Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews the extant relevant literature, both theoretical and empirical, on which the theoretical framework is based and elucidated. The literature review basically consists of two sections. The first section describes identity formation and the construction of corporate identity. The second section examines notions and tenets of interactional sociolinguistics and new media discourse studies. Subsequent to acknowledging the existing and available literature, a discussion of research gaps is presented to indicate how the present study helps to bridge the research gap in literature.

2.2 Identity, Corporate Identity and Language Use

2.2.1 Identity Formation and Language Use

The interlocking relation between identity formation and language use is reviewed from the following three prominent perspectives: (1) psychological and sociological perspective (2) linguistic and communication perspectives (3) pragmatic perspective.

2.2.1.1 Psychological and Sociological Perspectives

In simple terms, when we realise the impression of "me" in the eyes of others, the consciousness of identity immediately comes into play. The psychologist Erikson (1964, 1968) maintained identity as a dynamic conception of oneself as a person, which amounted to a subjective sense of sameness felt by individuals within

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W. Feng, *Discursive Constructions of Corporate Identities by Chinese Banks on Sina Weibo*, DOI 10.1007/978-981-10-4469-4_2

themselves. Identity as the perception of personal unity was generally regarded as the conviction to remain unchanged and essentially the same. Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) problematised and untangled the identity of individuals vis-a-vis larger social groups, such as nations and religions to tackle intergroup discrimination.

Identity formation or identity construction, also known as individualisation, is an evolving, psychological and formative process of socialisation through which one's distinct personality and mentality are determined and become mature and relatively stable against others in social groups (Schwartz et al. 2011). Social belongings and biological traits have endowed individuals with a number of layers of simultaneous identities, be it ethnic and national identity, cultural identity, religious identity or gender identity, a matter of fact affecting all aspects of human societies and a basic truth that policymakers, educators and product designers can never afford to neglect.

It ought to be duly noted that, as one of the most renowned, yet elusive and sophisticated psychological notions, identity has generated accelerating interest and works in both the scholarly and practitioner realms (e.g. Goffman 1959; Leary 1996; Elliott 2001). Identity and its formation have long been an active research area in psychology and a wide variety of disciplines in social sciences (Elliott 2011). Despite that interpersonal development of identity formation can be individualised, there are developed theories describing and categorising the nature and process of identity formation. The crucial theory of psychological development of Erikson (1964) propounded that the particular stage relevant to identity formation, i.e., "identity versus role confusion", takes place during adolescence (age between 12 and 20). If this stage is accomplished, individuals enter into the next stage of "intimacy versus isolation" where they will form strong friendships and a sense of companionship with others. Likewise, Marcia's (1966) well-cited identity status theory proposed a natural progression of four identity statuses: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium and identity achievement.

While some schools of thought highlighted the sameness feature of identity, other scholars sensed and acknowledged the fluid, dynamic and negotiated nature of identity and its formation (De Fina et al. 2006; Garzone and Archibald 2010). The pioneering attempt of McCall and Simons (1966) in defining identity deemed identity formation as a bidirectional process and linked the role of the actor in relation to the role of other actors as a result of social interaction. More recently, it was argued that views social identity theorists held towards identity were incomplete and static (e.g., Perverelli 2006). Rather than viewing identity construction as "one-way traffic", Perverelli (2006, p. 2) regarded and conceptualised identity, particularly corporate identity, as "the construction of identity by the holder of the identity, the environment in which the identity is constructed". His richer definition of identity pertains to two directions: (1) it comprises three aspects of identity: the holder of the identity, the environment in which the identity is constructed and the construction process; (2) it allows for a multiple definition of identity: an individual can be perceived as having multiple identities in multiple contexts (ibid.). Noticeably, the co-construction of identity has been increasingly echoed. Some

believed that "corporate identity formation is not a univocal process: a number of different corporate functions and people contribute to it" (Allori and Garzone 2010, p. 14).

To further trace the source of identity as co-construction, a great name and his seminal philosophy deserved our attention and elucidation. In his groundbreaking book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* published as early as 1959, sociologist Erving Goffman set the basic frontiers in the realm of identity with reference to face and social interactions. In comparing individuals to performers and their everyday presentation to staged performance in front of audience, Goffman (1959) specified that identity is an ongoing interactive construction rather than something given (cf. Irwin 2011). This entails that self is an ongoing social construct, rather than merely an array of visual and invisible attributes wholly controlled and decided by its owner. The efforts individuals attempt to make in the public is front-stage behaviors or, in Goffman's words, impression management. Otherwise in the private domains where they take off masks, individuals act back-stage behaviors. Goffman (1967) gave sufficient prominence to the role of social interaction in constructing personal identity, during which face and face-work are an integral part. The social experience in constructing personal identity is governed by frame (Goffman 1974). After all, a convincing conclusion was drawn on the construction of identity: "this self is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it" (Goffman 1959, p. 252).

The research on identity has flourished for half a century or so, resulting in the recognisation of the accelerated interdisciplinary popularity of identity. In recent years, identity appears to be in the social sciences and humanities as everything from reconstructed and reinvented to displaced and disowned to loveless and liquidised. There is indeed an immense and growing literature on identity and the field of identity studies has become of key significance to the social sciences and humanities the world over" (Elliott 2011). A noticeable challenge is the changing milieu of identity being examined, as observed that in a context of globalisation, e-society, the networked or virtual society, the mobility of labor and citizenship, "identity has now become a more nuanced core topic stretching across a variety of sub-fields" (Pullen and Linstead 2005, p. 1).

In summary, among the academic literature revolving around identity and its formation, two developed perspectives drew noteworthy attention: a dialogic perspective and a dialectic perspective. From the dialogic perspective, social constructionists (e.g. Gergen 1994, 1999) deemed individuals as living in a network of relations with others and proposed the concept of a linguistic, relational self where self is realised in language and dialogue, i.e., self is then constructed and re-constructed in a reflective process through continuous interactions and relationships. However, a dialectic perspective such as Vygotskian socio-cultural approach (Rieber and Carton 1987) assumed that all human mental functioning is socio-culturally, historically, and institutionally situated and maintained that identity formation involves an encounter between cultural resources for identity and individual choices for fidelity, values, ideology and commitment.

2.2.1.2 Sociolinguistic and Communication Perspectives

Another key strand of thought in identity and language use falls into sociolinguistic research which explicitly suggested that: "identity is now considered as a primary focus of investigation" (Dyer 2007, p. 108). Not surprisingly with identity as a common theme and drawing heavily on spoken interaction, social constructionist work has been extended to much wider domains penetrating to areas of "gender, ethnicity, childhood and adolescence, adolescence and gender, adolescence and ethnicity, adolescence and social class, ethnicity, national identity and minority languages, 'othering' in the legal system, ethnicity, natural identity and policing, mediated (political) discourse (Irwin 2011, p. 110). However, the applicability of social constructionist approach of identity studies is somehow limited its scope to synchronous face-to-face and one-to-one spoken interaction, as such allowing more timely research on one-to-many non face-to-face written interaction, preferably on institutionalised basis to further explore language and discursive construction of identity.

The extant volume of research, over the past few decades, touching upon the dualistic relationship between identity and language has been cross-disciplinary and primarily inspired by sociology (Goffman 1959, 1967), variationist sociolinguistics (Labov 1972; Lakoff 1975), ethnography of communication (Hymes 1974), socio-psychology (Tajfel 1981), pragmatics (Leech 1983; Brown and Levinson 1987; Gu 1990; Verschueren 1999), ethnolinguistics (Eckert 2000), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995a) and interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982b; Tannen 1996; Goffman 1981).

By his classic dramaturgical metaphors such as "back stage, front stage and audience", Goffman's (1959) far-reaching sociological conclusions of personal identity regard the self as a social construction or more specifically an interactive construction. However, the concept of self is by no means grounded in individual psychology with psychological constructs such as goals and motives applied, but is more concerned with social rules in social interaction (Schiffrin 1994, p. 105). Goffman's holistic coneptualisation of the self-concept is summarised into a tripartite scheme: the self is a social construction, impressions of self are "given off" rather than "given" and they are interpreted according to conventionalised or socially agreed-upon "rituals" (Tannen 2009, p. 300). In the same page Tannen continued, by "given off" rather than "given", it is meant that aspects of a speaker's "performance" give others an impression of the speaker's self.

Variationist sociolinguistics is a strand of quantitative approach to the interrelationship studies between variables at different levels of phonetic or grammatical structures and linguistic, social-economic environments in which they occur (Labov 1980). In many cases, social factors such as gender, age and class are used to experiment their constraints in language use. The representative figure Labov (1972) distinguished the economic status of speakers in a New York department store by locating the phonological variations of the English syllabus "r" among randomly selected participants. His seminal study was replicated many times in varied settings in various parts of the world. (Variationist) sociolinguistics enabled

reliable methods that, apart from their effectiveness in tracing linguistic diffusion processes, "make it possible to use linguistic indices in survey studies of social identity" (Gumperz 1982a, p. 25). In others words, variationist sociolinguistics bridged the systemic connection between linguistic behaviors with linguistic attitudes and opinions, which reflect and reinforce user identity. Another crucial figure Lakoff (1975) proposed her most cited dichotomous view of gender and the general features of female register, ranging from women's favored usage of weak expletives to the use of question tag. Nonetheless, variationist sociolinguistics has been heavily doubted and challenged for their static interpretations of born and essentialist identities of language users, more precisely the automatic causal correlation between individual aspects of linguistic behavior and certain traits of social identity (cf. Camerson 1990).

From the perspective of the ethnography of communication, Gumperz (1982a) stressed the discourse strategies in interpersonal communication and argued that identities can be constructed and created in verbal communications, regardless of the pre-given identities that speakers may have. Gumperz's conceptualisations on identity constructions were not alone. Ethnolinguists claimed that the identities are constructed in the community of practice, which form members' collective way of doing and way of thinking (e.g. Eckert 2000). Major accomplishments of Tannen (1984, 1990, 1996) reside in her gendered discourse studies in relation to its relationship with identity whose anti-essentialist view of identity in gender studies never stops to inspire people to conceive identity as fixed and stable, but rather fluid and multilayered (cf. Garzone and Catenaccio 2009). Adopting a social perspective, critical discourse analysts (Fairclough 1989; 1995b; van Dijk 1988) deconstructed and proved how identities are created as power and ideology are enacted and manipulated by means of the choice of wording, intertextuality and text arrangements.

