Economic Society and Humanities Vol. 3 No. 7, 2026

Multimodal Recontextualization of Corporate Identity in Global Maritime Communication

Mi Li*, Jiaqi Liu
School of Foreign Languages, Guangzhou Maritime University, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China
**Corresponding Author*

Abstract: Maritime logistics companies construct very different identities from similar operations through their corporate homepages. This study compares how COSCO Shipping and Maersk recontextualize maritime practices through the multimodal resources of their official English-language homepages, and how recurring patterns give rise to distinct identity orientations. The analysis draws on full-page captures of both homepages and examines the organization of global connectivity, service capability, and uncertainty through language, images, layout, and interactive resources. The comparison identifies two predominant orientations. COSCO Shipping adopts a system-centered identity, conveyed through the scale, structure, and continuity of its operating system. Maersk presents a customer-enabling identity, conveyed through accessible services, actionable guidance, and tasks that visitors can take up. The study argues that multimodal recontextualization shapes corporate identity through what a homepage shows and the relation it establishes with the visitor.

Keywords: Corporate Identity; Multimodal Recontextualization; Maritime Logistics; Corporate Homepages; Social Semiotics

1. Introduction

A corporate homepage is a company's public face. It selects what to show and what to leave out, arranging information in ways that shape how visitors encounter the organization. Corporate identity, in this sense, is not a fixed attribute. It is a communicatively constructed account of what the organization is and how it relates to its stakeholders. Research has shown that corporate identity is built through lexical choices on websites, through images and layout in annual reports, and through the rhetorical strategies of CEO letters and social media posts [1-4]. Studies of corporate websites have also shown that companies operating in comparable industries may foreground different values, relationships, and forms of organizational authority.

Digital corporate communication, however, is not produced through language alone. Multimodal modes including images, written text, and spatial arrangement have different meaning potentials and can be coordinated to shape organizational self-presentation. Research on corporate digital communication has shown how social practices may be reconstructed in websites, blogs, and videos through interacting discursive and visual resources [5]. Website functions also participate in meaning-making. Search fields, buttons, and service portals exceed their technical function. By making certain actions immediately available, they organize relations between the company, its services, and the website user. The discursive role of website interactivity has received less systematic attention than writing, images, and layout, despite its importance to digital communication [6].

Existing studies therefore establish that corporate identities are selectively constructed and that digital corporate communication is multimodal. Yet the literature leaves a more specific explanatory issue less clear. Website research has often concentrated on linguistic patterns within selected sections, such as "About Us" and corporate responsibility pages, on particular organizational themes such as diversity, or on individual modes and platforms. Less attention has been directed to how operational practices are reorganized in the functional sections of a corporate homepage and how recurring relations among prominent information, visual evidence, page sequence, and user action develop into broader identity meanings. The issue is not simply whether a homepage contains multiple semiotic resources,

but how comparable organizational practices are assigned different communicative values through their multimodal organization.

Maritime logistics provides a useful setting for examining this issue. Maritime transport carries around 80% of international merchandise trade by volume, while shipping companies operate through geographically dispersed network. These operations have also been affected by digital transformation, changing customer expectations, geopolitical disruption, and growing demands for supply-chain coordination [7,8]. Corporate communication in this industry must make complex and often geographically remote operations meaningful to international audiences. Research on strategic communication in maritime logistics has examined the vision statements of major companies and identified themes such as services, customers, geographical scope, quality, and corporate image [9]. Such work confirms the relevance of corporate self-presentation in the sector, but does not explain how homepage design, and the multimodal recontextualization of operational practices contribute to corporate identity construction.

The present study approaches global maritime communication through one of its public-facing digital forms: the official English-language corporate homepage. It does not seek to represent the full range of operational, regulatory, or ship–shore communication in the maritime sector. Instead, it compares the homepages of COSCO Shipping and Maersk as purposively selected cases operating within a broadly comparable maritime-logistics environment. Drawing on social semiotic multimodality and the recontextualization of social practice, the study examines how maritime operations are selected, foregrounded, sequenced, evaluated, and connected with user action. Its contribution lies not merely in identifying differences between two websites, but in investigating how companies within the same industry can assign different communicative meanings to comparable operational practices.

