

## *Original Paper*

# A Comparative Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Consumer Touch Points Image of Chinese and US Tea Enterprises Based on Corpus on the Amazon Platform

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### **Abstract**

*On Amazon's cross-border e-commerce platform, tea products are iconic commodities that account for a relatively large amount of exports between China and the US, and play an important role in the foreign trade market, while the e-commerce development of tea enterprises is also of great significance to the construction of the national agricultural economy. This paper mainly takes the product promotion information of 20 Chinese and US tea enterprises on the Amazon platform as an example, and uses multimodal discourse analysis theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the three promotion forms of text, pictures and videos. With the support of the above two theories, the paper aims to interpret the characteristics of the consumer touch points image expressed in the product promotion messages of Chinese and US tea enterprises, so as to provide reference for cross-border tea enterprises in the field of e-commerce marketing and international competition.*

### **Keywords**

*Multimodal discourse analysis, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Amazon platform, Chinese and US tea enterprises, Touch point image*

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, influenced by economic globalization and Covid-19 epidemic, cross-border e-commerce has continued to rise and accelerate its development trend, impacting the traditional

industry chain and trade model. Amazon is a well-known cross-border e-commerce platform, through which cross-border enterprises from many countries establish their brand effect, attract international consumers and expand their sales turnover. With the acceleration of the globalization process, in the international market, the influence of tea products from China and the US is gradually increasing, and it is also the trend for the relevant tea enterprises to take advantage of cross-border e-commerce to improve their international competitiveness. Cross-border e-commerce for tea enterprises is both an opportunity and a challenge, how to stand out in the wave of cross-border e-commerce, which has become a new topic to learn and discuss in this era.

Text, videos, pictures, sound, color and other multimodal resources are richly used by Chinese and US tea enterprises in their respective product promotion information, allowing consumers to understand product information in a more efficient, personalized, tridimensional and intuitive way, and using consumer touch points to guide consumer behavior, which can greatly enhance the international competitiveness and economic benefits of enterprises (Cao & Xue, 2006; Shen, 2021).

Based on this, the purpose of this paper is to explore the characteristics of consumer touch points image behind the comparison of the product promotion messages formulated by Chinese and US tea enterprises, in order to provide references for tea enterprises participating in cross-border e-commerce to conduct production marketing and enhance international competitiveness.

## **2. Research Background**

### *2.1 Research Object*

Anne Suhler (2016), who pioneered the concept of “touch point” in her explanation of marketing management activities in business, argues that creating “touch point” for target consumers is essential if enterprises want them to achieve the behaviour of the final purchase. This is the key to creating brand identity and gaining customer loyalty.

Consumer touch points image refers to the concentrated self-image of the consumer as reflected in the product promotion information of the Chinese and US tea enterprises, as well as the personality characteristics of certain aspects of the self-image. If there is a change in the touch points image, what are the common characteristics of the consumer touch points image in different promotional messages? The common characteristics are the “touch point” that move consumers or that consumers pursue, which are the characteristics of consumer “touch point” (Zhang & Cao, 2011).

On the Amazon platform, the Chinese and US tea enterprises use text, pictures and videos as the main form of product promotion information to introduce the product attributes and selling points to consumers in order to inspire them to buy.

This study will qualitatively and quantitatively analyze the product promotion messages of 20 Chinese and US tea enterprises on the Amazon platform in 2022, to compare the characteristics of the consumer touch points image behind Chinese and US tea enterprises, as well as their marketing strategies in terms of text, pictures and videos.

## 2.2 Overview of Relevant Theories

Multimodal discourse analysis theory is a linguistic theory based on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, and combined with social semiotics to analyze and construct multimodal elements such as text, pictures and videos (Halliday, 1978, 1994). In this paper, we combine the verbal resource system and visual symbol system (Cai & Deng, 2021), and want to explore how the product promotion information of Chinese and US tea enterprises to meet consumer needs, stimulate consumer touch points and expand total consumption by grasping three modal forms: text, pictures and videos.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs divides human needs into five levels: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs (Jin & Luo, 2019). For Chinese and US tea enterprises, only when the product promotion information meets the above needs as much as possible, can they meet the consumer touch points to a greater extent and induce consumers to make purchases.

## 3. Research Questions and Methods

This study examines the following questions:

(1) On the Amazon platform, how do Chinese and US tea enterprises stimulate consumer touch points through product promotion messages? What kind of the characteristics of the consumer touch points image are reflected in the product messages?

(2) On the Amazon platform, are there any major differences between the product promotion messages of Chinese and US enterprises? If so, what are the tendencies of each?

This study uses a combination of textual analysis and qualitative and quantitative research methods to answer the above questions. This paper is based on a comparative analysis of the use of three modal resources: text, pictures, and videos for the Chinese and US tea enterprises on the Amazon, a B2C cross-border e-commerce platform.

