emphasize product innovation and market expansion.	Emphasizing emotional appeal and design orientation: using terms like "design-led", "highest quality", and "original gift concepts" to build a high-end positioning.
Argumentation	Emphasizing financial data and market performance: e.g., sales growth of 14% and exports grew by 31%, using growth data to demonstrate the effectiveness of brand expansion.	Combining data with market strategy: e.g., sales growth of 34% paired with global logistics networks, while emphasizing the layout and effectiveness of globalization strategies. Highlighting appeal across many different countries and cultures to enhance cultural penetration.
Perspectivization	Corporate perspective: Focusing on brand expansion and profitability, e.g., enhance the company's brand identity and reputation.	Dual perspective of corporation and consumers: Emphasizing global adaptability and emotional connection, e.g., soft toys for all ages and throughout the world. Demonstrating attention to consumer needs through understanding contrasting markets and customer preferences.

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Dimension	2011–2013	2014–2016
Intensification/ Mitigation	Enhancing functionality and growth: Highlighting product innovation and growth stability through new designs and solid results.	Enhancing globalization and digitalization: Emphasizing brand value and global layout through terms like “dedicated local distribution facilities” and “new ecommerce platforms”.

Jellycat’s discourse strategies between 2011 and 2013 focused on functional attributes and market expansion, reflecting a brand narrative centered on innovation, reputation, and growth. Through brand naming that differentiated target audiences, predicate strategies emphasizing product functionality and market performance, and a combination of financial data and multifaceted perspectives, the company established an image of steady development. These strategies laid the groundwork for subsequent globalization and emotional storytelling.

From 2014 to 2016, Jellycat’s discourse strategies underwent a significant transformation, reflecting a more mature approach to globalization and emotional connection. The brand incorporated design-oriented naming and attribute descriptions to emphasize its adaptability to international markets. By integrating data with culturally strategic reasoning, it reinforced its growth logic and value positioning. Additionally, by introducing a consumer perspective and demonstrating cultural adaptability, the brand showcased a deep understanding of the emotional needs and consumption preferences of adult consumers.

Under the influence of the Kidult culture, Jellycat successfully transformed from a traditional children’s toy manufacturer to a design-driven global brand. This transformation not only demonstrated the brand’s adaptability within global trends but also provided a classic case for studying culturally driven brand discourse. It offers valuable insights for future strategic adjustments of brands in the context of globalization and cultural trends.

4.2 Corporate Identity Construction Analysis

This study focuses on analyzing the logic and staged characteristics of Jellycat’s corporate identity construction during two key periods from 2011 to 2016. Influenced by Kidult culture, Jellycat adjusted its discourse strategies, expanding its corporate positioning and consumer groups, thereby laying a foundation for globalization and identity reshaping.

During the 2011–2013 period, characterized as the initial exploratory phase of identity transformation, Jellycat for the first time explicitly mentioned consumers in its Director’s Reports. This marked a shift from a traditional toy manufacturer to addressing a more diverse audience. The discourse content primarily focused on “children”, highlighting the company’s attention to the children’s market. Concurrently, Jellycat began introducing emotional appeals in product design and marketing narratives, such as emphasizing the softness and warmth of its products and their associations with family life, thereby starting to craft a brand image with emotional resonance (Fournier, 1998). The 2014–2016 period saw further identity expansion and the strengthening of emotional resonance, as Jellycat adjusted its discourse to extend its consumer base from “children” to “all age groups,” directly responding to the rise and spread of Kidult culture. Its discourse strategies demonstrated a keen sensitivity to emotional needs and nostalgic consumption trends, by incorporating nostalgic elements into product narratives (e.g., evoking childhood memories) and deepening emotional connections with adult consumers (Holt, 2004; Sedikides et al., 2016; Wiederhold, 2024).

The 2011–2013 phase represented a basic stage of identity transformation, with corporate discourse focusing more on functional features and market positioning experimentation. In contrast, the 2014–2016 phase employed more sophisticated discourse strategies to achieve a transition from targeting the children’s market to embracing a broader, cross-generational consumer base. This differentiated discourse reflects the staged pattern of Jellycat’s corporate identity construction: from establishing a foundational focus on the children’s market to leveraging emotional connections to appeal to a wider audience. This transformation not only established the company’s core values but also provided discursive support for subsequent phases

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of globalization and the incorporation of themes like social responsibility and sustainability.

5 Conclusion

This study, based on the Discourse-Historical Approach framework, explored the British Brand Jellycat's corporate identity construction and strategic adjustments under the influence of Kidult culture across micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Focusing on the analysis of textual data from 2011 to 2016, the research reveals key characteristics of Jellycat's evolution, from functionality to emotionality, from targeting children to addressing an all-age market, and from regional expansion to globalized development. In terms of corporate discourse transformation, Jellycat transitioned from a function-oriented narrative to an emotionally driven and design-led narrative, effectively enhancing its emotional value and global positioning. This enabled the brand to attract a cross-generational audience successfully. The Kidult culture played a pivotal role in this evolution. By incorporating emotionally resonant designs that addressed adult consumers' needs for therapeutic and nostalgic themes, Jellycat expanded its audience and achieved a strategic shift from a single child-focused market to one that spans all age groups. Regarding globalization and digitalization, Jellycat established a global logistics network and developed e-commerce platforms, significantly increasing its international market penetration and consumer accessibility. These efforts provided strong support for the global dissemination of its brand value.

This study provides practical insights for domestic companies navigating strategic adjustments under the influence of globalization and cultural trends. However, the scope of the data was limited and did not fully encompass multimodal forms of communication. Additionally, the methodology lacked the support of corpus-based tools. Future research could expand the data sources, incorporate multimodal analyses and corpus techniques, and conduct cross-cultural comparative studies to comprehensively reveal the dynamic characteristics of corporate discourse. By examining the impact of Kidult culture on corporate identity construction, this study offers valuable implications for businesses and lays the groundwork for further exploration in this domain.

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