The study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How are comparable maritime and logistics practices multimodally recontextualized on the two homepages?

RQ2: What corporate identity orientations emerge from recurring patterns of multimodal recontextualization in the two cases?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Corporate Identity as Communicative Construction

Corporate identity is fundamentally defined as "what the organization is" [10]. It represents the distinct attributes and "quintessence" of an entity. Balmer describes it as "multi-faceted and draws on several disciplines," functioning as an emerging philosophy or approach to management that represents a melding of corporate communication and culture [10]. Modern research view corporate identity as a "dynamic construct that is realized in and through the discursive practices of members of business and disciplinary cultures," emphasizing that it is "multiple, changeable, linguistically constructed, and contextually constrained" rather than a fixed attribute [3].

Previous research has identified corporate websites as a key site where such identity construction takes place. It functions as the "digital footprint" and "virtual façade" of an organization [1], and serves as a channel for presenting strategic information such as missions and visions. Scholars have further shown that organizations deploy visual resources such as logos and typography on their homepages, to "communicate corporate philosophy and personality" to stakeholders [11].

The present study understands corporate identity as a communicative construction. Identity is made recognizable through recurring discursive and multimodal choices. They are selectively presented in a designed environment to show certain preference for organizational activities, capabilities, values, and stakeholder relations. For a shipping company, vessels, routes, warehouses, digital systems, and even specialist knowledge are all resources for identity construction. They can be named, pictured, grouped and connected in different ways for visitors to encounter.

2.2 Social Semiotic Multimodality

Social semiotic multimodality draws on the study of signs and systemic functional linguistics. It treats language and other semiotic resources as socially and culturally shaped [12]. Kress and van Leeuwen proposed that communication is inherently multimodal: semiotic principles operate in and across different modes, including text, image, sound, and gesture [13]. These

modes interact to produce meaning. As van Leeuwen argues, they participate in the social construction of identities and organizations, just as language does [14].

The present study takes the following concepts from social semiotic multimodality to examine how the multimodal resources of corporate homepages are organized to construct particular versions of corporate identity. Salience refers to the degree of visual prominence an element has within a composition. It is produced through size, color, position, and typography. Framing works somewhat differently. It is about how elements are separated or connected to organize information, and it involves choosing which meanings, values, or experiences to emphasize and which to downplay. In doing so, it creates a particular version of reality. Composition, meanwhile, relates to the textual function of a mode—the way a text or image is organized into a coherent whole. In visual composition, this means how representational and interactive elements are placed in relation to one another. Researchers can analyze what Kress and van Leeuwen call the "grammar of visual design," examining the relationships a page sets up between the things it depicts, the actions it represents, and the circumstances in which these unfold [15].

2.3 Multimodal Recontextualization

Recontextualization refers to the transformation of social practices as they are represented in discourse. It is defined as a strategic process of selecting aspects from reality that serve specific communicative purposes and interests [5]. Social practices are reconstructed through what is included and what is left out, creating a particular version of reality. This selection operates through language, but also through images, layout, and the spatial organization of the page [5].

Van Leeuwen breaks this process down into four transformations [14]. Deletion leaves out elements that are present in the practice itself. Substitution replaces concrete details with more general categories. Rearrangement changes the order or relations among components. Addition brings in elements that were not part of the original practice. A single sentence or image can delete, generalize, and evaluate at the same time.

The present study applies this perspective to maritime logistics. Logistics operations extend across multiple locations, organizations, and transport modes. A corporate homepage cannot show this complexity. It selects. What the homepage presents is not the operational field itself but a version of it. Recontextualization provides a way to trace how this version is put together and what it makes visible. In this study, it connects the analysis of homepage to the question of how maritime enterprises construct their corporate identities through what they choose to show.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Case Selection

This study offers a qualitative comparison of the official English-language homepages of COSCO Shipping and Maersk. The cases were selected purposively because both companies operate across container shipping, inland transport, and logistics services. This common operational ground allows similar areas of activity to be examined across two differently organized homepages.