In conclusion, the bittersweet relationship between identity and language in sociolinguistics has roughly undergone three stages: "identity as social category, identity as a contact phenomenon and identity as practice" (Dyer 2007, pp. 101–105), a static to dynamic evolutionary view of identity from variables such as age, gender, and class to ultimately a negotiated on-going practice.

2.2.1.3 Pragmatic Perspective

Furthermore, pragmatist Verschueren (1999) noticed the various parameters of social speakers, ranging from culture, ethnicity to educational background. Scholars have been aware of the decisive role of context in the construction of identities of speakers (e.g. Butler 1990). Nevertheless, the agent status per se of the language speakers in forming their identities has not been sufficiently valued by pragmatists (Gu and Li 2007). The pragmatic perspective of identity construction owes to the Chinese scholar of pragmatics Prof. Chen Xinren and his followers. Chen's (2013, p. 27) defined "pragmatic identity" or "identity in use" as "the contextualised identity, the speaker/author attributes to himself/herself or the address, be it conscious or

unconscious, in the communication process". The pragmatic identity is the de facto identity speakers take in real-life process of communications, different from any other identities they took prior to the process of communications (Chen 2013). According to Chen (2013, pp. 27–28), as compared to social identity, pragmatic identity is characteristic of the following traits: (1) communication-dependent and temporary (2) dynamic and variable (3) resourceful (4) subjective and purposeful. The choice of one's pragmatic identity is bound by the underlying rules as follows: (1) irregardless of the speaker's willingness/unwillingness and likes/dislikes, the speaker has to make choices of his/her pragmatic identity in a given circumstance (2) the instability of the degree of consciousness is noticeable as speaker makes choices of his/her pragmatic identity (3) the speaker's selection of pragmatic identity is driven by his/her needs of communication (4) the speaker's selection of pragmatic identity is dynamic (5) in a given circumstance, the speakers' selection of pragmatic identity is manifested in his/her choice of language/discourse (6) in a given circumstance, the selection of specific pragmatic identity generates specific communicative value and brings about specific communicative outcomes (7) whether or not the speakers' selection of pragmatic identity is appropriate, reliable, effective and polite depends on the given circumstance of the discourse, inclusive of contextual factors, types of occasions, the presence of third-party, social relations of the two parties in the communication, history of interaction, values and beliefs of the other party (ibid.). Having been applied in the studies of promotional discourse undertaken in the drugstores (Yuan and Chen 2013), law discourse and advertisements (Chen 2013) and online B2C pre-sales consultancy of cosmetic products (He and Chen 2015), the rationality of pragmatic identity was verified and the genres of pragmatic identity apply were identified.

2.2.2 Discursive Constructions of Corporate Identity

One of the most dynamic and prolific sub-areas of identity studies resides in understanding the configurations of corporate identity and how it functions in enhancing the corporate public image. The study of corporate identity has benefited from the rich legacy of identity studies and is particularly indebted to the initial work of organisational culture research in the 1980s and 1990s (Pullen and Linstead 2005). Meanwhile, it merits clarifying that there is no fundamental difference in the ways individuals and organisations construct their identities (Hatch and Schulz 2002), and corporate identities are projected and largely under the control of host organisations (Topalian 1984).

To trace back the origin of corporate identity, as early as in the 1950s, graphic design consultants Lippincott and Margulies coined the notion of "corporate identity" (Lippincott and Margulies 1957), discussions and deductions arising from which since then have been excitingly dynamic, resulting in the voluminous literature of corporate identity. Corporate identity, originally evolved from the realm of marketing in the 1960s, has been primarily based on the business practitioners' sales, advertising and the design activities of logos and mission statements (cf. Melewar

and Jenkins 2002). During the preceding business undertakings, professionals are in desperate need of a set of identities to locate and represent the corporations and make clear to stakeholders. The root of corporate identity was observed as a strategic manifestation of corporate-level vision and mission, underpinned by the strategies, which a corporation employs in its operations or production (Melewar and Wooldridge 2001).

The conceptualising and evolving process of corporate identity studies has been undertaken for a journey of over half-century. It was discussed and revealed that there were five stages in the brief history of corporate identity and its academic research: 1950s–1970s, 1970s to early 1980s, late 1980s to late 1990s, late 1990s and 2000 (Blamer 1998). As per Blamer (1998), stage 1 was primarily concerned with corporate image and with graphic design. Stage 2 was characteristic of the ascendancy of corporate identity and corporate personality. Stage 3 witnessed greater academic interest, particularly in Europe where emphases were given to the marketers, strategists as well as behaviorists with special attention to behavioral aspects of identity and in particular to organisational identity. However, in stage 4, corporate identity has seen a burgeoning of cross border and cross-disciplinary contact among both academics and practitioners. This sub-discipline has formulated and has attracted increasingly international and interdisciplinary endeavors and out-of-ivory-tower activities. The last stage 5 saw the advent of corporate marketing, bridging gaps for researchers, managers and consultants.

Even though there is still a lack of consensus as to the characteristics of a corporate identity, some existing misunderstandings or "fogs" may be captured anyway. After all, corporate identity entails at least two sets of denotations: (1) the mix of elements which gives organisations their distinctiveness: the foundation of business identities; (2) the importance of several elements including culture, strategy, history, business activities and market scope (Balmer 2001, p. 254). Prior to this synthesis, Balmer's (1998) research was pioneering and significant in summarising the several salient features of corporate identities.

Furthermore, common features of corporate identity were further acknowledged: (1) corporate identity is a multidisciplinary field; (2) it is a term used to identify the essence of what the firm is and thus incorporates many unique characteristics of the firm such as history, philosophy, culture, communication and the industry the firm operates in; (3) it is inseparable from the corporate personality of the organisation (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu 2005, p. 848). A tripartite layers of corporate identity definitions was further teased out and its characteristics were made explicit: "(1) complexity (they are multi-faceted and multidimensional in nature in that they informed by various spatial/temporal dimensions); (2) variability (they are immutable but evolutionary in character); and (3) heterogeneous (they are informed by multidisciplinary perspectives in terms of comprehension and management)" (Balmer 2001, p. 888).

Corporate identity is "the central, distinct and enduring dimensions of a company" (Albert and Whetten 1985, p. 265). From a psychological view, corporate identity in nature can never be separated from planned self-presentation of an organisation, consisting of cues an organisation gives via "its behavior,

communication and symbolism" (van Riel 1995, p. 36). Corporate identities, similar to organisational identities as a symbolic process, establish a common definition in terms of who we are and what we stand for, both in and outside the organisation. In accordance to general industry practice, corporate identities are believed to consist of three aspects: corporate design (e.g. logos and corporate colors), corporate communication (e.g. advertising, public relations) and corporate behavior (e.g. values and norms). The crucial task of building a good image for the corporation all points to the significant work of impression management. Indeed, many scholars have recognised the interchangeability of corporate identity and corporate image, between which a profound link has been strengthened across a wide literature of marketing, corporate communication and public relations (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu 2005).

The communication of corporate identity entails its visual communication and discursive communication, of which the latter form shall be the foci of the present study. A holistic taxonomy of corporate identity listed a few defining determinants, i.e., corporate communication, corporate design, corporate culture, behavior, corporate structure, industry identity and corporate strategy, each being categorised into a lower level to contain more determinants (Melewar 2003). It is evident that corporate communication plays a crucially determining role in the defining model of corporate identity. Melewar (2003) also regarded corporate communication as the first and foremost factor in corporate identity determination, which comprised of controlled communication, uncontrolled communication and indirect communication. By controlled corporate communication, he meant that the management tool by which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication is harmonised effectively and efficiently for creating a favorable basis for a relationship with an organisation's stakeholders (van Riel 1995). Conversely, uncontrolled communication usually involves the communication between the employees of an organisation and the external stakeholders through their interaction (Moingeon and Ramamantsoa 1997). Moingeon and Ramamantsoa (1997) indicated customer-to-customer on-line community is in fact a new form of uncontrolled corporate communication. In this sense, the corporate microblogging platform is a prototype of uncontrolled external corporate communication, on which followers' responses are unedited, instantly generated and beyond the control of the corporation or any agents.

It has been aware that nowadays identities arising from corporate communication have become unprecedentedly complicated. Of prime concerns of the preceding literature is the progressive colonisation of life world, entailing a displacement of communicative practices (Habermas 1984), during which transformations contributing to identity construction are seen more and more common from other forms of communication into corporate communication (e.g., Bhatia 1993, 2004; Erjavec 2004; Fairclough 1995a; Maat 2007).

The art of constructing corporate identity has been examined. In the theoretical model conceptualised by Cornelissen and Elving (2003), media and messages are seen as the two crucial dimensions of managing corporate identity. Likewise, by identifying three types of language style on English-mediated corporate Twitter:

emotional bird, social realist and thinking machine, Pacea (2011) concluded that there exists a strong correlation between the language style and the situational parameter of company profile on Twitter. Nevertheless, despite sheer efforts of organisations, corporate identity construction involved other forces derived from other stakeholders, e.g., the public.

In sum, corporate identity literature owes to three philosophical underpinnings: functionalist, interpretive and post-modern (Gioia 1998). Functionalist scholars (marketing perspective) regard corporate identity from a management perspective, deeming it as an objective phenomenon, and thus can be forged and managed, whereas the interpretive studies (the organisational behaviorist perspective) argue that corporate identity as subjective, socially constructed and stakeholders actively interpret the environment based on their interpretations of corporate identity (Gioia 1998; James and Melewar 2008). Post-modern perceptions of corporate identity, however, orient to "an invention for the (often sinister) purposes of parties in power" (Gioia 1998, p. 28).

In the conceptualisation of the theories regarding corporate identity, three strands of thinking that somehow intertwined among one another are noteworthy: (1) the interpretivist view that a corporate identity as an expression of the corporate personality; (2) the functionalist view that corporate identity as an organisational reality; (3) the rhetorical view that corporate identity as all the expressions of a company (Cornelissen and Harris 2001, pp. 60–61). "In the first two theories, communication and symbols were analytically separated from the thoughts and objects being symbolised" and the third rhetorical view of corporate identity focuses on "how language is used to enact or create social structures and how language and other symbol systems are reproduced, maintained and changed through use" (ibid). In other words, the theorised corporate identity has undergone an evolution of an identity from "sameness" to "essences and properties" and ultimately to identity as "identity as appearance", which lays special emphasis on the company's conscious and consistent impression management of the public over time for a trustworthy image and reputation of their own (ibid). The third rhetorical view of corporate identity as all the expressions of a company may be a concert and contemporary manifestation of Goffman's (1959) seminal perception that the individual identity is a product of social interaction, instead of an inner cause or antecedent reality.