The text, pictures and videos are from the same 20 Chinese and US tea enterprises (involving 10 Chinese tea enterprises and 10 US tea enterprises).

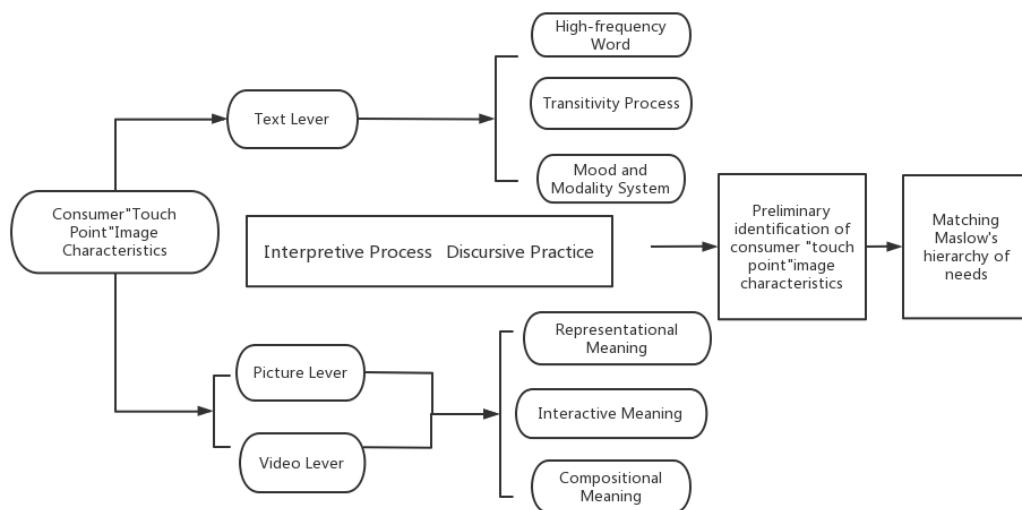
The text resource section uses tea as the search term, 32 sets of primary data on tea products from China and 41 sets of primary data on tea products from the United States before February 2022 as the corpus. According to where the enterprises were registered, the corpus was divided into two text corpora using the corpus software Antconc: Chinese enterprises and US enterprises. The Chinese enterprise corpus contains 12402 characters and 2269 types, and the US enterprise corpus contains 15649 characters and 3,534 types. In this paper, we analyze the text messages of Chinese and US tea products to help understand the process of impressing consumers and the image characteristics of consumer touch points reflected in the text.

The picture resources section uses the product detail page pictures of 20 Chinese and US tea enterprises mentioned above on the Amazon platform. The paper contrastingly analyzed the pictures resources of Chinese and US tea products and applied the multimodal discourse analysis framework to find the

differences, in order to deepen the understanding of the role of still pictures in the marketing communication between Chinese and US cross-border tea enterprises.

The video resources section uses the product promotion videos of 20 Chinese and US tea enterprises mentioned above on the Amazon platform. The US tea enterprises include Barry's Tea, Bigelow Tea, Buddha Tea, etc., and the Chinese tea enterprises include Beikouliuxiang, Cha Wu WarmSun, China Mist, etc. The paper analyzes the touch points image of consumers through the information presented in the dynamic videos, with a view to making suggestions on the optimization of product promotion videos and information presentation.

Referring to the Multimodal Critical (positive) Discourse Analysis Framework designed by Zhang, D. L. and Zhang K. (2022), Zhang (2018) and the Process of Constructing the Characteristics of Target Users "Touch Points" Image designed by Zhang and Cao (2011), this study constructs a multimodal discourse analysis framework of the characteristics of consumer touch points image, as shown in the Figure 1:



**Figure 1. Multimodal Discourse Analysis Framework of the Characteristics of Consumer Touch Points Image**

#### 4. Research Analysis

In Fairclough's (1992) theory of critical discourse analysis, it regards the description of vocabulary and grammar in textual discourse as the starting point of everything. After statistical collation, the study respectively collected the promotional messages of 10 Chinese and 10 US tea enterprises on the Amazon platform. From the perspective of textual analysis, the study focus on three aspects: high-frequency words, transitivity processes, and modality system (Cai & Deng, 2021; Shao & Jun, 2021). The aim of the part is to explore their linguistic features, and comparatively analyze the differences and similarities in the image characteristics of the customer touch points in the promotional messages of Chinese and US tea enterprises.

#### 4.1 Text Analysis

##### 4.1.1 Comparison of High-Frequency Word Distribution Characteristics of the Chinese and US Tea Enterprises

In the Halliday social semiotics, the language is mentioned as a set of meaning choices available to language users (Zhang, 2016; Halliday, 1978). High-frequency words can reflect certain discourse tendencies or discourse characteristics in a concentrated manner. Therefore, this paper uses corpus software Antconc to generate high-frequency word lists for both Chinese and US corpora, and selects the top 10 high-frequency words for sorting and presenting, and tries to interpret the similarities and differences in the constructive features of touch points in Chinese and US tea enterprises in the texts.