Concepts from social semiotic multimodality and recontextualization guided the reading of the material. Broader identity orientations were formulated after related patterns had recurred within the individual homepages and become relevant to the comparison.

3.2 Data Collection and Unit of Analysis

The two homepages were archived as full-page scrolling captures on July 4, 2026. These captures record the wording, images, numerical modules, layout, section order, and visible state of interactive elements encountered at the time of capture. Linked pages were outside the dataset. Hyperlinks, buttons, tabs, and search fields were considered only insofar as they appeared on the homepage and indicated a possible route of action.

Maersk's homepage contained a one-minute promotional video. The video was viewed in full, and a transcript of its dialogue was prepared for analysis. Only the homepage module through which the video was accessed is shown in the analysis.

For close analysis, each homepage was divided into sections marked by changes in layout, background, spacing, headings, or communicative function. These included the hero area, network statistics, service presentations, customer advisories, and knowledge resources. The division provided a

practical way of examining resources that appeared together on the page. It was not treated as an additional theoretical category.

All figures presented in the analysis were cropped from the archived full-page captures.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

Each homepage was first read from top to bottom as a continuous scrolling text. Section-by-section notes were then made on wording, imagery, numerical displays, spatial arrangement, page position, and visible interactive elements. The Maersk video was examined as a short audiovisual narrative, with attention to its dialogue.

Close reading moved from individual features to the relations established among them. Salience, framing, vertical sequence, and visible interactivity guided this stage of the analysis. Attention was given to where prominence was concentrated, which elements were connected or separated, how one section led into another, and what actions the page made immediately available.

Recontextualization was examined by tracing what happened to maritime and logistics practices when they entered homepage representation. The analysis asked which aspects remained visible, which were omitted or generalized, how relations among activities were reorganized, and where evaluative meanings entered the account.

Interpretations developed in one section were checked against other parts of the same homepage before the two cases were compared. An identity orientation was retained when a similar direction of meaning appeared in more than one section and received support from more than one semiotic mode. Both researchers examined the full dataset and discussed emerging readings with reference to the archived materials.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Recontextualizing Global Connectivity

Global connectivity appears near the top of both homepages, but each page gives it a different visible form.

COSCO Shipping places a statistical block beneath the claim, “A world leading container fleet, a service network with disruption-free global coverage.” The module lists 146 countries and regions, 663 ports, 419 routes, and 596 vessels (Figure 1a). These figures refer to different kinds of entities. Countries and regions indicate geographical coverage; ports identify points in the transport network; routes suggest connections among those points; and vessels refer to physical operating capacity. Equal spacing, repeated typography, and parallel labels instead gather the four categories into a compact account of corporate reach.

The wording above the figures adds a meaning that the numbers alone cannot establish. “Global coverage” summarizes their geographical implication, while “disruption-free” associates the represented network with continuity. The statistics provide visible evidence of extent. The promise of uninterrupted coverage, however, remains an evaluative claim supplied by the heading. The compact module makes a geographically dispersed operation quickly legible. Relations among its components remain outside the representation.

Maersk opens with the heading “Get closer to your customers with Contract Logistics” over a warehouse and fulfilment scene. Storage racks, packages, and conveyor lines locate the claim in an identifiable operational environment. The heading does not describe connectivity in geographical terms. Its use of “your customers” extends the represented relationship from Maersk to the visiting business and, beyond it, to the customers that business serves. Connectivity is framed here through this customer relationship and the fulfilment activities that support it.

The warehouse scene does not stand alone. A service panel overlaps the lower edge of the image, so that promotional representation and service use occupy the same opening area. “Tracking,” “Schedules,” and “Offices” are presented together, but only “Tracking” is already open (Figure 1b). Its default state gives tracking greater immediate prominence than the neighboring options.