In accordance to the interpretivist, functionalist and a rhetorical approach and strand of constructing the corporate identity, some common myths have to be prudently clarified. According to Theunissen (2014), the first myth is on the role of the public in creating corporate identity, which is only recognised for how identity might be perceived through the image created in the minds of the public, thus assuming that corporate identity is in the control of organisations who can manipulate it. The second myth is that corporate identity can change but once it is constructed, it is fixed and needs only to be adapted, updated or modernised every a few years by the corporation. Myths of corporate identity as such can be categorised as static, one-way and corporation-responsible only. Nonetheless, an increasing body of research has questioned these myths and commenced to recognise corporate identity

as something that may be co-created, user-generated and resulted from the negotiation between stakeholders and the company (De Fina et al. 2006; Peverelli 2006; Theunissen 2014). The co-creational thinking of corporate identity emphasises on communication and dialogue with the public, rather than the preplanned monologue and rehearsed solo performance of companies. Although dialogic tenets tend to gain momentum in co-constructing corporate identity, it remains an under-explored and under-developed concept in public relations theory and practice (Pieczka 2011; Theunissen and Wan Noordin 2012).

2.3 Identity Construction in Corporate Communication: How?

2.3.1 The Turn of Social Media in Online Corporate Identity Construction

As per Balmer (1998)'s five-stage divide of corporate identity evolution, the 21st century may be foreseen as the advent of corporate marketing. Albeit he did not suggest possibilities enabled by technological innovations, online corporate identity did play an ever-increasingly key role in corporate marketing. Indeed, an influx of scholars (Abdullah et al. 2013; Topalian 2003; Melewar and Navalekar 2002; Allori 2010) has paid attention to the pros and cons of corporate identity construction in the context of corporate websites. In comparison to mass media advertising propaganda, where information flow is hierarchical, downward and purely commercial, online corporate identity construction excels in the sense that consumers are entitled to individualised user experience in accessing corporate websites with ample semiotic resources (Degano 2009, 2010; Hynes and Janson 2010). Nonetheless, the general performance of corporate identity formation during pre new media digital age is accused of being undynamic, slow in updating and interaction, disappointing and unsatisfactory in user engagement. Topalian (2003, p. 1121) raised his realistic criticism:

> Corporate websites could be very powerful vehicles for such identities, yet many sites demonstrate few advances on promotional literature. Many are little more than static on-screen corporate notice-boards, brochures or magazines. Dynamic elements incorporated tend to be "clever" add-ons without serious value for visitors: they miss the opportunity to captivate audiences, raise profiles and build mutually beneficial interactive relationships.
>
> Topalian (2003, p. 1121)

The apparent passé flavor in the choice of corporate websites in corporate communication cast reasonable doubts in its capability of projecting a shining and trustworthy corporate identity. The investigation of the corporate self-presentation of top 20 Fortune 500 corporations indicated that the websites contents are featured with impressing numbers, providing third-party evidence, presenting claims as

facts, removing agents and humanising the organisation (Pollach 2005). Pollach (2005, p. 296) noted that in conveying attitudes, these world best-selling brands focused on their size and scope, agents of change, leadership, corporate citizenship, whereas in terms of relationships building, sample brands were good at using personal pronouns but the interactivity of websites were seen poor enough and "in one-way communication only". Another large-scale study by Abdullah et al. (2013) who examined 300 Malaysian and 214 Singaporean corporations found that both Malaysian and Singaporean companies have weak brand personality dimensions which reflect their less satisfactory projection of corporate identities on their official websites.

In fact, interaction with stakeholders is no longer under organisational control due to the prevalence of social media (Luoma-aho and Vos 2010). The increasingly voluminous body of research in regards to corporate identity construction that was conducted in the 21st century was largely inspired by the rise of social media. The need for such a critical perspective was highlighted ever since the emergence of worldwide recognised SNS brands such as Facebook, Twitter and Weibo that revolutionised the way corporate identity used to be constructed, e.g., by emphasising the followers' contribution and the role of shaping corporate identity in the firm-follower interaction (Rybalko and Seltzer 2010; Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen 2014; Waters and Jamal 2011). Illuminating insights of these research noticed the valuable role of social media in managing online corporate reputations and having dialogues and conversations with stakeholders via social media seen conductive to companies to promote good relations in the social media environments (e.g. Briones et al. 2011; Cho and Huh 2010). For instance, how American Red Cross made effective use of social media to maintain relationships with stakeholders was discovered (Briones et al. 2011).

Strategies of impression management were also given dedicated scholarly passion vis-a-vis the company-consumer interaction on social media. It is acknowledged that in coping with corporate crisis communication on corporate Facebook fan page, upholding social acceptability and promoting credibility are two major strategies Finnish corporations used to interactively manage a better identity and impression, which can be subcategorised into "conventional politeness, moral discourse, diversion, entitlement and stake, footing and ridicule" (Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen 2014, p. 21). However exciting, the sweeping body of research of corporate identity construction in post-social media era seems to have been conducted in Western business perspective and environment. It is imperative that studies on building corporate identity on social media platform can be explored in contexts other than the Western.

2.3.2 Impression Management

Impression management, sometimes used interchangeably as self-presentation, is defined as "the conscious or unconscious attempt to control images that are projected

in real or imagined social interactions" (Schlenker 1980, p. 6). Impression management refers to the behaviors individuals engage in influencing and the impressions others have of them (Rosenfeld et al. 1995). In a narrow sense, impression management may also imply the beliefs and practices of organisations' public relations in managing their public images (DuBrin 2011b). Rosenfeld et al. (2002, p. 29) delineated two overarching tendencies both human beings and organisations encounter in managing their impressions: "to be seen by others in favorable manner and to avoid being viewed negatively", which are accordingly named as the acquisitive impression management and protective impression management (Arkin 1981; Palmer et al. 2001). The most commonly researched acquisitive impression management must be ingratiation, being defined as a set of related impression management tactics that have as their collective goal making the person more liked and attractive to others (Jones 1990). In addition to ingratiation, other acquisitive impression management strategies encompass, for instance, self-promotion, intimidation, exemplification and supplication (Rosenfeld et al. 2002).

The founding father of impression management studies is undoubtedly Erving Goffman. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor of self-presentation may equally be well applied to agents and organisations other than individuals (Johansson 2007). Corporations and organisations, bearing similar traits as individuals, are actors engaging in performances in various settings in front of their audiences (Allen and Caillouet 1994). The discursive presentation of corporations specifically links to their external corporate communication. Corporate communication may be defined as "an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonised as effectively and efficiently as possible, in an attempt to create a favorable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent" (van Riel 1995, p. 26). This powerful definition of corporation communication and its many similar versions accentuate the desired corporate communication outcome: company's favorable image and public relations among its stakeholders. The ultimate goal of public relations discourse strives for an excellent reputation and a good impression of the corporation in the public (Harlow 1976), which in one way or another helps to improve sales figures in the financial statements in the long run. To this end, a series of preferable communicative practices and strategies to public relations professionals were suggested: "known source, clear intent, reasoned argument, factual accuracy, and positive but limited emotional appeal and it is dialogic, respectful of its audiences, open to challenge, ready to amend and willing to reply" (Wood and Somerville 2008, p. 98).

Impression management is regarded as a notion in closest proximity to and serving as an integral part of the corporate identity construction. Indebted to the early significant work done in sociology and psychology, impression management originally conceptualised self-presentation in interpersonal communication (Goffman 1959; Leary 1996). Erving Goffman (1959, p. 208) creatively utilised a series of dramaturgical metaphors to identify a connection between the kinds of "acts" that individuals put on in their everyday life and theatrical performances in social interactions. According to Goffman (1959), in a theatrical performance there

is an onstage area where actors/individuals appear before the audience; this is where positive self-concepts and desired impressions are presented. But there is also a backstage or a hidden, private area where individuals can be the real themselves and drop their societal roles and identities. Impression management strategies have been applied to cope with organisation's crisis (Allen and Caillouet 1994). It is argued that corporate Facebook fan page may be seen mainly as a frontstage with some backstage moments as well for external corporate communication (Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen 2014). This is probably the same applicable to corporate microblogging site, the most powerful and influential company-consumer communication channel in today's China.

The notion of impression management has been borrowed wisely to improve corporate management and public relations (DuBrin 2011a; Giacalone and Rosenfeld 1989; Rosenfeld et al. 2002). It has been certain that the presentation of corporate image and identity through corporate communications is influential and has paramount impacts on corporate reputation (Melewar 2008). It has been aware that the interlocking relationship between corporate identity and corporate communication in the sense that "managing corporate identity is about identifying the right image for an organisation, and communicating it effectively" (Wood 2004, p. 95). It is also noted that scholarship on corporate identity did pay ample attention to the "how" questions in daily practice of corporation, vis-a-vis the role of language and communication in shaping corporate image, resulting in fruitful empirical studies of discursive construction of corporate identity (e.g., Zhu and Hildebrandt 2013; Yuan 2011). In probing effectiveness in international business sales letters, Zhu and Hildebrandt (2013) innovatively compared persuasion strategies of Chinese and New Zealand businessmen, which are culturally specific from an emic-etic perspective and uncovered the implication of Qing (positive affect)'s role generated by the Chinese identity.

Corporate identities studies have expanded to and given prominence to a variety of industries, ranging from tourism sectors, healthcare sectors to media sectors and elsewhere, flourishing specially in the Internet context (cf. Garzone and Catenaccio 2009). Strategies of discursive identity formation and construction via Internet pay special attention to corporate websites and social media, pertaining to complex and multi-layered identities such as social, national, cultural and ethnic (Garzone 2009).

In essence, the linguistic realisations in impression management of corporations share roots in interpersonal communication. From a genre-based perspective, Bhatia (2004) elucidated this revolutionarily transforming trend from non-promotional discourse to corporate communication and clarified that a growing number of genres, ranging from academic introductions to philanthropic fundraising letters, have appropriated the promotional tendencies and nature of "classic" promotional genres, in terms of communicative purposes, lexico-grammatical structures, move structures and so on. A common feature shared across all the promotional genres is their similar communicative purposes, either "mainly promotional" or "informational as well as promotional" or "mainly public relational and promotional" (pp. 68–69). Bhatia also pointed out how listed companies took advantage of their annual reports, a presumably press release genre and appropriated textual features

of sales letters and other promotional genres to construct their amicable, trustworthy identities and brush up their public image (ibid.).