**Table 1. US Enterprises High-frequency Word List**

High-frequency words	Frequency	Sequence	High-frequency words	Frequency	Sequence
tea	715	1	ginger	69	6
organic	136	2	caffeine	58	7
product	105	3	ingredient	56	8
flavor	88	4	herbal	46	9
gourmet	72	5	certified	44	10

**Table 2. Chinese Enterprises High-frequency Word List**

High-frequency words	Frequency	Sequence	High-frequency words	Frequency	Sequence
tea	723	1	information	57	6
taste	71	2	water	45	7
flavor	67	3	package	44	8
product	64	4	natural	43	9
green	61	5	health	41	10

Text delivery is a common method of product marketing and a very direct and powerful way to engage with consumers. The text of product promotions are crucial, which can engage consumers can directly drive and increase product sales. If enterprises think from the consumer's point of view and start from the characteristics of customer touch points image, the content of product promotion will have stronger attractiveness and effectiveness.

According to the above comparison of high-frequency words Table 1 and Table 2 between Chinese enterprise corpus and the US enterprise corpus, the top words in Chinese enterprise corpus are "tea", "taste", "flavour", "product" and "green", etc., while the top words in the US enterprise corpus are "tea", "organic", "product", "flavour", "gourmet", etc. Among these two word lists, we can see the words "tea", "product", "flavour" are mentioned repeatedly, which reflects the desire of the Chinese

and the US enterprises to inspire the consumer's touch points for product quality and practicality by emphasizing the characteristics and attributes of their products. It is also a reflection of the physiological needs and safety needs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Due to the differences in agricultural history and agricultural development between China and the US, Chinese enterprises place more emphasis on "green", "natural", "health" and "package", because Chinese enterprises pay more attention to the promotion of nature and green attributes under the influence of the traditional Chinese tea culture. And most of the Chinese tea is produced in the south which is not well preserved and easily affected by moisture, so the package is also a focus of consumer concern. The US enterprises place more emphasis on "ginger", "caffeine", "certified" and "ingredient". It is influenced by the taste habits of the US consumers and the strict management system of the US food safety. It also reflects the characteristics of consumers touch points image who think highly of the qualification certifications and food safety.

#### 4.1.2 Comparison of Transitivity Processes Distribution Characteristics of the Chinese and US Tea Enterprises

According to Halliday's metafunctional theory, the ideational function corresponds to conceptual meaning at the grammatical and lexical level, mainly reflected through transitivity processes (Halliday, 1994; Xia, 2017). The transitivity processes can express the objective feelings through different processes including the material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process, and existential process, which is a greatly important semantic system in the system functional linguistics (Xia, 2017).

The Chinese and US enterprises tend to take advantage of integrating product promotion information with the consumer touch points to attract customers to buy, so the transitivity processes of the product promotion information is significant to research the characteristics of the customers touch points image.

(1) The material process refers to the process of doing something.

E.g., We've added apple, beetroot, and lemongrass to bring an extra touch of flavor to this ruby-colored brew.

(2) The mental process refers to a series of the mental activities including sensory, reaction and cognition, etc.

E.g., Steep for 4 minutes or whatever time you like.

(3) The relational process refers to the relationship between things, which is also known as the correlation process.

E.g., This classic black tea is the namesake of Charles Grey.

(4) The verbal process refers to the process of information communication, exchange, transmission and reception.

E.g., Tell my friends but don't take mine.

(5) The existential process refers to the process of having something in existence.

