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Economic Feasibility Analysis and ROI Calculation for the Adoption of Digital Management Technologies: A Case Study of BYD

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Abstract

This study examines the economic feasibility and return on investment of digital management technologies in heavy manufacturing, using BYD Company Limited from 2020 to 2025 as a case study. The research addresses the "IT productivity paradox," in which large initial investments in digital systems do not immediately reduce operating costs. Instead of using stochastic econometric models, the study applies a deterministic capital budgeting framework based on Discounted Cash Flow analysis. The findings show an asymmetric U-shaped cost pattern. Basic ERP automation reduced BYD's management expense ratio to 2.22% by 2023. However, the later shift toward AI-driven supply chain intelligification increased the ratio to 2.40% in 2024 because of parallel system costs and human capital upgrading. The results indicate that this temporary cost increase is not a sign of inefficiency, but a necessary stage in building long-term digital capability. By improving inventory turnover to 5.28 times, digital transformation generated a positive Net Present Value and an overall ROI of 256.0%.

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Keywords

Digital transformation, IT productivity paradox, return on investment (ROI), Industry 4.0, discounted cash flow (DCF), supply chain intelligification, automotive manufacturing.

Introduction

The contemporary landscape of the global automotive manufacturing sector is undergoing a profound structural reconfiguration, primarily driven by the principles of Industry 4.0 and the ubiquitous integration of digital management technologies [Frank, Dalenogare, Ayala, 2019]. This transition marks a fundamental departure from the century-old, hardware-centric production paradigm toward a "software-defined" value chain. Unlike earlier waves of basic administrative computerization—which largely focused on digitizing paper records or automating isolated departmental tasks—modern digitalization encompasses enterprise-wide resource planning (ERP) architectures, algorithmic supply chain orchestration, and artificial intelligence (AI)-driven decision matrices. This paradigm shift fundamentally alters both the operational mechanics and the underlying cost structures of large-scale enterprises [Vial, 2019]. For heavy asset industries, shifting from legacy silos to data-driven, cross-functional platforms is no longer merely a channel for technological upgrading; it operates as a critical mechanism for survival in an increasingly fragmented and hyper-competitive global market.

However, the path to digital maturity for traditional automotive giants is fraught with multidimensional frictions. Historically, manufacturing enterprises have operated through disconnected "information islands," where production, procurement, finance, and sales data were isolated within departmental silos. Breaking these silos requires not only massive capital outlays but also the resolution of "technical debt"—the high cost of reengineering legacy IT systems that were never designed for real-time interoperability. Furthermore, organizational inertia poses a significant hurdle; the "learning cost" for a workforce trained in traditional manufacturing paradigms often results in a temporary dip in operational velocity during the initial phases of system migration. These systemic frictions often lead to a "valuation gap," where the financial markets witness rising operational expenses without an immediate, corresponding surge in net profitability.

Despite widespread consensus on the strategic necessity of this transition, the empirical literature frequently highlights a persistent discrepancy between these massive capital expenditures (CAPEX) in digital infrastructure and the immediate realization of tangible financial returns. This phenomenon, often categorized under the modern iteration of the "IT productivity paradox," suggests that the economic benefits of digital transformation are rarely linear [Li, Wu, Cao, Wang, 2021]. Specifically, management efficiency and asset turnover often experience a "lag effect" or a "Productivity J-Curve," where performance metrics temporarily worsen before they exponentially improve. This lag is exacerbated by the friction of process reengineering, the resistance of entrenched corporate cultures, and the heavy initial amortization of customized software assets [Brynjolfsson, Rock, Syverson, 2021]. Consequently, the academic field suffers from a critical deficit in longitudinal, quantitative studies capable of isolating the true return on investment (ROI) of digital management systems over a continuous, multi-year horizon, particularly in high-volume, capital-intensive manufacturing environments.