This configuration also affects page sequence. Cargo tracking is available within the opening view, without an intervening navigation step. The warehouse establishes an operational setting, and the panel provides a point of entry into an ongoing shipment. Together, the warehouse and the open tracking field connect the represented logistics environment with a practical means of locating goods.

These opening configurations set up different routes into the rest of each homepage. COSCO begins with a visually unified account of network extent. Maersk

places a customer-oriented claim, an operational setting, and an active tracking function within the same opening view. The next section examines how these differences develop in the presentation of service capability.

(a) COSCO Shipping's network statistics



(b) Maersk's hero sectionand tracking panel

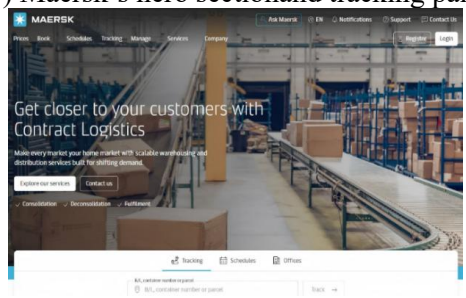


Figure 1. Homepage Representations of Global Connectivity

4.2 Recontextualizing Service Capability

A corporate homepage cannot show everything involved in moving goods by sea, road, and rail. What appears are assets, services, and the actions available to visitors. How these are arranged constructs different versions of corporate identity.

On COSCO Shipping's homepage, the shift from network scale to service provision begins with two images placed side by side (Figure 2a). One shows a vessel, with the words "Convenient," "Reliable," "Safe," and "Standardization" next to it. These words attach service qualities directly to a visible company asset. The other image brings together port equipment, rail wagons, and trucks under the heading "Door to Door Supply-chain solution."

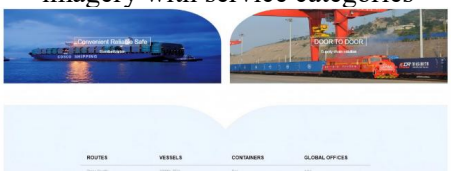
Further down the page, routes, vessels, containers, and global offices are arranged in parallel columns. These elements belong to different parts of logistics. Some are physical assets, others are commercial functions. The layout places them into a single overview. The visitor sees the company's resources laid out together before being directed toward specific tasks.

Maersk takes a different approach. Its "Logistics services and solutions" section is built around named products. "Transport," "Store," "Clear & Protect," and "Logistics Management" serve as organizing categories. Beneath them, "Maersk Spot," "Ocean Contract," "Ocean Quote," "Maersk Go," and "Intermodal Transport Prices" appear as cards of equal weight and matching format (Figure 2b).

The product names turn complex logistics arrangements into recognizable options. Much of the operational detail is not brought into view. The cards show what can be selected and where a service interaction may begin. This principle also shapes the main navigation, where "Prices," "Book," "Schedules," "Tracking," and "Manage" organize logistics as a set of tasks.

The two homepages simplify the same field of provision along different lines. COSCO shows how assets, transport modes, organizational categories, and customer functions belong within one operating system. Maersk presents service integration through standardized products and the actions associated with them. On COSCO's page, capability lies in how the parts relate to one another. Maersk's page locates it in services that can be compared and chosen.

(a) COSCO Shipping's vessel and door-to-door imagery with service categories



(b) Maersk's logistics service cards

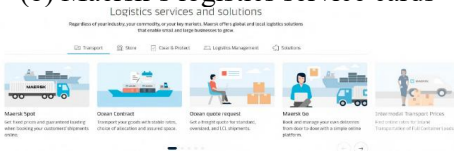


Figure 2. Homepage Representations of Operational Capability and Service Integration

4.3 Recontextualizing Uncertainty

The two homepages interrupt their more stable accounts of networks and services with notices concerning the Middle East situation. Acknowledging disruption is only part of what these notices do. Through their placement, wording, and links, they give changing circumstances a form that visitors can recognize and follow.