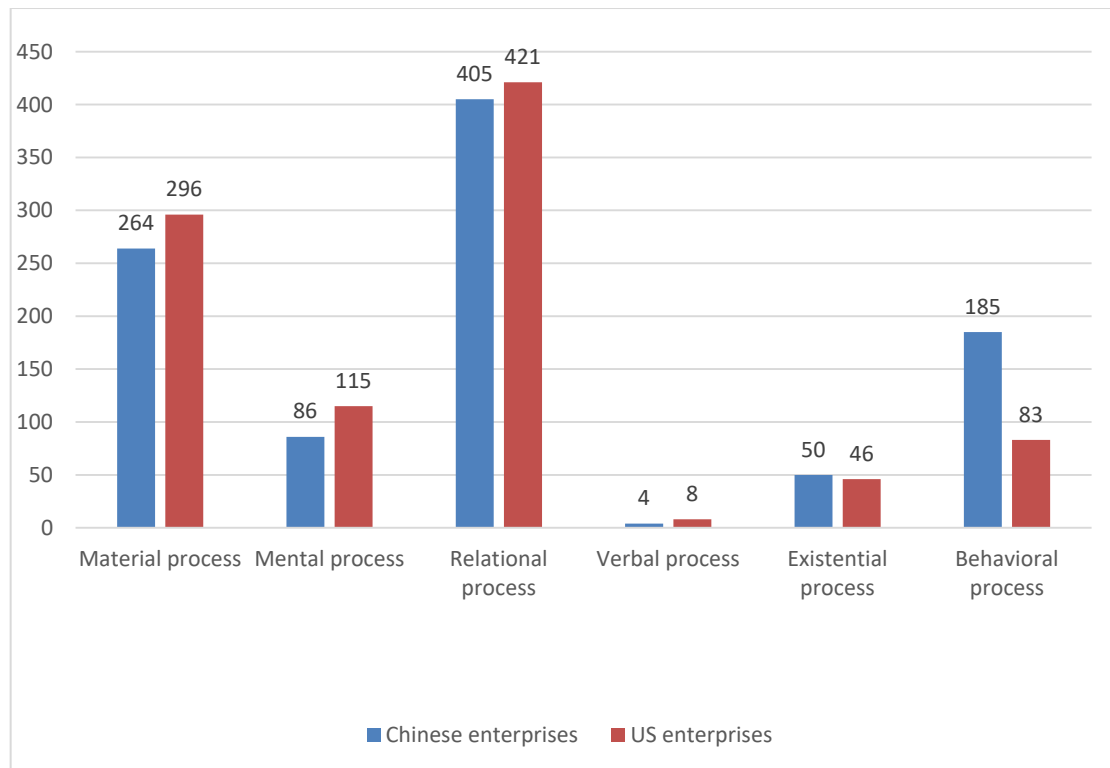
E.g., Currently, item can be shipped only within the U.S. and to APO/FPO addresses.

(6) The behavioral process refers to the process of physiological activities including breathing, coughing, sighing and dreaming, etc.

E.g., Please note Elderberry does not smell and taste like a classic berry.

**Table 3. The Transitivity Processes and the Frequently-Used Verbs to Express these Processes in Product Promotion Information Used by Chinese and US Tea Enterprises on the Cross-Border E-Commerce Platform Amazon**

Process	Meaning	Frequently-used verbs in promotion texts to represent the process
material process	the process of something happening	Sell, keep, serve, provide, become, get, make, pack, add, boil, use, heat, help, create, pour, etc.
mental process	the process of inner activity	Feel, think, support, believe, know, like, love, enjoy, etc.
relational process	the relationship between entities	Are, is, include, cover, own, contain, have, etc.
verbal process	the process of exchanging meanings of words and sentences	Contact, tell, etc.
existential process	the process of the existence of something	Be, etc.
behavioral process	the process of human physiological activity	Smell, look, drink, taste, see, etc.



**Figure 2. Comparison of the Frequency of the Various Transitivity Processes in Product Promotion Information Used by Chinese and US Tea Enterprises**

**Table 4. Comparison of the Frequency of the Various Transitivity Processes in Product Promotion Information Used by Chinese and US Tea Enterprises**

Process	material process		mental process		relational process		verbal process		existential process		behavioral process	
	Chin ese	US	Chin ese	US	Chin ese	US	Chin ese	US	Chin ese	US	Chin ese	US
Enterprise	Chin ese	US	Chin ese	US	Chin ese	US	Chin ese	US	Chin ese	US	Chin ese	US
Frequency	264	296	86	115	405	421	4	8	50	46	185	83
Total Frequency	560		201		826		12		96		268	
Percentage	28.5%		10.2%		42.1%		0.6%		4.9%		13.7%	

According to the Figure 2 and Table 4, it can be seen that in the comparison of the transitivity processes of the product promotion information of Chinese and US tea enterprises, the relational process and material process account for a higher proportion, while the verbal process accounts for the least, the overall difference among other processes is not obvious except for the behavioral process. It probably indicates that Chinese and US tea enterprises hope to deepen the close relationship between tea products and consumers through the material process and the relationship process of the product promotion texts, so as to achieve the purpose of meeting the physiological needs and love and



belonging needs of consumers. In the behavioral process, the frequency of relevant behavioral verbs used by Chinese enterprises is much higher than that of US enterprises, which indicates that Chinese enterprises attach more importance to sensory marketing of their products, deepen consumers' sense of product experience for tea products through behavioral actions, lead consumers into the imagination of tea tasting, and satisfy consumers' demand for self-fulfillment.

#### 4.1.3 Comparison of Mood and Modality System Distribution Characteristics of the Chinese and US Tea Enterprises

The interpersonal function is a function that allows people to express their attitudes and judgments, and thus influence and change the thoughts of others through language. The interpersonal function is also one of the three metafunctions of language in Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 1994; Xia, 2017). In the interpersonal function of language, tone and mood are the main ways to play a role.