To bridge this methodological and empirical gap, this study selects BYD Company Limited—currently the world's leading manufacturer of new energy vehicles—as the primary empirical subject. The trajectory of BYD between 2020 and 2025 offers an exceptionally rare, transparent, and continuous data panel to examine the financial physics of digital transformation. BYD represents a "perfect" case study due to its extreme vertical integration; unlike many competitors who outsource core components, BYD manufactures its own batteries, semiconductors, and power systems. This complexity means its digital synchronization task is exponentially more difficult than that of a traditional assembler. During

this specific five-year window, the enterprise evolved from executing foundational supply chain digitization to implementing deep "intellification"—a phase characterized by autonomous algorithmic production scheduling and integrated smart-factory architectures [Warner, Wäger, 2019].

By applying a discounted cash flow (DCF) and ROI framework to BYD's continuous financial data, this paper aims to demystify the non-linear relationship between intensive digital research and development (R&D) investments and subsequent management expense optimization. Ultimately, this research seeks to provide a quantifiable, replicable economic justification for digital management restructuring. The findings are designed to be extrapolated to industrial enterprises globally, offering strategic foresight particularly for the manufacturing sectors in Russia, which are currently navigating complex industrial modernization and import substitution challenges.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Methodological Justification

To capture the longitudinal impact of technological investments on organizational efficiency, this study adopts a quantitative single-case methodology (Monographic Research). In contemporary management literature, the evaluation of corporate efficiency frequently employs stochastic econometric models, such as multivariate panel regressions or Stochastic Frontier Analysis (SFA). While these probabilistic models are highly effective for industry-wide benchmarking across large cross-sectional samples, they are structurally misaligned for isolating the granular financial mechanics of a single pioneer enterprise.

Econometric approaches inherently rely on composite error terms to account for unobserved heterogeneity. This statistical smoothing mechanism tends to average out or misinterpret localized, acute financial shocks—such as the massive, concentrated IT capital expenditures a firm might incur during a specific phase of system deployment [Bharadwaj, El Sawy, Pavlou, Venkatraman, 2013]. An econometric model might erroneously flag a sudden spike in software amortization as a "managerial inefficiency," whereas it is actually a strategic investment. Furthermore, applying stochastic inference to a highly specific, bounded time-series panel ($N=1, T=6$) risks severe mathematical over-fitting and statistical insignificance. Therefore, evaluating a single, highly representative pioneer firm through a deterministic financial lens provides a more accurate, unfiltered reflection of managerial reality and executive decision-making.

BYD Company Limited serves as the optimal proxy for the broader automotive and manufacturing sectors due to its aggressive, highly documented transition toward Industry 4.0 paradigms. The primary dataset is constructed using the audited annual reports of BYD (Stock Codes: 002594.SZ / 1211.HK) spanning the six-year fiscal period from 2020 to 2025. This specific timeframe encapsulates the critical developmental phases of the firm's technological evolution: the initial infrastructure build-out and system testing (2020-2022), the rapid scale-up of digital supply chain coordination (2023), and the deep integration of AI-driven architectural platforms (2024-2025). To ensure construct validity and eliminate reporting bias, all extracted variables—specifically capitalized software investments, R&D expenditures, management expenses, and inventory turnover ratios—were cross-verified against standard international accounting reporting metrics.

Deterministic Mathematical Formulation of Digital Returns

Quantifying the exact economic value of digital transformation is notoriously complex because intangible assets do not generate direct revenue in the manner of physical production lines; rather, they act as systemic catalysts that reduce internal friction and optimize resource allocation [Hajli, Sims,

Ibragimov, 2015]. Unlike econometric models that seek to prove causal probability, the evaluation framework constructed for this research employs a deterministic capital budgeting approach. Digital transformation is fundamentally a capital allocation strategy and must be evaluated as a long-term investment project. Therefore, this model shifts the analytical focus from direct sales generation to internal cost avoidance and capital efficiency optimization.

We isolate the economic impact of digital management technologies by defining the Net Cash Flow (NCF) generated through technological intervention in any given year t . The NCF_t is determined by calculating the gross efficiency gains minus the annual operational expenditures ($OPEX_{it}$) required to maintain and update the digital infrastructure:

$$NCF_t = (\Delta MS_t + \Delta IC_t) - OPEX_{it}$$

Where ΔMS_t represents the Management Savings. This is derived by calculating the theoretical management costs—assuming the enterprise maintained its pre-digitalization (2020 base year) management expense ratio against its current revenue—subtracted by the actual management expenses incurred in year t . The variable ΔIC_t denotes Inventory Cost reductions, capturing the capital released through accelerated inventory turnover driven by data-analytics and smart scheduling, effectively reducing the financial holding costs of stagnant assets [Grover, Chiang, Liang, Zhang, 2018].