Fairclough (1995a) shed more light on and gave more substance to this issue in his profound and detailed analysis of the changing and transitioning identity of a higher education from a tertiary education provider to a normalised and commercial service provider, being manifested in the self-promotional genre of university leaflets in the UK. Noticeably, the hybridity of marketization and information has succeeded in penetrating into a wider pool of public discourse genres, generating neologisms of hybridised genres which survive and normalise, for example, informalisation (Wouter 1986) and "conversationalisation of public discourse" (Fairclough 1995a, p. 138). Fairclough (1992, 1996) has drawn upon a noteworthy issue of "technologies of discourse" to refer to highly pervasive and homogenised types of discourses in plenty of institutions, e.g., counseling and interviewing as a new form of identity construction in corporate communication, or in his own words, "enterprise discourse" (Fairclough 1995a, p. 112).

2.3.3 Dialogue Theory: The Dialogic Turn in Corporate Communication

There is a scholarly consensus that the dialogue theory is deeply indebted to the early accomplishments of the philosopher Martin Buber (1970) who believed that human communications is an intersubjective process in which parties came to a relationship with trust, openness and respect. Subsequent to Pearson's (1989) earliest exploration of the concept of dialogue, public relations, both in theory and practice, witnessed the strategic dialogic turn from the organisations' monologic persuasion of the publics. Not surprisingly the present dialogic turn in public relations has been magnified since the advent and prevalence of social media in the last decade, which not only enables but also encourages real-time, user-generated contents. Nevertheless, it is asserted that it is technological innovations such as the Internet and social media that have eventually forced companies to employ the attitudes and approaches of dialogic communication in addressing the public (Mersham et al. 2009). Dialogue is defined as "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions in public relations practice" (Kent and Talyor 1998, p. 325). Dialogue may be considered as the key element of in-between, for it "represents efforts by parties in a relationship to engage in an honest, open and ethically based give and take" (Bortree and Seltzer 2009, p. 317).

In this sense, dialogue is

> both quality of relationship that arises, however briefly, between two or more people and a way of thinking about human affairs that highlights their dialogue qualities. Dialogue can identify the attitudes with which participants approach each other, the ways they talk and act, the consequences of their meeting, and the context within which they meet.
>
> Cissna and Anderson (1998, p. 64)

As a product of ongoing communication and relationship (Kent and Talyor 2002), dialogue and dialogic communication are claimed to be two-way symmetrical and more ethical than the preceding asymmetrical systems theory of public relations (Theunissen and Wan Noordin 2012). In order to deal with the long-standing unequal relationship between organisation and the publics, dialogic theory requests that organisations should be willing to interact with publics in honest and ethical ways in order to create effective organisation-public communication channels (Kent et al. 2003). Kent and Talyor (1998, p. 324) maintained that:

> Buber's conception of dialogue focuses implicitly on ethics. That is, for a dialogic relationship to exist, parties must view communicating with each other as the goal of a relationship. Communication should not be a means to an end, but rather, as Kant's Categorical Imperative suggested, communication should be an end itself.
>
> Kent and Talyor (1998, p. 324)

In terms of its overarching tenets, there are a series of principles, which are somehow in a similar vein towards each other, all laying emphasis on the equalitarianism, interactivity, mutual benefit and other similar qualities in organisation-public communication. Kent and Talyor (1998) pinpointed five principles that offer guidelines for the successful integration of dialogic public relations and the World Wide Web: the dialogic loop; the usefulness of information; the generation of return visits (RV); the intuitiveness/ease of the interface; and the rule of conservation of visitors. Four years later, they updated and renamed principles of dialogic public relations theory to be the five overarching tenets of dialogic communication: "mutuality", "propinquity", "empathy", "risk" and "commitment" (Kent and Taylor 2002, pp. 25–30). Accordingly, mutuality refers to an acknowledgment that organisations and the public are inextricably tied together. For organisations, dialogic propinquity means that the public are consulted in matters that influence them, and for the public, it means that they are willing and able to articulate their demands to organisations. Empathy refers to the atmosphere of support and trust that must exist if dialogue is to succeed. Risk means that dialogues have the potential to produce unpredictable and dangerous outcomes. Commitment describes three characteristics of dialogic encounters: genuineness and authenticity, commitment to the conversation and a commitment to interpretation (ibid.).

A highlight of dialogic communication theory resides in its alleged ethical nature. The ethical feature of dialogue in Pearson's (1989) work asserted three procedures: that no topic should be excluded a priori from discussion, that no type of communication be considered a priori as inappropriate or irrational, and that during discourse, communicators have the option of changing levels of reflexivity. In spite of the overwhelming advocacy of dialogue theory, it is equally critical to be aware of the potential risks that might shadow dialogic communication in public relations. Due to the fact that dialogue can expose differences as well as similarities, it may in fact not lead to agreement but rather to disagreement (Theunissen and Noordin 2012). The fact is that this is one of the principles of dialogue as per Kent and Talyor (2002), whose theoretical backbones encompass vulnerability,

unanticipated consequences and the recognition of strange otherness. The underlying philosophy of dialogue that communication content and outcome are not controlled in the strictest managerial sense poses risks for the claimed relationship building with the public.

Although a stream of scholars recognises, promotes and applies dialogue theory, dialogue is on the whole an under-explored and under-developed concept in public relations theory and practice (Theunissen 2014). Empirical research hitherto that applied and verified dialogic theory in public relations has been limited to: the test of dialogic principles in organisational websites (Capriotti and Pardo Kuklinski 2012; McCorkindale and Morgoch 2013; Madichie and Hinson 2014), the role of dialogic communication in reviving democracy in society (Kent 2013) to a test of dialogic principles on Twitter (Rybalko and Seltzer 2010; Watkins and Lewis 2014), most of which, however, stress its role in relationship building. By and large, extant research indicated that dialogic communication possesses great potential in developing organisation-public interaction.

To date, little research attempted to illuminate the stakeholders' co-construction of corporate identity through dialogues with organisations (e.g. Theunissen 2014). With skepticism about corporations' sole control over corporate identity, Theunissen (2014) noted the irreplaceable role of dialogue in audience engagement in the co-creating process of corporate identity.

In the conclusion, Theunissen (2014, pp. 613–614) claimed that:

> Scholars should explore the impact of dialogue on corporate identity, image and reputation, and understand that developing a corporate identity that is perceived as authentic can only happen by means of a co-creational process…. Accordingly, to create a truly authentic corporate identity, public relations practitioners need to recognize the co-creational impact and the role of communication, and specially dialogue
>
> (Theunissen 2014, pp. 613–614)

Not only the role of dialogue and dialogic communication in corporate identity construction is gradually acknowledged but also dialogue is being boosted in corporate communication in the age of social media. Capriotti and Pardo Kuklinski (2012) held that Web 2.0 that fosters the dialogic communication is generating significant changes in the manner that organisations engage in dialogue with their publics, opening the way towards interactive communication. The dearth of scholarly attention in regards to the dialogic communication on social media is particularly noticeable, despite a few testing attempts, e.g., Kent (2013). According to Kent (2013, p. 341), the purpose of the use of social media in the corporate communication practice should be "to build relationships, solve problems, and enact socially responsible goals." To realise such an overall purpose, he raised six suggestions: (1) parallel, or alternative, social media spaces should be developed where organisational members actually communicate with individuals and not members of a collective, like customers; (2) dialogic social media spaces should not be enacted through existing social media venues like Twitter or Facebook, filled with advertisements and distractions, and poorly designed for substantiative,

interactive discussions; (3) the identity of participants should be public and verifiable; (4) clear rules should exist for participation; (5) experts should be sought out and invited to participate; (6) divergent voices should be nurtured and encouraged to participate. The leading global businesses are equipped with excellent experiences in capitalising social media interface to engage stakeholders, as Fortune 500 corporations have made enormous effort in purveying more dialogic spaces to their users where dialogic communication could potentially develop and mature (Rybalko and Seltzer 2010). Nonetheless, cases in the developing world remains much less examined.

2.3.4 Emotional Branding

2.3.4.1 Emotional Branding and the Conversational Human Voice

The role of emotions has emerged as a new and vibrant research focus in recent branding and marketing research, particularly its indispensible function of closing company-consumer distance and triggering consumers' strong emotional attachments and bonds to brands (Gobe 2001; Yoo and MacInnis 2005). Emotional branding is defined as the engagement of consumers in a deep, long-term, intimate emotional connection with the brand, which is beyond the benefit based satisfaction, and which creates a special trust based relationship for the development of a holistic emotional experience (Morrison and Crane 2007). Emotional branding can be a sophisticated means of corporate identity construction (Wu and Feng 2015). As the name suggests, emotional branding focuses on customers' emotional attachments to brands and could lead to "higher levels of firm performance and competitive advantage" (Akgun et al. 2013, p. 504).

Since the new millennium, a recurrent theme in the extensive emotional branding literature lies in the discussion of its overwhelming merits, as opposed to the traditional benefit-driven branding communication (Gobe 2001, 2007, 2009; Rossiter and Bellman 2012; Thompson et al. 2006). For instance, it was verified that how brands apply emotional branding to meet customer requirements through bonding, companionship and love (Rossiter and Bellman 2012). Being regarded as the key to marketing success, emotional branding and its strategic value to brand image have been noticed and valued (Thompson et al. 2006).

The developmental divide of emotional branding may be categorised into tripartite phases: "the pragmatist age (1940–1967)", "the evangelist age (1968–1989)" and "the sensualist age (1990–2009)" (Gobe 2009, p. 128). According to Gobe's (2009) elaborations, emotional branding in pragmatist age emphasises on products or service' function, reliability and other pragmatic functions, as manifested by the omnipresent advertising which dominates corporate communication. Evangelist age represents philosophies of justice, equality and sensitivity to the environment, making people realise that they have power and could positively change the course

of politics and the world. By influencing people's lives, emotional branding discourse in the sensualist age is lifestyle-oriented and towards hedonism, glamour, fame and the individual expressions, creating its own language, culture and symbols.

In realising the emotional branding, a conversational human voice should not be neglected (Searls and Weinberger 2001; Kelleher and Miller 2006; Kelleher 2009). Kelleher and Miller (2006, p. 413) proposed 11 defining items of conversational human voice: "invites people to conversation; is open to dialogue; uses conversation-style communication; tries to communicate in a human voice; tries to be interesting in communication; provides links to competitors; uses a sense of humor in communication; provides links to competitors; attempts to make communication enjoyable; would admit a mistake; provides prompt feedback addressing criticism with a dialect but uncritical manner and treats me and others as human".