In the verbal communication, people have only two main roles, which refer to "Giving" and "Demanding". Giving or demanding can be information, or goods & services. Combined, these form the four speech roles (Xia, 2017). In cross-border e-commerce transactions, if tea enterprises can reasonably use the interpersonal function of language in product promotion texts, it will help to understand the psychological needs of consumers, strengthen the communication with consumers, optimise the shopping experience of the consumer and finally improve the sales turnover.

	Information	Goods&Services
Giving	Statement	Supply
Demanding	Question	Order

Generally speaking, "statements" are expressed in a declarative tone, "questions" in a questioning tone, and "orders" in an imperative tone. According to systemic functional linguistics, there is an in-between possibility of "modality" in the process of communication, in addition to the two poles of affirmative and negative expressions.

##### (1) Modality Value: Modal Operators

The modality is an intermediate state between affirmation and negation, and is itself distinguished by a hierarchy. The weight of the speaker's tone of voice can be distinguished by judging the high, medium and low magnitudes of the modality. The quantitative values of modal operators are showed in Table 5 below:

**Table 5. The Frequently-Used Modal Words in Product Promotion Information of Chinese and US Tea Enterprises**

	Low	Medium	High
Affirmative	Can, may, could, might	Will, would, should, is/was to, shall	Must, ought to, need, has/had to
Negative	Doesn't/didn't need to, have to, needn't,	Shouldn't, isn't/wasn't to, won't, wouldn't,	Can't, couldn't, mightn't, hasn't/hadn't to, mustn't, oughtn't to,

Modal words with a high value are used to express the relatively positive attitude. Conversely, modal words with lower value are used to express the negative attitude. Accordingly, the paper makes statistics for the Chinese and US tea enterprises corpora of the product promotion information to summarize as the Table 6 and Table 7:

**Table 6. Comparison of the Modal Value of Frequently-Used Modal Words in the Product Promotion Information of Chinese and US Tea Enterprises**

Enterprise	Characters	Low		Medium		High	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Chinese corpus	12402	110	0.89	39	0.31	5	0.004
US corpus	15469	67	0.43	10	0.06	0	0

**Table 7. Comparison of the Frequency of Modal Auxiliary in the Product Promotion Information of Chinese and US Tea Enterprises**

	must	need	will	should	may	can	could
Chinese corpus	4	1	32	7	20	88	2
US corpus	1	0	8	2	15	50	2

From the above data, it can be seen that in the product promotion information of Amazon tea enterprises, both Chinese and US enterprises, without exception, the share of modal operators is low > medium > high. And it is worth noting that Chinese tea enterprises use the number and frequency of modal operators are greater than US tea enterprises, which the low-value modal operators 'can' account for the majority. Analysis from the semantic level, the debatable discourse can give the listener sufficient space to decide, and the low-value and medium-value modal words have the functional feature of relative attitude. As for high-value modal words, they have the functional feature of absolute attitude. Therefore, on the Amazon platform, Chinese and US tea enterprises both use low-value and medium-value modal words to express politeness. However, according to the frequency of use, Chinese tea enterprises show more respect and politeness to consumers than US tea enterprises, which also

reflects the characteristics of consumer touch points image that they are eager to esteem needs.

### (2) Speech Function

The two variants of communicative roles and exchange of objects make up the four most dominant speech functions: supply, order, statement, and question. From the product promotion texts of 20 Chinese and US tea enterprises, it can be seen that whether it is to introduce the product or describe the efficacy, enterprises use the speech function of “statement”. Using an objective tone to describe the product can increase the trust of consumers to a certain extent, and touch the inner needs of consumers by increasing the trust. In addition, when reminding consumers of product precautions, the “order” function often appears, such as: Keep out of reach of children. By enhancing the tone of voice to raise consumers’ attention, it reflects the consumers’ demand for product safety.

### (3) Mood Element

Systemic functional linguistics suggests that mood element plays a pivotal role in sentences.

**Table 8. Table of Subject Collocation of Modal Auxiliary in the Product Promotion Text of US Tea Enterprises**

	Used “you” or “people” as the subject	Used “product-related” as the subject	Used other words as the subject
may	0	12	3
can	14	29	7
could	2	0	0
will	4	4	0
should	0	2	0
must	0	0	0
need	0	0	0

**Table 9. Table of Subject Collocation of Modal Auxiliary in the Product Promotion Text of Chinese Tea Enterprises**

	Used “you” or “people” as the subject	or	Used “product-related” as the subject	Used “shipping/delivery time” as the subject	Used other words as the subject
may	0		10	10	0
can	15		79	0	16
could	2		0	0	0
will	3		29	0	0
should	4		2	0	1
must	2		2	0	0
need	0		0	0	1

By comparing the above Table 8 and Table 9, on the Amazon platform, Chinese and US tea enterprises are mostly using objective products as the subject of modal auxiliary, followed by the second person “you” as the subject. While Chinese tea enterprises and US tea enterprises have a huge difference in the use of “may”, Chinese tea enterprises by geographical restrictions will repeatedly use “may” to indicate the uncertainty of shipping/delivery time, such as: Arrival/Delivery date limit estimated by platform system may be inaccurate. In addition, there is the use of “may” to explain the delay of timely delivery caused by the Covid-19 epidemic, such as: Few delayed parcel may take about 1 month to arrive due to COVID-19 impact.