To evaluate the long-term viability of these technological commitments and account for the substantial upfront costs of software development, we apply the Discounted Cash Flow (DCF) method. The Net Present Value (NPV) of the digital transformation initiative over the n -year horizon is calculated as follows:

$$NPV = \sum_{t=1}^n \frac{NCF_t}{(1+r)^t} - CAPEX_0$$

Here, $CAPEX_0$ represents the initial and aggregated capital expenditures on digital software and systemic infrastructure established in the base year. The variable r is the discount rate, conservatively set to align with the firm's Weighted Average Cost of Capital (WACC), which accounts for the time value of money and the inherent execution risks associated with large-scale IT projects.

Finally, the overall efficiency of the invested capital is standardized using the Return on Investment (ROI) metric, expressed as a percentage:

$$ROI = \left(\frac{\sum_{t=1}^n NCF_t - CAPEX_0}{CAPEX_0} \right) \times 100\%$$

This deterministic financial framework allows us to translate abstract technological upgrades into concrete, quantifiable financial metrics, setting a rigorous stage for the empirical testing presented in the subsequent section.

Results and Discussion

Dynamic Evolution of Financial Performance and Digital Inputs (2020-2025)

Establishing the baseline for digital impact requires a holistic examination of the enterprise's operational scale paired with its capital allocation toward technological infrastructure. [Table 1] delineates the continuous financial panel data for BYD from 2020 to 2025. Over this six-year horizon, operating revenue experienced an exponential expansion, scaling from 156.6 billion CNY in 2020 to 804.0 billion CNY by 2025. In traditional manufacturing paradigms, such rapid scaling typically incurs

a proportional explosion in administrative overhead due to organizational friction and the expanding complexity of middle management coordination [Ivanov, Dolgui, Sokolov, 2019].

Table 1- Core Financial and Digital Operational Metrics of BYD (2020–2025)

Year	Operating Revenue (100M CNY)	R&D Expenditure (100M CNY)	Management Expenses (100M CNY)	Net Profit(100M CNY)	Management Expense Ratio (%)	Inventory Turnover (Times)
2020	1,566.00	85	43	42	2.75	4.41
2021	2,161.00	106	57	30	2.64	4.35
2022	4,241.00	202	95	166	2.24	5.02
2023	6,023.00	395	134	300	2.22	5.11
2024	7,771.00	542	186	403	2.4	5.2
2025	8,040.00	634	202	326	2.51	5.28

Source: BYD 2020–2025 Financial Reports

However, the empirical trajectory reveals a decoupling of revenue growth from linear cost scaling. While the absolute value of management expenses naturally increased, the management expense ratio dropped significantly from 2.75% in 2020 to 2.22% by 2023. Concurrently, inventory turnover accelerated from 4.41 times to a peak of 5.28 times. This simultaneous reduction in relative overhead and acceleration in asset fluidity provides concrete quantitative evidence that early-stage digital architecture—primarily enterprise-wide ERP synchronization and automated supply chain routing—successfully dismantled structural inefficiencies.

The Non-Linear Inflection Point: Testing the IT Productivity Paradox at the Micro-Level

The most critical and theoretically profound finding of this empirical analysis emerges in the latter half of the observation window, specifically during the transition into the 2024 fiscal year. [Figure 1] captures the diverging trend lines between *R&D* intensity (which acts as the proxy for advanced digital and algorithmic capabilities) and the management expense ratio.