On COSCO Shipping's homepage, "Middle East Update—Customer Advisory No. 3 (Amendment)" appears in a dark-blue bar between the opening promotional area and the statistical presentation of the company's network (Figure 3a). "Notice" marks the section on the left, the advisory title occupies the center, and a "More" link directs visitors beyond the homepage. The bounded format separates the

notice from the surrounding promotional material without removing it from the page's main progression. Its wording turns the regional situation into a maintained corporate record. 'Customer Advisory' signals an official channel, 'No. 3' indicates an ongoing series, and 'Amendment' makes revision visible. The point is not to explain the disruption but to show that information is being formally issued and updated as conditions change.

Maersk places its "Middle East Situation" notice immediately below the tracking panel (Figure 3b). A megaphone icon accompanies the invitation to "Stay up to date with our latest information, links and guidance here," followed by a "Read updates" button. Its proximity to Tracking, Schedules, and Offices connects exceptional circumstances with the same interface through which visitors handle routine logistics tasks. The wording also gives information a practical direction: visitors are not only told that updates exist, but are directed toward material intended to help them follow the situation.

(a) COSCO Shipping's numbered and amended customer advisory



(b) Maersk's Middle East notice beneath the tracking panel

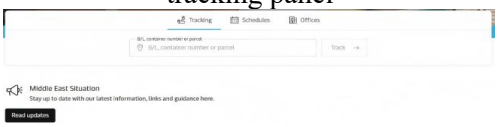


Figure 3. Homepage Updates on the Middle East Situation

Elsewhere on the Maersk homepage, knowledge is placed in two different relations to uncertainty. The promotional video "Be ready for anything to go all the way" organizes a missing customs form as a concrete operational problem (Figure 4a). Through a short problem–response narrative, documentary knowledge and corporate support are presented as relevant to the continued movement of cargo. The uncertainty represented here is immediate and procedural. A particular omission becomes consequential because it interrupts an otherwise ordinary logistics process.

The Logistics Trend Map (Figure 4b) and the "Latest insights" section (Figure 4c) operate on a different timescale. Their images, headlines, explanatory text, and links make market, technological, regulatory, and supply-chain developments available for continuing exploration. Where the video resolves a single operational obstacle, these resources present change itself as something that requires interpretation. They position Maersk as a source through which developments in the logistics environment may be understood.

COSCO gives particular visibility to the maintenance of an identifiable and revisable information record. Maersk connects the reporting of disruption more directly with resources for action, procedural support, and industry interpretation. These are differences of communicative emphasis rather than separate stages in a single hierarchy of response.

4.4 Comparative Identity Orientations

The three areas examined above show two different ways of building corporate identity on a homepage. Global connectivity, service capability, and responses to disruption are handled differently on each. COSCO Shipping keeps the logistics system itself in view. Its network is measured and mapped. Its services are ordered within a visible structure. Even its response to uncertainty takes the form of a maintained, numbered record. Maersk foregrounds what the visitor can do. Its network appears as a route into action. Its services are presented as comparable products. Its response to uncertainty points the visitor toward guidance and updates. Across the three areas, COSCO makes the system visible. Maersk makes the interaction available.

(a) Promotional video module



(b) Logistics Trend Map



(c) Latest insights section. Panel

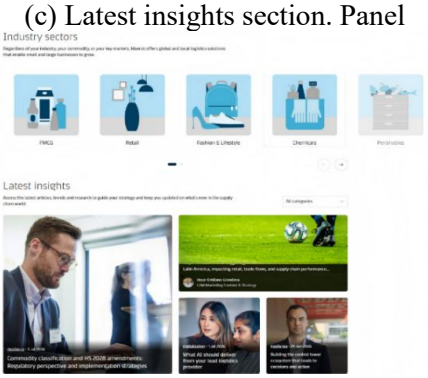


Figure 4. Knowledge Resources on the Maersk Homepage

Note. (a) shows the homepage module rather than the full video sequence.

Taken together, these patterns point to two distinct identity orientations. COSCO's homepage can be described as system-centered: capability is made visible through the scale, structure, and continuity of the operating system. Maersk's is more customer-enabling: capability takes the form of accessible services, actionable guidance, and tasks that visitors can take up.