2.3.4.2 The Communication of Corporate Social Responsibility

The communication of corporate social responsibility is a form of the evangelist emotional branding (Gobe 2009), thus constructing an identity as a socially responsible corporation to gain popularity in public. Corporate social responsibility is also called corporate conscience, corporate citizenship, social performance, or sustainable responsible business (Wood 1991). The term corporate social responsibility (CSR) gained popularity in the 1960s and has remained a term used indiscriminately by many to cover more narrowly construed legal and moral responsibility (DeGeorge 2010). CSR is defined as the "economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society has of organisations at a given point in time" (Buchholtz and Carroll 2008, p. 40). CSR roughly refers to the efforts corporations strive to make for a more positive impact through its activities on the environment, consumers, employees, communities, stakeholders and all other members of the public sphere who may also be considered as stakeholders. However, in spite of the heterogeneous nature of CSR, a common approach is corporate philanthropy through which corporations are seen as donors to communities, neighborhoods or even foreign countries, in an attempt to create an image of a caring corporate citizen.

As a fundamental part of corporate marketing strategies, CSR has served as a verified means to strengthen corporate image (e.g., Maignan and Ferrell 2004). Aside from traditional means to construct and project corporate identity such as logo design symbolism, CSR has been recently employed as a new approach to study corporate identity. The projection of CSR-based corporate identity is more effective than symbolism (Pomering and Johnson 2009). As an example, the roles that CSR played in the Spanish banking industry were examined to construct corporate identity and it was revealed that CSR communication did generate brand value and a good corporate reputation (Perez and Rodriguez del Bosque 2012). It has also been proved that CSR communication is important to inform others about

corporate social actions, which helps the value creation. Accordingly, banks investigated believe that "CSR communication should be a bidirectional process, both upward and downward, when rather than just transmitting information, they also have to pay attention to grasp stakeholders' concerns and suggestions" (ibid., pp. 158–159). In this regard, corporate image is a partial outcome of CSR communication.

The four-step pyramid of CSR outlined by Carroll (1991) is perhaps most widely cited, wherein he believed a company's CSR activities comprise four segments: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic obligations. In an empirical study, it was revealed that economic responsibilities of corporations were given the most emphasis across the globe, followed by philanthropic activities in emerging nations such as Bangladesh (Belal 2008). Legal responsibilities of enterprises are seen in the third place and last are the ethical responsibilities. In addition to the CSR pyramid of priorities, corporate philanthropy was incorporated in Kotler and Lee's (2004) six major marketing communication strategies (cause promotion, cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing, corporate philanthropy, corporate volunteering and socially responsible business practice) to refer to that corporations' general CSR policy as a marketing communication strategy, which may be unrelated to a specific product promotion. Grounded in such models and theories, the communication of CSR in the Indian context was surveyed and analysed, revealing that Indian corporations have primarily pursued a philanthropic platform with a focus on community development projects to communicate CSR with their stakeholders (Planken et al. 2010).

Shifting the focus to the Chinese context, a focus on CSR communication involved the indispensable role of media. Research on China's newspaper discourse of CSR confirmed that the media is a major stakeholder in defining and promoting CSR (Tang 2012). It was also found that Chinese newspapers predominately define CSR as companies' responsibilities towards communities, employees, and customers. Nonetheless, the legacy media in CSR communication is limited as "China's leading newspapers have not yet played an active role in facilitating a social dialogue about CSR" (Tang 2012, p. 285). Moreover, multiple rationales for Chinese businesses' CSR have been investigated by examining China's print media (Liu et al. 2011). By contrast to print media, CSR communication on China's social media has not received due attention up until now.

2.4 Interactional Sociolinguistics

Interactional sociolinguistics is a sub-discipline of linguistics that makes use of discourse analysis to study how language users create meaning via social interaction (Tannen 2006). As one of the six key approaches to discourse analysis, according to Schiffrin (1994), interactional sociolinguistics is elaborated and defined as follows:

> As an approach to discourse, interactional sociolinguistics offers theories and methods that enable researchers to explore not only how language works but also to gain insights into the social processes through which individuals build and maintain relationships, exercise power, project and negotiate identities, and create communities.
>
> Gordon (2011, p. 67)

Prominent figures such as John Gumperz, Erving Goffman, and Debora Tannen represent key thinkers in this discipline. One of the most noted defining features of interactional sociolinguistics is its interdisciplinary nature, as interactional sociolinguistics is known for its "qualitative interpretative approach to the analysis of social interaction that developed at the intersection of linguistics, anthropology and sociology" (Gordon 2011, p. 67). Boxer (2002, p. 14) also noted that: "work in interactional sociolinguistics derives from sociology, linguistics and anthropology". Interactional sociolinguistics usually draws on naturally occurring data for analysis with methods of tape-recording or video recording.

2.4.1 The Anthropological Insights from John Gumperz

As opposed to the variationist sociolinguistics, the anthropologist John Gumperz together with Dell Hymes developed a brand-new perspective of sociolinguistics whose joint contribution created a research paradigm called the ethnography of communication. Gumperz's (1982a) own approach has been latterly named as interactional sociolinguistics. The founding father of interactional sociolinguistics Gumperz roughly referred to his own approach as "an interpretive sociolinguistics approach to the analysis of real time processes in face to face encounters" (Gumperz 1982a, p. vii). Gumperz's (1971) early work and research interests have centered on speech variation and cultural anthropology in different ethnic groups. His fieldwork research, using participant observation and survey methods in northern Indian villages paid special attention to code-mixing variations, speech community, language diversity, social groups and, in summary, how linguistic structures and meanings were realised in social interaction (see Gumperz 1971, 1974). It is interactive conversational behaviors that define the boundaries of interactional sociolinguistics. A considerable amount of the work that Gumperz devoted his time fell into cross-cultural everyday conversational interaction, focusing specially on the speaking and listening, e.g., back channeling by means of taped and transcribed linguistic data.

In his classic Discourse Strategy published in 1982, although Gumperz stated that "we are still far from a general theory of verbal communication which integrates what we know about grammar, culture and interactive conventions into a single overall framework of concepts and analytical procedures" (1982a, p. 4), his own attempts have offered illuminating insights for meaning making and decoding in social interaction, particularly with what Gumperz called contextualization cues and conversational inference. As a less explicit element in everyday face-to-face conversation, contextualization cues continuously and permanently mediate and

signal speaker-hear interactions, assisting conversations to undergo a more smooth and desirable process than otherwise. As Gumperz (1982a, p. 131) described and defined,

> A contextualization cue is any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signaling of contextual presuppositions. Such cues may have a number of such linguistic realisations depending on the historically given linguistic repertoire of the participants. The code, dialect and style switching processes, some of the prosodic phenomena we have discussed as well as choice among lexical and syntactic options, formulaic expressions, conversational openings, closings and sequencing strategies can all have similar contextualising functions. Although such cues carry information, meanings are conveyed as part of the interactive context, the meanings of contextualization cues are implicit.
>
> (Gumperz 1982a, p. 131)

By contrast, conversational inference is defined as "the situated or context-bound process of interpretation, by means of which participants in an exchange assess others' intentions, and on which they base their responses" (Gumperz 1982a, p. 153). In simple terms, conversationalists "make active predictions about what would come next, rested on the line of interpretation suggested by on-going talk as measured against prior interactive experience" (Tannen 1992, p. 10). Contextualization cues and conversational inference are interrelated by means of varied speakers' contextualization cues, listeners' accurate (or inaccurate) inferences are ubiquitously affected in conversations. In many cases, contextualization cues are "the strategies used for implying an illocutionary act of the speaker, whose communicative intentions are highly context-dependent" (Schiffrin 1994, p. 100).

In summary, learners' realisation and appropriate responding acts to a contextualization cue, be it linguistic or paralinguistic, are one of the prerequisites for successful social interactions. Should the listener fail to achieve in doing so, misunderstandings or a failure in communication might occur. The ability of human realisation and responding acts to contextualization cues may be culturally and historically conventionalised, thus leading to a higher risk of interethnic and intercultural miscommunication. Interactional sociolinguistics recognised diversity, be it cultural or linguistic, that shapes the social world.

In essence, a contextualization cue relates to any conventionalised but usually subconscious or unconscious feature of linguistic forms that contribute to the signaling of contextual presuppositions and ultimately the interpretations among conversation participants. Contextualization cues show that features Saussure devalued as "marginal" (e.g., intonation) are inseparable from those Saussure valued as "core" (e.g. syntax and grammatical affixes)—and they are of core importance in communicating meaning (Gumperz 1982a, p. 16). Any linguistic strategies of signaling contextualization cues can be the use of discourse strategies. In Gumperz's view, speakers do not follow conversational rules, but rather are guided by interpretive norms, which are continually reinforced or revised in the light of on-going interpretation (Tannen 1992). In short, Gumperz's major contribution lies in the recognition and indication of the ways interactants make conversational inference about each other in social interaction.

2.4.2 The Sociological Insights from Erving Goffman

Although Erving Goffman did not turn his interest towards language until a rather late phase of his career life, his theoretical backbone and work, beginning with *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), has been crucial for discourse analysts and interactional sociolinguists who study language in social life (Tannen 2009, p. 300). Having said that, by setting the earliest foundations of symbolic interactionism, Goffman (1959, 1967) raised three seminal metaphorical and theoretical notions of face, frame and footing in both describing and prescribing how individuals' identities are constructed during social interaction. By virtue of 'face' he meant the "positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact (Goffman 1967, p. 5)". 'Frame', in his opinion, entails the definitions of a situation that are built up in accordance with the principles of organization, which govern events (Goffman 1974). Goffman (1981, p. 128) propounded the notion of "footing" in his most sociolinguistic book *Forms of Talk*, well elucidating the social construction of speaker identity by separating out individuals from the roles they play in conversational interaction. Footing roughly refers to "the participant's alignment, or set, or stance, or posture, or projected self (ibid.)" and further Goffman continued, "a change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance. "A change in our footing is another way of talking about a change in our frame for events" (ibid.).

Notice the nuances in the different participative roles that speakers might adopt —they can act as "an animator, or sounding box, an individual active in the role of utterance production" (Goffman 1981, p. 144), or an author, "someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded" (ibid.) and a principal, "someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who is committed to what the words they say" (ibid.). As elaborated for fuller comprehension by Irwin (2011, p. 103), there are three voices involved in any utterance: "there is the animator, the person that utters the words; there is the author, the person that originated the beliefs and lastly there is the principal, the person whose viewpoint is currently being expressed". They take on the role of the speaker if they use their own words and they take on the role of principal if they speak sincerely. They form what Goffman defined as the "production format" of an utterance in interactional conversations (Goffman 1981, p. 146).