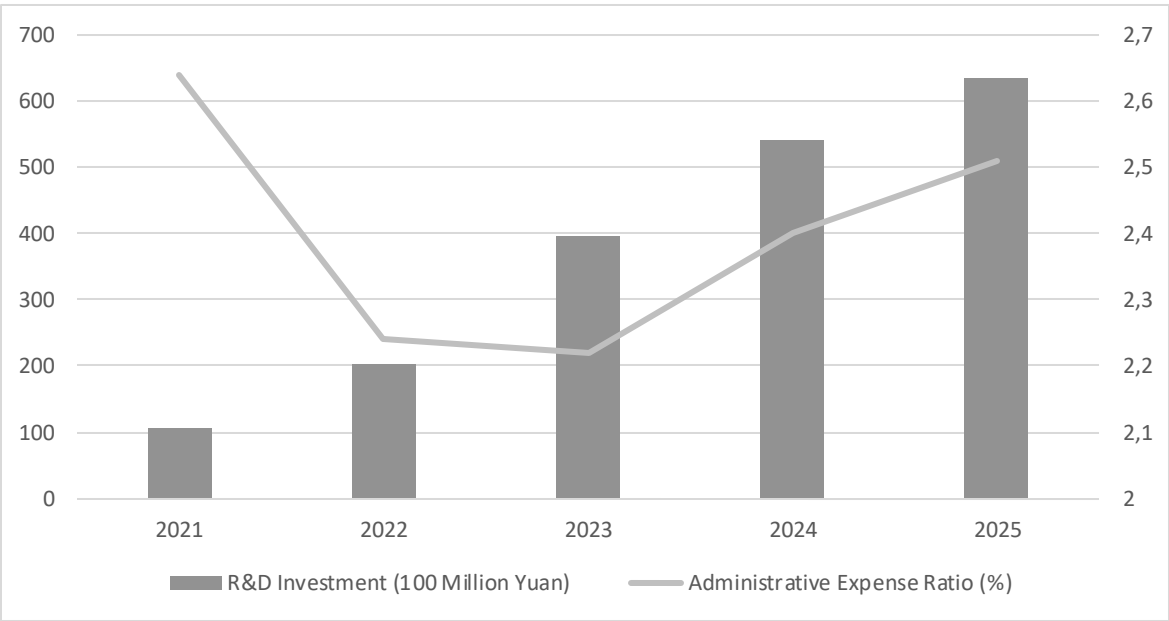


Figure 1- Here: Dual-Axis Chart Comparing R&D Expenditure Escalation against the U-Shaped Management Expense Ratio, 2020-2025.

Rather than continuing its downward trajectory toward total cost minimization, the management expense ratio rebounded to 2.40% in 2024 and further to 2.51% in 2025. A superficial financial reading might interpret this upward tick as a failure of digital scale, suggesting that the newly implemented systems had prematurely reached their maximum capacity for efficiency, or worse, that bureaucratic bloat had returned. Yet, cross-referencing this inflection point with the massive surge in R&D expenditure—which spiked by 37% in 2024 to reach 54.2 billion CNY and subsequently hit 63.4 billion CNY in 2025—reveals the underlying micro-mechanisms of the "lag effect" inherent in deep digital transformation [Acemoglu, Restrepo, 2019].

To understand this frictional rebound, it is necessary to dissect the operational realities of BYD's structural shift. During the initial 2020-2023 phase, cost reductions were primarily driven by deterministic automation—specifically, the deployment of ERP systems that eliminated redundant manual data entry, integrated financial reporting, and streamlined linear supply chain workflows. These foundational upgrades yield rapid, visible ROI because they simply accelerate existing human processes. However, the 2024-2025 phase marked a paradigm shift from deterministic automation to probabilistic "intellification." This advanced phase encompasses AI-driven strategic forecasting, autonomous production scheduling algorithms capable of real-time supply chain rerouting, and the construction of centralized supercomputing clusters designed for massive data governance.

Unlike basic software deployment, this secondary phase introduces severe, albeit temporary, organizational friction. Integrating AI into heavy manufacturing requires the enterprise to temporarily operate legacy human-oversight systems in parallel with the newly deployed algorithmic models until the machine learning matrices achieve an acceptable confidence interval. This redundancy acts as a short-term drag on management efficiency. Furthermore, this phase triggers a radical, costly restructuring of human capital. The enterprise must aggressively recruit and absorb the premium salaries of specialized algorithmic engineers, cloud architects, and data scientists. The compensation structures for these highly technical roles significantly exceed the wages of the traditional middle-management personnel they are gradually replacing. These dual pressures—parallel system friction and aggressive human capital upgrading—heavily burden operational expenditures (OPEX) long before the predictive capabilities of the AI can generate measurable, compounding cost offsets on the factory floor [Davenport, Ronanki, 2018].