In conclusion, by analyzing the mood and modality system of Chinese and US tea enterprises in the text message, we can see that the enterprises attach importance to consumers’ purchasing experience and consumption feelings, and at the same time some relevant product descriptions and reminders of the enterprises also reflect the characteristics of consumers’ touch points image that consumers pursue the multifaceted combination of physiological needs, safety needs and esteem needs.

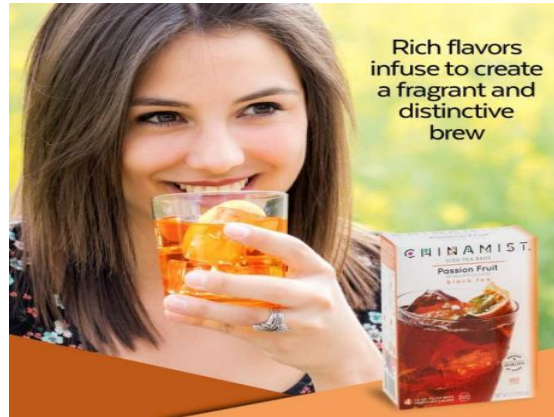
#### *4.2 Image Analysis*

Multimodal discourse, consisting of two or more social signs, is usually a combination of pictures, text, and colors. According to Kress and Leeuwen, static pictures, as non-verbal signs, contain three levels of meaning: representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning (Halliday, 1978; Xia, 2017).

E-commerce sites such as Amazon have created a purchasing scenario like a “remote buying environment”, where the pictures of product details displayed on the detail pages are still intangible for consumers because they cannot be physically touched. Therefore, additional information in the context may help deepen consumers’ understanding of a product. In the present study, the product detail pages of 10 Chinese enterprises and 10 US enterprises were selected for case studies. Elements in the pictures were analyzed to explore the differences between enterprises from the two countries.

##### *4.2.1 Representational Meaning*

The representational meaning of images refers to the ability of visual images to play the role of language and represents people, places, and events in the objective world as well as various activities in the inner world of human beings (Zhang, 2018; Xia, 2017). Mining the representational meaning conveyed in images is comparable to the conceptual function in linguistic studies, both focusing on describing conceptual relations and communicative links among various activities. Kress and Vanyu classified images based on whether there are vectors. An image with at least one vector connecting the viewers is a narrative image, and one without any vector is a conceptual image. Vectors can be usually understood as verbs in linguistics. As the number of vectors and characters often do not match, the narrative process can be further divided into action, reaction, language, and mental processes. When understanding the action process, it is necessary to clarify that there are two elements, the agent and the patient, and the focus is usually on the agent in a static picture. If there is a patient in a picture, the action can be considered a transitive one, otherwise, it is an intransitive image.



**Figure 3. Advertisement of a US Tea Enterprises**



**Figure 4. Advertisement of a Chinese Tea Enterprises**

Taking the product picture of a US tea enterprises in Figure 3 as an example, there are at least two participants: the lady tasting tea and the teacup she is holding. The lady is the agent and the cup is the patient. The lady is linked to the viewers through a vector, indicating that they are doing something together. She looks at the viewers with a smile and a half-open mouth, as if she wants to share something joyful with them. The whole picture is vibrant, vivid, and full of tension, blurring the boundary between the viewers' real experience and their imagination. As the process of this action unfolds and the lady's gaze conveys something, the viewers can notice the text in the upper right corner of the image and the packaging of the tea product at the bottom.

Conceptual images can be classified into three processes, namely classification, analysis, and symbolization, and do not have vectors (Xia, 2017). When a enterprises enhances the effect of advertising by releasing symbolic meanings of an image and adds text to make explanations and descriptions, viewers can more easily accept the information conveyed by the image. The extension information of tea products displayed on e-commerce websites usually belongs to the category of conceptual images.

Taking the picture of a real tea plantation presented by a Chinese tea enterprises shown in Figure 4 as an example, the image is intended to convey deep information about the natural and high-quality nature of the tea to the viewers and influence their perception of the product and the brand. The Chinese and English product descriptions in the image help the viewers to understand the content. Although the Chinese characters “茶园景色” (scenery of a tea plantation) on the left side of the picture may appear slightly redundant, it complements the title above and emphasizes the theme and relevant information, thus creating a coherent rhythm for the viewers and multidimensionally constructs a professional, high-quality, and positive image of the tea enterprises and its products.