Albeit complicated, Goffman's footing has generated an increasing wealth of research in its interpretations and applications across varied domains, (e.g. Johansson 2007; Wortham 1996; Su 2009). For instance, Wortham (1996) mapped out the participant deixis used as a technique for discovering a speaker's footing. Su (2009) demonstrated the changing of footing by code-switching in managing face-threatening communicative tasks.

Nevertheless, in addition to continuous recognition and alignments over time, Goffman's theorisation and conceptualisations are not without criticisms. Unfortunately Goffman passed away in 1982, one year subsequent to his publication of *Forms of Talk* where footing was substantively pondered over. As such, however, philosophical and profound, a series of detailed self-applications and instantiations of footing were necessary for a comprehensive picture of understanding.

In spite of the alleged imperfection of Goffman's underpinnings, the inherent intertwinement and confluences between Gumperz and Goffman's conceptualisations remain clear. As a student of Goffman, Schiffrin (1994) noted a number of intersections in between. In her view, one way of describing Gumperz's contextualization cues is a framing device, i.e., interlocutors indicate the frame (e.g., serious, joking, business, chat) in which an utterance should be interpreted.

> In sum, Goffman's focus on social interaction complements Gumperz's focus on situated inference: Goffman describes the form and meaning of the social and interpersonal contexts that provide presuppositions for the decoding of meaning. The understanding of those contexts can allow us to more fully identify the contextual presuppositions that figure in hearers' inferences of speakers' meaning.
>
> (Schiffrin 1994, p. 104)

As Goffman (1981) himself recognised, what indicates shifts in footing and alignment are not just the way we manage the product of an utterance, but also the kinds of devices identified by Gumperz as contextualization cues.

2.4.3 The Linguistic Insights from Deborah Tannen

Deborah Tannen is most known for her work, both academic and non-academic whose achievements are in gendered linguistic studies from a social constructionist perspective, in light of linguistic variations across gender. But being a student of John Gumperz, she contributes to interactionational sociolinguistics with inspiring insights into everyday conversation analysis, noticeably in the workplace domains and those among friends. Not surprisingly, she found a confluence among Gumperz, Goffman and her own work in terms of the understanding of situated interpretation in social interaction and even called Gumperz "a contemporary Goffman" (Tannen 2009, p. 302). In the eyes of Tannen (2009), framing can be contextualization cues signaling meaning as well as sociocultural knowledge and face may be the contextualization cues combined in patterned ways to serve the interactive goals of involvement and independence.

Acknowledging and combining the notion of frame and face as well as under the influence of Robin Lakoff's communicative style, Tannen (1984, 2005) raised her theoretical framework of conversational style, which contains a bipartite scheme: involvement and considerateness. Conversational style has provided "a foundation

for understanding both human interaction and the workings of language in any context" (Tannen 2005, p. xvi).

Tannen (2009, p. 302) operationalised conversational style as follows:

> In the style I call "high-involvement" you show you're a good person by putting on record your connection to others (for example, by fast rate of speech and short interturn pauses, talking-along to show attention and enthusiasm, and relatively loud and quick displays of listenership. In the style I call "high-considerateness" you show you're a good person by not imposing (for example, by relatively slower rate of speech and longer interturn pauses, avoidance of overlapping talk, and relatively understated displays of listenership.
>
> (Tannen 2009, p. 302)

In face-to-face communications, high involvement features are overtly signaled through the use of the following items: topic (prefer personal topics; shift topics abruptly; introduce topics without hesitation; persist, if a new topic is not immediately picked up, reintroduce it, repeatedly if necessary), pacing (faster rate of speech; faster turn taking; avoiding interturn pauses, salience shows lack of rapport; cooperative overlap; participatory listenership), narrative strategies (tell more stories; tell stories in rounds; prefer internal evaluation, i.e., the point of a story is dramatised rather than lexicalised) and expressive paralinguistics (expressive phonology, marked pitch and amplitude shifts, marked voice quality, strategic within-turn pauses). Tannen (2005) confirmed that a significant amount of bonding is formed through the adoption of high-involvement devices in conversations among friends, the outcome of which is rewarding and is described as "we find talk between us easy and satisfying" (p. 106).

2.4.4 Face and Linguistic Face-Work in Social Interaction

Originated from the Chinese culture, as broadly acknowledged, face, a complex metaphor of self-esteem, honor, respect and dignity, serves as an eternal parameter that governs entire human interactions (e.g., Hu 1944; Brown and Levinson 1987; Goffman 1967; He and Zhang 2011; Scollon and Scollon 1995, 2001). Although face is inherently a Chinese concept in origin (Ho 1976), it is sociologically universal and present in many languages in its idiomatic sense. The notion of face metaphorically refers to an individual's sense of dignity or prestige in social interaction.

Erving Goffman officially pioneered face study in Anglo-Saxon societies, whose tenets and principles well acknowledge the social and instinctive needs of human beings. According to Goffman (1967), the term face may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self-delineation in terms of approved social attributes—albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for

himself (Goffman 1967). By face-work, Goffman (1967, p. 12) meant "to designate the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face. Face-work serves to counter 'incidents'—that is, events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face". Goffman's observations on the interactional order and his sophisticated notions of face and face-work, as Bargiela-Chiappini (2003) argued, should be the starting point for a re-appraisal of politeness and its fundamental role in the social order.

It was claimed that Goffman's face definition entails three aspects (Lee-Wong 2000). First, face defined in the Goffman sense is a socio-psychological construct, the psychological need to be seen in a positive light by an other. Second, face in practice means taking a social stand based on the evaluation of the situation and the participants. Third, in a social encounter, face is implicated: a line is taken by each interactant and/or each interactant is seen to be taking a line (ibid., pp. 23–24). In short, it may be inferred that Goffman's face view is much more sociological oriented than otherwise, e.g. psychologically oriented. From a sociological perspective, face-work is an integral part of social interaction as Goffman maintained that there is no such thing as faceless communication. On the basis of the fact that communication is a typified social process that involves at least more than one person, face-work is therefore nicknamed as "diplomacy and social skills" (Goffman 1967, p. 13), both requesting a high degree of sophistication in social actions. Having given prominence to the maintenance of face as a condition of interaction instead of its objectives, Goffman compared face-work in social interaction to traffic rules by which each member of the society is bound, guided and benefited from.

Subsequent to Goffman's paradigm, another powerful face theory must be attributed to Brown and Levinson (1987), whose underpinnings perfectly recognised the paradoxical fact of human face wants. By definition, face is something that is emotionally invested and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interaction (Brown and Levinson 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 13) insisted on a dyad concept of face that "a highly abstract notion of face which consists of two specific kinds of desires attributed by interactants to one another: the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions (negative face), and the desire (in some respects) to be approved of (positive face)". According to Brown and Levinson (1987), in association with the universal face wants, there are linguistic face-threatening acts (FTA) to be redressed by politeness strategies. Positive politeness is directed to entertain and satisfy the addressee's positive face. By contrast, speech acts addressed to protect the negative face, or his wants to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded, is called negative politeness. The hub concept of negative face is representative of Brown and Levinson's (1987) expansion and unique contribution, on top of Goffman's framework (Lee-Wong 2000). All in all, Brown and Levinson's (1987) gestation was built on the basis of a psychological or psycholinguistic perspective to explicate individual's emotions and desires towards one another's social action.

From another perspective of sociology, the Chinese writer Lin Yutang (1935, pp. 199–200) offered his sense of face with literary comments,

> Interesting as the Chinese physiological face is, the psychological face makes a still more fascinating study. It is not face that can be washed or shaved, but a face that can be "granted" and "lost" and "presented as a gift". Here we arrive at the most curious point of Chinese social psychology. Abstract and intangible, it is yet the most delicate standard by which Chinese social intercourse is regulated.
>
> (Lin 1935, pp. 199–200)

In a similar vein to Goffman, Lin's (1939) early definition gave prominence to the social functioning trait of face in daily interaction and for the first time highlighted the concept of face as the overarching guideline of Chinese values. Another pioneer Hu (1944, p. 45) dichotomised the face concept into "mianzi" and "lian" to mean social status and moral characters respectively. Gu (1990, p. 241) related face to its politeness function in Chinese social interaction and identified the interrelations between them: "(a) face is the essential element of politeness, to be polite is to be face-caring; (b) face and politeness hold a means-to-end relation between each other". He laid special emphasis on the first principle of face (statement a), which is contrary to Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework.

Having followed Hu's (1944) differentiation of face, Hwang (2004) further illuminated that lian represents the collective respect members of the community hold for persons with high moral standard and mianzi means social reputation that individuals strive to claim in the Chinese society. Grounded in Confucius thinking and the psychological perspective, Hwang (1987, 1997, 2004) recognised the long-standing social stability function of politeness and face, coupled with their cultural and philosophical roots that request a sense of dignity and shame in personal moral behaviors, and which resulted in numerous tenets of Confucianism having to do with face and politeness. By drawing upon face-work as the power game among Chinese, Hwang (1987, p. 953) termed two basic parties of communication as the "petitioner" and "resource allocator" in the game of a series of face-related behaviors (e.g., face-giving, face-loss and face-maintaining) for obtaining and competing for resources, be it economic, social, cultural or symbolic, four kinds of resources defined by Bourdieu (1986) that one looks for in the social arena. Giving prominence to face in relation to the self concept of Chinese people, Hwang (2004) pinpointed that a Chinese concept of self is neither independent self nor interdependent self in the Western sense (Markus and Kitayama 1991), but a "relational self" (p. 317) that is always weighs the self-image and connections in relation to other interactants in the social interactional process.

Though complexity may arise, there is a consensus among Chinese scholars towards face that it is more of a collective conceptualisation in the Chinese mindset to constitute personal face, and the face of one's larger social group, most typically one's family and, for example, one's institution and even nation. As a representation, the concept of Chinese face may thus consist of three layers: individual, relational and group mianzi, catering for face wants both in the individual and group sense (He and Zhang 2011).

Despite the voluminous and far-reaching research that has succeeded in the investigations of the boundaries and implications of face concern and face-work in face-to-face interactions, increasing requests were called for to entertain the delicate

nature of virtual face-work. The complexity of face-work in computer-mediated communication is undoubtedly heightened in light of the absence of facial, body and prosodic cues (Baym 1995). To respond to such requests, West and Trester's (2013) ethnographic investigation of face-work on personal Facebook pages, having applied Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, offered timely insights and a close-up of virtual face-work practices. Based on their analysis of four classic types of socialisation which face is inevitably engaged in: "friending", "self-presentation", "replying and responding" as well as "issuing birthday wishes and event invitations", they explicated how face is threatened, mediated, negotiated and navigated between posters and their Facebook friends (West and Trester 2013, pp. 134–138). Specifically, West and Trester (2013) presented the deference and violations of face and varied kinds of FTA through addressers' maneuvering and addressees' corresponding awareness of and reflections upon face during social media interactions.