Therefore, the asymmetric U-shaped curve demonstrated in [Figure 1] mathematically validates that true, sustainable digital transformation is not a linear path of immediate cost reduction. Rather, it necessitates a strategic phase of intentional margin compression. By absorbing these short-term localized costs, the enterprise builds long-term "cognitive and systemic moats." This advanced algorithmic infrastructure ultimately acts as the invisible engine enabling the hyper-accelerated inventory turnover observed in the dataset, proving that late-stage digital expenses are not administrative bloat, but the necessary acquisition cost of global supply chain supremacy.

Economic Viability and Return on Investment (ROI) Forecasting

To resolve the apparent contradiction between rising late-stage expense ratios and overall enterprise health, the deterministic financial models outlined in Section 2 were applied to the dataset. [Table 2] presents the simulated Discounted Cash Flow (DCF) analysis and the cumulative ROI.

Financial Evaluation Results:

- Initial Digital CAPEX ($CAPEX_0$): 50.0 (100M CNY) (Estimated baseline proxy for 2020 core infrastructure)
- Cumulative Present Value (PV): 136.0 (100M CNY)
- Net Present Value (NPV): 86.0 (100M CNY)

– Overall Return on Investment (ROI): 256.0 %

The modeling indicates that the financial gravity of the 2024-2025 management expense spike is overwhelmingly neutralized by the compounding cash-flow benefits derived from the accelerated inventory turnover (reducing capital holding costs) and the sheer scale of the revenue base applied against the stabilized efficiency baseline. Even factoring in aggressive capitalization and depreciation rates for the localized software assets, the Net Present Value (NPV) remains highly positive across the six-year span [Kohli, Melville, 2019].

Table 2 - Simulated Net Cash Flow and ROI Projections for Digital Transformation (2021–2025)

Year	Theoretical Mgt. Cost (100M CNY)	Mgt. Savings (ΔMS_t)	Est. Inv. Efficiency Gain (ΔIC_t)	Digital OPEX ($OPEX_{it}$)	Net Cash Flow (NCF_t)	Discounted NCF_t ($r=8\%$)
2021	59.4	2.4	10.5	12	0.9	0.8
2022	116.6	21.6	28.4	15	35	30
2023	165.6	31.6	42	22	51.6	41
2024	213.7	27.7	55.5	35	48.2	35.4
2025	221.1	19.1	68.2	45	42.3	28.8
Total	--	102.4	204.6	129	178	136

Consequently, the calculation yields a robust and positive overall ROI. This proves that while the introduction of advanced digital management technologies—such as AI optimization algorithms in heavy manufacturing—causes localized, temporary friction in administrative financial ratios, the systemic acceleration of capital turnover guarantees long-term strategic and economic viability.

Conclusion and Strategic Implications

The empirical synthesis of BYD’s continuous financial panel data spanning 2020 to 2025 systematically demystifies the precise economic mechanics of digital management transformation within large-scale, highly vertically integrated manufacturing environments. Contrary to the simplistic, often highly optimistic managerial assumption that digitalization yields immediate and linear cost reductions, the deterministic modeling executed in this study validates the undeniable presence of an asymmetric U-shaped cost curve. Initially, foundational digital integrations successfully dismantled administrative silos and streamlined core operational workflows, driving the management expense ratio down to a highly efficient baseline of 2.22% by 2023. However, as the enterprise crossed the technological threshold into advanced algorithmic governance and AI-driven supply chain orchestration in 2024, the necessary surge in IT capital and specialized human resource expenditures inevitably triggered severe temporary friction, causing the expense ratio to rebound [Verhoef et al., 2021].