An in-depth analysis based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs reveals that love and belonging needs are a basic level of human needs, at which individuals need to feel a sense of belonging and connection with others (Jin & Luo, 2019). Visual images in pictures can serve as a representation, depicting interaction between people and interpersonal relationships in social occasions. The representation of these images can meet people’s needs for a sense of love and belonging needs. Viewers can establish relationships and connections with others through images to meet their love and belonging needs, making themselves more satisfied and happier.

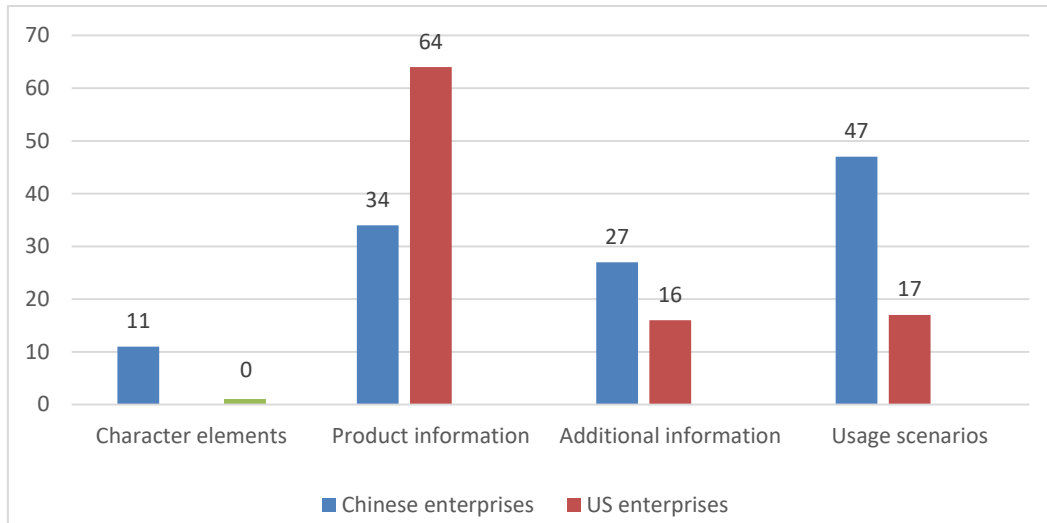
Additionally, love and belonging needs can also be reflected through narrative images, in which people describe the relationships between characters through vectors. There are usually some hidden plots that can convey more complex information and emotions. These images emphasize the interaction and connection between people, reinforcing people’s demand for love and belonging needs.

Moreover, when trying to understand the action process, viewers need to clarify elements in an image, such as the agent and the patient. Analyzing these elements can help viewers understand the context and emotions in the image and gain a deeper understanding of the interaction between people, which further meets their love and belonging needs.

Therefore, both Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and representational meanings of visual images emphasize human love and belonging needs. Through the representation in product pictures, consumers can gain relationships and connections with others to satisfy their love and belonging needs.

#### 4.2.2 Interactive Meaning

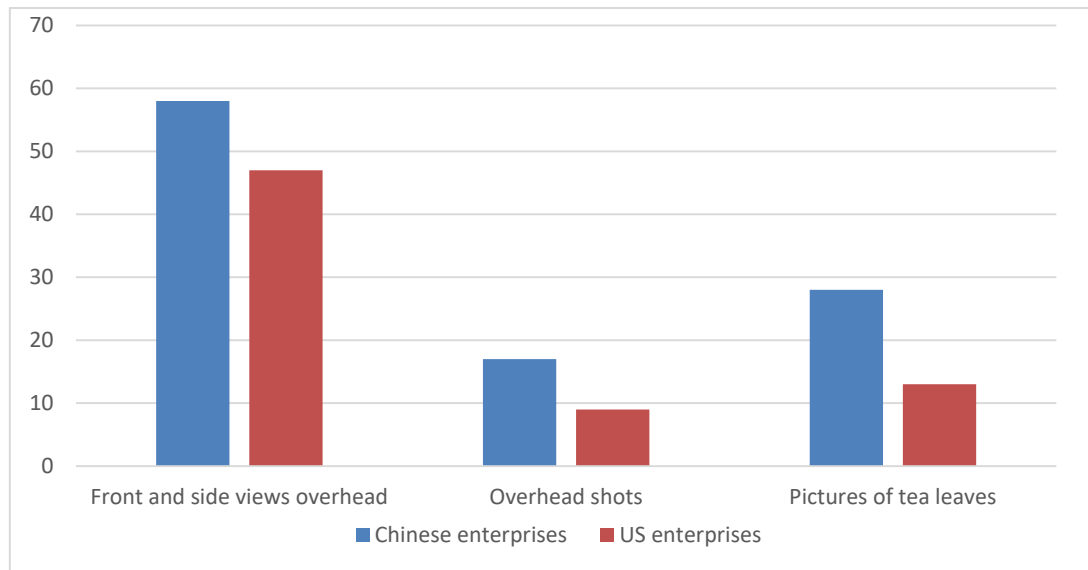
Multiple combinations of approaches and elements are incorporated into the layout design of product detail pages, suggesting that enterprises attempt to establish a multi-level emotional connection with viewers of the images from different perspectives (Wei & Wang, 2017; Huang, 2022). Marketing “touch points” for enterprises have both concrete and abstract expressions on the interactive level. Based on the visual grammar theory (Kress and Leeuwen), this paper analyzes the existing static image library according to the interactive effects of images.