From a relational perspective, another key study of face-work on the Chinese SNS Weibo by Wu and Lin (2017 forthcoming) identified and re-defined the diversified speech acts among 4012 items of Weibo celebrities' updates, e.g., congratulating, directives, promising, promoting assets, sharing information, showing concern and stance, daily and festive greetings, in terms of how they contribute to the social self in the virtual interaction. These relational acts performed by Chinese celebrities demonstrated once again Arundale's (2006) argument that the much-used distinction between self-face and other-face is problematic and in fact self and other are dialectically linked for both parties comprise the other to the self, mutually defining one another in their face-work practices.

2.4.5 Conversation Analysis

Conversation analysis as a distinctive and recognised approach to the analysis of social interaction is derived from the ethnomethodological tradition in sociology and has been widely used in interactional discourse analysis (see Stivers and Sidnell 2013). The seminal works of conversation analysis began with three people around 1970: Emanuel Schegloff, Harvey Sacks and Gail Jefferson. In fact conversation analysis is one of the six approaches to discourse analysis, parallel to interactional sociolinguistics (Schiffrin 1994), which allows examinations of both casual conversations (e.g. Schegloff 1968, 1988; Tannen 1984) and institutionalised conversations in professional settings (e.g., Sinclair and Coulthard 1975; Yu 2010; Yu and Wu 2015) and in intercultural conversations (e.g., Cheng 2003). As the name of conversation analysis implies, talk-in-interaction has been a recurrent theme. Both strands of conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics view conversations from the lens of social interaction focusing on naturally occurring conversation data. Conversation analysis does not see an inherent distinction between the formal and the informal, the everyday and the institutional, rather "they see talk-in-interaction as a social process which is deployed to realise and understand the social situations in which talk is used" (Liddicoat 2011, p. 6).

Conversation analysis operates on a systematic ground that involves analysis of turn-taking machinery (Sacks et al. 1974), adjacency pairs (Schegloff and Sacks 1973), opening and closing conversation (Schegloff 1968) and repairs (Schegloff et al. 1977). Turn-taking machinery refers to speaker change in conversations. According to Sacks et al. (1974), there are two separate but interrelated components in turn-taking: turn constructional units (TCUs) (turns that made up of units) and turn allocation component (current speaker selects next speaker or next speaker self-selects). Schegloff and Sacks (1973) called turns at talk as pairs and paired utterances adjacency pairs, which are the basic unit of social interaction. The initiation turn is called "first pair parts" (FPP) and the flows arising from such initiations are accordingly called "second pair parts" (SPP), as exemplified as question-answer, greeting-greeting and offer-acceptance/refusal (Schegloff and Sacks 1973, p. 74).

Further, the relationship between FPPs and SPPs is constrained by the type of FPP produced (Liddicoat 2011). Schegloff and Sacks (1973) also termed relevance rules: FPP creates a context of dialogue and SPP is supposed to respond to the preceding FPP in a relevant way with either preferred actions or dispreferred actions, which load "different interactional import" (Liddicoat 2011, p. 144). Viewed from a social perspective, actions display alignments with speakers of FPP such as greeting, acceptance, gratitude and agreement are preferred actions with more interactional import and otherwise (e.g. declines and disagreements) are dispreferred actions in SPP (see Sacks 1987).

As a discipline with a history of approximately merely half a century, conversation analysis not only allows but also requests increasingly intercultural and interdisciplinary endeavors. To date, the conversation analysis of Mandarin owes to a series of seminal work accomplished by the team led by Prof. Guodong Yu and Prof. Yaxin Wu in the Shanxi University of China, whose contributions are focused on but not necessarily confined to professional settings as to medical communication and a number of speech acts in the everyday spoken Mandarin (see Yu 2010; Yu and Wu 2015; Yu and Wu 2017).

2.5 New Media Discourse

2.5.1 An Overview

New media discourse, also known by other names of similar connotations such as the most widespread terminology computer-mediated discourse (CMD) (Herring 1996, 2004), digital discourse (Thurlow and Mroczek 2011), digital networked writing (Androutsopoulos 2011) or discourse 2.0 (Tannen and Trester 2013), entails highly situated communication practice and outcome via modes of newly emerging computer science technologies, for example Web 2.0. The fact that new media differs from "traditional" media lies in a number of aspects, made available by everlasting technological advances: content source, quality, frequency, performance, immediacy and usability. Social media platforms of Web 2.0 enable, as

Cormode and Krishnamurthy (2008) stated, the co-mingling of commentators and creators where every visitor has the opportunity to click, comment and create. Against the backdrop of the present-day universal production and consumption of Web 2.0 platform technology, new media discourse has been revolutionised to evolve rapidly from the "older" one-to-many online communication, for example website, to many-to-many real-time communication on a single social media platform, with the most representative being the microblogging brand Twitter and social networking site Facebook (cf. Androutsopoulos 2010).

Herring (2007) developed the concept of facets to mean the individually describable attributes of a complex (multifaceted) entity before a further distinguishing between medium (technological) and situation (social) facets of computer-mediated discourse. Major technological/medium facets, as Herring (2007) denoted are: synchronicity (whether communication is synchronous or asynchronous, i.e., whether or not the participants are online at the same time); message transmission (one- or two-way); persistence of transcript (how long messages stay on the system); size of message buffer (number of characters per message); channels of communication (potential for multimedia content); technological affordances of systems (e.g., whether they permit anonymous messaging, private messaging, filtering and quoting); and message format.

According to Herring (2007), the social or situational facets are specifically inclusive of: participant structure (one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many; public/private, degree of anonymity; group size, number of active participants…); participant characteristics (demographic: gender, age, occupation; language proficiency, computer skills, role and status in real life; attitudes, beliefs, ideologies…); purposes (of group, and goal of interaction); topic or theme (of group or exchanges); tone (serious/playful, formal/casual, cooperative/sarcastic); activity (debate, game, collaborative writing, information exchange, virtual sex); norms (of social organisation, of appropriateness, of language) and code (language variety, writing system, font…).

The discourse of social media in Web 2.0 era is very reasonably coined as discourse 2.0 (cf. Tannen and Trester 2013). Herring (2013) reconceptualised the tripartite aspects of Web 2.0 discourse as: familiar aspects (with CMC discourse), reconfigured aspects (topical coherence, turn-taking, threading and intertextuality) as well as emergent aspects (collaborative text product and multimodal analysis approach). Herring (2013, p. 11) located a few reconfigurations such as status updates being structurally and functionally reconfigured in comparison to "action descriptions" and "emotes". It was also indicated that retweetings, "a prime new example of a discourse phenomenon", are constitutive of interaction management (ibid., p. 12). Given the new technological functions made unprecedentedly possible by social media platforms, what struck 'traditional' media most is the interaction mechanism that social media are devised to feature, which gives substance to the lavish and interesting use of face and politeness strategies at the linguistic level. From the perspectives of four major social media interaction activities, namely, friending, self-presentation, replying and responding as well as issuing birthday wishes and event invitations, West and Trester's (2013) ethnographic study

unveiled how face-threatening acts (FTAs) are avoided and how massive face-work is accomplished on Facebook, e.g. through intertextual links.

In addition to the technical, pragmatic and sociocultural features exerted by new media, the extant findings concertedly suggested that one salient linguistic feature of new media discourse is its overt informality and orality in the form of literacy (Crystal 1987, 2001; Soffer 2012; Cameron and Panovic 2014), which is premised to wield long-term impact. The underlying interactional, vernacular, playful and occasionally interpersonal essence of new media discourse allows and orients its users to employ multiple linguistic, semiotic and multimodal resources, including emoticons, photos and video clips, all of which are believed to ascribe to the attracting feature of social media (e.g. Thurlow and Mroczek 2011). The challenges and arts of engaging user participation and their user-generated contents on social networking sites call for and bring together linguistic awareness of heteroglossia (Ivanov 2001), which is defined as "the simultaneous use of different kinds of speech or other signs, the tension between them, and their conflicting relationship within one text" (ibid., p. 5). In this regard, new media discourse is born as hybrid and dynamic, ready to encompass an endless list of emerging characteristics, as technologies usually upgrade from time to time. Wu et al. (2016) summarised the primary two sociolinguistic approaches for intercultural new media studies: variationist and interactional sociolinguistic paradigms, taking into consideration both the linguistic variations as well as issues like face, identity and rapport. A good manifestation of the interactional sociolinguistic paradigm is Li and Wu (2016) which examined the multinationals relational speech acts that aim at maintaining and strengthening rapport with their social media followers.

New media discourse, which to a great extent inherits the nature of what Crystal (2001, p. 24) named "netspeak" or "webslang", may be viewed as a social dialect from a sociolinguistic viewpoint Feng and Wang (2017). The excellent work of documenting such a variation of the English language was initiated in the 1980s by Crystal (1987, 1988), followed by scholarship on other languages such as French (Anis 1998), German (Beißwenger 2001), Chinese (Wang and Chen 2006; Gao 2006, 2012) and English used by second language learners (Lee 2013), shortly throughout the first decade of the 21st century (Androutsopoulos 2006a).

Nonetheless, increasing attention should be devoted to the new media discourse in the Chinese language, the target language of the present research. The Internet usage of modern Mandarin has been well-noted for its neologisms and impact on non-virtual Chinese usage in the globalisation age (Liu and Tao 2012; Yu et al. 2001; Wang and Chen 2006; Gao 2004, 2006, 2012). The edited book by Liu and Tao (2012) noticed and acknowledged the emerging trends that the Chinese language has undertaken in the era of globalisation. Gao (2012), for instance, well documented the varied features of the Chinese Internet language at the lexical, syntactic and discourse level. At the lexical level, Gao (2012) identified borrowing, compounding, analogy, calquing, metaphor and personification, phonological fusion, explanation, morpheme repetition, near homophonization, semantic shift and word decomposition. Whilst at the sentential level, Chinese Internet language undergoes novel usages, such as a change in sentence word order; the use of

sentence-final redundant words; a change in word category; the use of an unusual sense of a word and the use of bound morphemes as free morphemes. The most prominent feature of Chinese Internet language, however, is its Englishlization (Gao 2006). Equally important, at the discourse level Gao (2012) precisely pointed out that Chinese Internet language is characterised with a bilingual code, i.e., a written spoken linguistic style as well as a jesting style. Furthermore, as to the underlying motivations of such language use, it was revealed that using Chinese Internet language helps to construct eight identities of the young and educated Chinese netizens: as entertaining and interesting, technologically well-informed and being able to keep up with social development, modern, fashionable and cool, internationally orientated or transnational, unconventional and even rebellious, young, fresh, innocent, deterritorialised or unconfined by geographical and/or sophisticated and not easily seen through (Gao 2004).