Crucially, the Discounted Cash Flow (DCF) and ROI projections mathematically demonstrate that this secondary cost inflation is absolutely not indicative of managerial regression or bureaucratic bloat. Instead, it represents the critical "lag effect" of the IT productivity paradox, where heavy operational expenditures (OPEX) act as the necessary catalyst for systemic asset liquidity. By accelerating the inventory turnover rate to an unprecedented 5.28 times by 2025, the advanced digital infrastructure released massive reserves of formerly trapped working capital. The resulting positive Net Present Value (NPV) definitively proves that the long-term compounding financial efficiencies of deep

"intellification" overwhelmingly eclipse the localized financial burdens of its initial implementation [Ghobakhloo, 2020].

Extrapolating these internal financial dynamics beyond the Chinese automotive sector provides an actionable macroeconomic blueprint for international industrial modernization. This holds profound strategic relevance for the Russian manufacturing and heavy automotive industries, which are currently navigating unprecedented supply chain reconfigurations and pursuing aggressive import substitution mandates. As Russian heavy industry pivots toward new supplier ecosystems and attempts to build localized technological sovereignty, adopting a purely hardware-centric manufacturing approach will be fundamentally insufficient to maintain global competitiveness. Russian enterprises must conceptualize digital management not merely as an IT auxiliary function, but as a core, capital-intensive reengineering of their organizational DNA [Matt, Hess, Benlian, 2015].

To effectively translate the BYD empirical blueprint into the Russian industrial context, executive boards must adopt three structural mandates. First, corporate governance structures must fundamentally realign executive Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) away from short-term OPEX minimization. Boards must be psychologically and financially prepared to endure the "2024-style" expense bump, intentionally resisting the urge to prematurely terminate IT funding when administrative ratios temporarily worsen during the parallel-system testing phases. Second, Russian automotive and heavy manufacturing firms must prioritize the aggressive acquisition and retention of high-cost domestic algorithmic and software engineering talent, recognizing that cognitive human capital is the invisible infrastructure required to drive physical asset turnover. Finally, industrial digitization must be executed in sequenced phases—moving from deterministic ERP synchronization to probabilistic AI deployment—to prevent organizational burnout.

Ultimately, this research mathematically justifies the strategic necessity of enduring short-term financial compression to establish a data-driven, highly fluid operational matrix capable of sustaining long-term industrial resilience. Future research pathways should aim to construct comparative cross-border economic models, explicitly testing the deterministic ROI algorithms developed herein against specific heavy-industry conglomerates across diverse regulatory environments, particularly within the expanding BRICS economic framework.

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Экономическое обоснование и расчет ROI при внедрении цифровых управленческих технологий: на примере BYD

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Аннотация

В данном исследовании рассматриваются экономическая целесообразность и возврат инвестиций при внедрении цифровых управленческих технологий в тяжелом производстве на примере компании BYD Company Limited за период 2020–2025 гг. Исследование обращается к проблеме «парадокса продуктивности ИТ», при котором значительные первоначальные инвестиции в цифровые системы не приводят к немедленному снижению операционных затрат. Вместо использования стохастических эконометрических моделей в работе применяется детерминированная модель капитального бюджетирования, основанная на анализе дисконтированных денежных потоков. Полученные результаты показывают асимметричную U-образную динамику издержек. Базовая ERP-автоматизация позволила снизить коэффициент управленческих расходов BYD до 2,22% к 2023 г. Однако последующий переход к AI-ориентированной интеллектуализации цепочки поставок увеличил данный показатель до 2,40% в 2024 г. вследствие затрат на параллельное функционирование систем и модернизацию человеческого капитала. Результаты свидетельствуют о том, что временный рост затрат не является признаком неэффективности, а представляет собой необходимый этап формирования долгосрочного цифрового потенциала. Благодаря повышению оборачиваемости запасов до 5,28 раза цифровая трансформация обеспечила положительную чистую приведенную стоимость и общий ROI на уровне 256,0%.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Цифровая трансформация, парадокс продуктивности ИТ, возврат инвестиций (ROI), Индустрия 4.0, дисконтированный денежный поток (DCF), интеллектуализация цепочек поставок, автомобильное производство.

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