

From Tea to Symbol: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of HeyTea's Branding Discourses

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In the highly-competitive market of China's new tea beverages, the strategy of product differentiation is difficult to be put into effect. Marketing and branding has become more essential. This study investigates how leading beverage brands like HeyTea use linguistic and visual resources to build a unique brand identity that resonates with the younger generation of consumers.

Guided by a multimodal discourse analysis framework, this research tries to investigate the under-explored area of marketing discourse for Chinese tea beverages. It presumes that brand identity is discursively built through the combination of language and other visual resources. Data was collected from HeyTea's official website, WeChat public account and its online menu, comprising over 30 product names and their visual designs.

The data analyses reveal three main strategies utilized by HeyTea. First, at the linguistic level, HeyTea utilizes creative lexical innovations, such as the affectionate reduplication "芝芝" (Zhizhi, cheesy) and "啵啵" (Bobo, bubble), to create a sense of intimacy. Second, the product names incorporate traditional Chinese culture (e.g., "喜柿多多", which means "There are many happy events"), which transcend functional description, making the consumption experience as an aesthetic and emotional event. Third, the unique brand image is reinforced by a consistent visual demonstration employing muted colors and minimalist design, aiming to construct an identity of "inspiration" and premium quality.

The findings in this study indicate that the aforementioned strategies effectively reconstruct tea beverages from mere drinks into consumable symbols of modern, stylish lifestyles. The research concludes that the strategic use of discourse of Chinese new tea drinks can serve as a tool for observing the dynamics of contemporary Asian consumer culture, where consumer identity is built through the symbolic act of consumption. The current study

expects to offer insights into the understanding of brand communication in the experience economy.