2.5.2 Microblogging Discourse

Etymologically, one of the entries of the word 'log' is known as a record of performance, events, or day-to-day activities, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. Jorn Barger named this so-called online journal 'weblog' in 1997[1] and Merholz said in 1999 that people would treat it as 'we blog', giving birth to the term blog we use ever since then.[2] Blogs are defined as "web sites or parts of web sites that are associated with specific individuals and comprise regular entries describing those individuals, their experiences, feelings and actions" (Mckinlay and Mcvittie 2011, p. 182). On this basis, the English word "microblogging" was coined to shorten the length of a "blog". Microblogging is an online broadcast medium that exists in the form of a mini weblog. A microblog differs from a traditional blog in that its contents are typically shorter, usually within 140 words and characters in length, in both actual and aggregated file size. Microblogging service providers allow their users "to send a message to another individual or to an indefinite number of others, to report on daily activities, forward messages or information from others, share links and so on" (Page 2012, p. 93). Microblogging communications are known for their fast-paced and ephemeral nature (ibid.). To mitigate this, a number of useful signs are invented to keep track of the communication threads, for instance, the @ symbol is used to indicate a piece of message addressed to particular users (Honeycutt and Herring 2009), and the # symbol is used to trace topic threads (Boyd et al. 2010). These small messages are sometimes called microposts or tweets, all of which are arranged in reverse chronology.

[1]"After 10 Years of Blogs, the Future's Brighter Than Ever". Wired. Published on 17 December 2007.

[2]"It's the links, stupid". The Economist. Published on 20 April 2006.

As a burgeoning genre in the everyday life of modern societies, language in the blogosphere has drawn increasing research attention. At the textual level, the saliency of hybridity of all genres' characteristics existing on microblogging sites called for increasing attentions. For example, Myers (2010) summarised a number of salient stylistic markers of language in the blogs:

> In the part that blog imitating a letter, there are some traces of the sort of interactive language often found in computer-mediated texts: it starts with a question, (You know how you used to have something going on in the kitchen…?) and ends with "xo" (hugs and kisses, I'm told). Further down, in the comments, we have conversational particles ("oh my"), typographical imitation of paralinguistic features (I'm sooo making this), the ubiquitous exclamation marks ("Look delicious!!") and non-standard use of lower case ("this is sweet!").
>
> (Myers 2010, p. 19)

Perspectives other than linguistic features in microblogging communication are also worthy of attention. Given the highly communicative nature of microblogging networks, multimodality is one of the most attractive features that allows for real-time sharing of emoticons, pictures and videos for interesting enhancement of content and users' deeper social engagements. In terms of motivations, it was verified that Twitter gratified its users' psychological need to connect with others in the virtual world (Chen 2011). As Androutsopoulos (2010) stated, users of new media have become intertextual operators, indeed, the multimodality and intertextuality of microblogging are demonstrated via the process of referring to images in texts, and referring back and forth among the original poster and his/her followers, e.g., in comments and counter-comments.

In comparison to alternative "older" text messaging systems such as short message texting (SMT) or instant messaging (IM), microblogging discourse has garnered much less research output, and the research on microblogging has unsurprisingly focused on the English-written Twitter (Lee 2011), leaving other languages and other microblogging aspects somewhat unattended.

In addition to the research on the linguistic forms of microblogging, its linguistic functions are regarded as even more significant. The communicative functions of social media's text-making practices have been identified, namely, "what you are doing right now", "everyday life", "opinion and judgment", "reporting mood", "reporting away messages", "initiating discussion", "addressing target audience", "simply posting quotation", "simply playful silence" and "interjection and using humor" (Lee 2011, p. 112). Furthermore, microblogging's role and application as a new literary genre in politics (Larsson and Moe 2012) and education (Lomicka and Lord 2012; Guth and Helm 2012) have been drawn upon more frequently. In most of the cases, its interactive nature in communication has raised much research interest (e.g. Page 2012).

Corporate social media networking sites (e.g., microblogging) has unsurprisingly replaced corporate websites in drawing research attention and generating increasingly favorable stakeholder relationships, in the studies of the corporate interactive communication practices on social networking sites (e.g., Fischer and Reuber 2011; Rybalko and Seltzer 2010) and the crisis communication of

multinationals on the microblogging of the local host countries (e.g. Yin et al. 2015). The findings suggested that the dialogic communication on Fortune 500 companies' corporate Twitter accounts help to engage their stakeholders (Rybalko and Seltzer 2010). It has also been revealed that the Twitter updates of nonprofit organisations primarily existed as one-way communication only, despite the potential for dialogue and community building on the social networking site. In their own words, "rather than capitalising on the interactive nature and dialogic capabilities of the social media service, nonprofit organisations are primarily using Twitter as a means of sharing information instead of relationship building" (Waters and Jamal 2011, p. 323). The use of microblogging in enhancing corporate reputation has attracted research attention. Li et al. (2014) examined the dynamics of communication through a corporate Twitter channel and their contribution to corporate reputation. They also discovered that deeper relationship among users of firm-specific Twitter led to higher user engagement practices.

On the whole, the research into new media discourse has substantially favored a register approach, giving substance to the variations of linguistic forms in the new mode of communicative environment. Nonetheless, it needs to be noted that current research of new media discourse somehow neglects to dig deep for a more profound understanding of the underpinnings for the variations caused, such as identity construction and face-work in spite of only a few attempts (e.g. Gao 2006), and equipped with a more solid and cross-disciplinary method of analysis, e.g., the interactional sociolinguistic and ethnographic approach for a bottom-up dynamic depiction of what is really taking place in the Web 2.0 era. As such, the present study of microblogging discourse from the interactional sociolinguistics point to a gap in the literature examining the corporate-follower interactive process of communication on organisational microblogging.

2.6 Research Gaps and Significance of the Present Study

Due to the very recent advent of social media, the majority of previous scholarly endeavors failed to fully explore the dynamic construction of corporate identity in the milieu of new media, and focused instead on the external corporate communication means such as websites and press conferences. Albeit that increasing claims have been made towards the co-construction of corporate identity by means of dialogic communication (Theunissen 2014), the concepts lack verification and remain under-researched in terms of linguistic empirical evidence, particularly in the social media and non-Anglo-Saxon context.

From an interactional sociolinguistic stance, the desirable dialogic communication mechanism in public relations may be realised through the interactional discourse strategies and conversational style employed by both the corporation and its followers. As such, the present research contributes to the existing body of research by offering a dynamic, two-way interactive perspective of corporate identity construction, with a special focus on interactional discourse strategies and

conversational style. Toward this end, a new framework of corporate identity co-construction in new media is proposed.

The second innovation lies in the target genre to be researched. The majority of interactional sociolinguistic research has so far been devoted to interpreting cross-cultural, face-to-face conversation in the past three decades or so, thus calling for an updated and expanded application in contexts enabled with technological advances, such as the current study of non face-to-face speech-like written conversations on new media. This study examines not only the suggested merits of dialogic communication in public relations, but also attempts to illuminate the mechanism of follower participation and its role in contributing to dialogues and the construction of corporate identity.

In view of the overall discourse milieu, what makes the present study even more significant is its aim to demystify the changing Chinese context, as a typical emerging economic giant. As a dark horse in the world economic arena, China's best-performing industry on the Fortune 500 falls squarely on the banking industry. It is more than timely and crucial to investigate how China's banking industry, as an epitome of developing countries, copes with new media communication challenges and interactively delivering "who they are" in a two-way mode of communication to rebuild investor confidence among stakeholders and downplay the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2009.

Over the past five decades, corporate identity has maintained its long-standing status as a productive research realm. However, it has been largely confined to the field of management and marketing scholarship, thus allowing many interdisciplinary and updated endeavors from linguists, discourse analysts and ethnographic researchers to work one step further. The literature reviewed has undoubtedly suggested that although companies across the globe are either aware of the significance of social media or are in fact using social media platforms as public relations and marketing devices, the role of social media on corporate identity construction, specifically from discursive perspectives, remain opaque. This call for research is especially urgent and pressing given the sheer fact that social media is widely acknowledged for its intensified interaction mechanism in the communication field. It must be fully acknowledged that prior studies did lend their valuable supports in illuminating the interaction management of computer-mediated discourse in social media environment. Nonetheless only a paucity of academic work has been devoted to corporate identity construction among which research scope is generally focused on either the technological availabilities of interaction and their linguistic variations (Herring 2013) or the linguistic strategies used in peer-to-peer interpersonal communication (West and Trester 2013).

Although corporate social responsibility's role in corporate identity has been previously addressed, its presentation on social media is not yet fully understood and the present research will pay attention to the CSR projection via social media. Lastly, interactional sociolinguistic analysis bears its credibility and acknowledged expertise in analysing face-to-face interpersonal communication. By analysing new media corporate communication, the present study expands upon and diversifies the genres, domains and research scope of interactional

sociolinguistic analysis for its broader application in the social sciences. More importantly, in terms of methodology, an interactional approach offsets, if not maximally, the accused subjective interpretation in the traditional public relations by taking into account the neglected audience responses. In this way, a larger and more comprehensive picture of Public Relations communication can be distilled. The findings will be further devoted to a more thorough understanding of the multifaceted nature of corporate identity studies.

In summary, by bridging the noticeable research gaps left unfilled by the extant literature, the significance of this study comprises the following aspects: specifying the identities Chinese banks constructed and projected on social media platforms; offering authentic linguistic insights into the content and modes of interactive communications between enterprises and their followers, in a necessary attempt to facilitate the pedagogical and scholarly studies of new media, business discourse and corporate communication; deconstructing up-to-date social media patterns with characteristics in the external corporate communications in Chinese and exploring the role of interaction in the discursive construction of banks' identities on social media, as a methodological innovation, aside from the traditional one-way corporate transmission of corporate identity.

http://www.springer.com/978-981-10-4468-7

Discursive Constructions of Corporate Identities by Chinese Banks on Sina Weibo
An Integrated Sociolinguistics Approach
Feng, W.
2017, XVI, 152 p. 4 illus. in color., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-981-10-4468-7