These orientations take shape through multimodal recontextualization. The transformation of maritime practice is not only a matter of which assets and services appear on the page. It also concerns what receives prominence, which relations become visible, and where visitors are given an entry into the represented operation. Corporate identity, as the homepages show, develops through the recurrence of these relations across the homepage.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how comparable maritime and logistics practices are recontextualized on the English-language homepages of COSCO Shipping and Maersk. The analysis found that operational practices acquire corporate meaning through the selection and arrangement of language, images, numerical displays, page sections, and visible interactive elements. Quantification, classification, evaluation, and access to user action each contribute to the public presentation of corporate capability.

The recurring patterns support two broad identity orientations. COSCO Shipping's homepage places greater emphasis on the visibility and organization of its operating system. Maersk's homepage more often presents logistics capability through service access, task completion, guidance, and knowledge resources. These orientations describe tendencies in the archived pages: each homepage also contains features associated with the other orientation.

The study contributes to multimodal recontextualization research by showing that the transformation of social practice on a corporate homepage extends across the vertical sequence of the page and its visible interactive entry points. Corporate identity, in this process, is built through what a homepage shows and the way it relates to the visitor.

The findings are drawn from two English-language homepage snapshots archived at a particular moment. They concern the communicative meanings made available by these pages. Future work could examine how such meanings are received by different audiences or how they compare across a wider range of maritime companies.

Acknowledgments

This paper is supported by Humanities and Social Sciences Youth Foundation, Ministry of Education (No. 21YJC740027).

References

[1] H. Fu and H. Zhu. Discursive Construction of Corporate Identity Through Websites: An Intercultural Perspective on the Commercial Banks of the United States and China. Frontiers in Psychology, 2022, 13:947012.

[2] C. Hu, A. Zhang and Y. Xu. Metaphor, Stance, and Identity: A Corpus-Based Study of CEO Letters in Chinese and American Corporate Social Responsibility Reports. IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, 2024, 67(1):47–62.

[3] N. Wu, M. Liu and J. Zhang. Rhetorical Strategies for the Construction of a Corporate Identity: A Case Study Based on Huawei Annual Reports. Pragmatics and Society, 2023, 14(5):777–800.

[4] J. Strong and L. Plagens. Decoding the Code: Multimodal Workplace Attire and Corporate Identity Construction on Goldman Sachs' Instagram. International Journal of Business Communication, 2026, advance online publication.

[5] C. D. Maier and S. Ravazzani. Framing Diversity in Corporate Digital Contexts: A Multimodal Approach to Discursive Recontextualizations of Social Practices. International Journal of Business Communication, 2021, 58(4):463–489.

[6] S. Vigild Poulsen. The Same but Different: A Social Semiotic Analysis of Website Interactivity as Discourse. Discourse & Communication, 2022, 16(2):249–268.

[7] Z. Raza, J. Woxenius, C. Altuntas Vural, et al. Digital Transformation of Maritime Logistics: Exploring Trends in the Liner Shipping Segment. Computers in Industry, 2023, 145:103811.

[8] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Review of Maritime Transport 2024: Navigating Maritime Chokepoints. United Nations, 2024.

[9] N. N. Yashalova and D. A. Ruban. Content of Corporate Vision Statements in Maritime Logistics: A Case Study of the Largest Companies. Economies, 2023, 11(3):87.
[10] J. M. T. Balmer. Corporate Identity and the Advent of Corporate Marketing. Journal of Marketing Management, 1998, 14(9):963–996.
[11] Y. Q. Wu and C. Y. M. Cheong. Corporate Branding of Academic Institutions: Semiotic Communication of Logos and Names. Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 2026, 34(1):324–353.
[12] C. Jewitt and G. R. Kress (Eds.). Multimodal Literacy. Peter Lang, 2008.
[13] G. R. Kress and T. van Leeuwen. Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication. Arnold, 2001.
[14] T. van Leeuwen. Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis. Oxford University Press, 2008.
[15] G. Kress and T. van Leeuwen. Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2006