**Figure 5. Comparison of the Content in Static Images of Chinese and US Tea Enterprises**

As shown in Figure 5, both Chinese and US tea enterprises regard their main product promotion information as the most important element in the pictures on their detail pages. They both simulate the actual use of tea products and present the real scenarios of brewing tea. In addition, both Chinese and US enterprises add additional elements such as tablecloths, objects, and cups to enrich the content of the images. Lastly, Chinese enterprises pay more attention to the participation of human beings and demonstrate the products through pictures of people drinking tea. In terms of the shooting angle, both Chinese and US enterprises mainly use traditional front and side views to shoot products and packaging. However, Chinese enterprises have significantly more shots of products without packaging. Furthermore, both Chinese and US tea enterprises use a limited number of overhead shots.

Figure 4 provides a subjective perspective of the tea garden, allowing readers to connect the tea product with the tea garden and more easily participate in the overall narrative of the tea image. The picture is real and natural, vividly representing the contrast between the cool tea plantation and the bright sky background through aerial or telephoto shots. Doing so not only creates a variable and natural emotional atmosphere but also highlights the professional and high-quality brand image of the tea plantation. The text above and on both sides of the main image is a high-saturation area, strongly contrasting the dim background with the various bright colors and providing viewers with visual impacts. Doing so emphasizes the superior quality of the product and implies the natural and pollution-free conditions in the source of the enterprises's raw materials.



**Figure 6. Comparison of Shooting Angles of Advertising Pictures of Chinese and US Tea Enterprises**

According to Kress and van Leeuwen’s visual grammar study, the relationship between the viewer, the elements in the image, and the worldview is constructed by three angles: contact, social distance, and attitude (Pan, Tian & Liu, 2021; Wei & Wang, 2017). From the perspective of the contact between the image and the viewer, most Chinese and US tea enterprises use images with human elements to show “providing behavior”. The representational participants in these pictures avoid direct eye contact with viewers, and their contact, if any, may also occur at a non-realistic level. Therefore, tea enterprises often place “request” type images to seek recognition from viewers and potential consumers in order to build a communicative link with their consumers. In terms of the social distance portrayed in an image, most product pictures with human characters are close-up shots, which only show the parts above the shoulders to shorten the distance between the brand and its products and consumers and establish a close relationship between them. Attitude is expressed through the perspective of the image presentation, and differences in the perspective imply different attitudes from the image information provider and enterprise. Attitude plays its part through the perspective of image presentation, and the differences in perspective imply different attitudes of those who convey messages and enterprises. According to Figure 6, Chinese enterprises tend to use pictures taken with different shooting and composition techniques according to different types of image elements, resulting in more diverse and varied perspectives, while US enterprises mainly use a horizontal perspective, including front and inclined horizontal views, to convey a message of being included or excluded from the image world, respectively. The horizontal perspective enables the viewer to be on the same level as the product, creating an immersive atmosphere. In a way, a bridge is built between the product display and the viewer, encouraging the viewer to actively browse and dig deeper into the product and the brand.



Contrasting colors are widely used to create specific emotional atmospheres and cues and are promoted in the design of individual product pictures. There are significant differences between Chinese and US tea enterprises in this regard. In Figure 3, for example, the bright yellow color of the tea starkly contrasts with the skin colors of the characters, the colors of their clothes, and the green color at the bottom, attracting viewers' attention to the bright yellow tea in the hands of the models. At the same time, the content presented using white and green colors at the bottom complements the professionalism and readability of the advertising pictures of the product. These pictures generally present product features (such as flavors, stores, etc.), facilitating emotional interaction between consumers and enterprises and thereby enhancing the effect of advertising. Lastly, the richness and high contrast of colors often help to compensate for the shortcomings and negative effects of advertisements using only text. Bright and soft lighting and a gentle layout create a warm and joyful atmosphere and present the positive values of the brand to the audience.

Both Chinese and US tea enterprises use pictures on e-commerce platforms to display and convey various information about their products in order to attract and guide potential consumers. These pictures usually contain detailed information about the products, usage scenarios, characters, photos of tea plantations, social distance, attitudes, etc. After satisfying viewers' basic physiological, safety, social, and esteem needs, the above information further stimulates viewers' need for self-actualization. In other words, consumers can feel a strong connection with the brand and the product when viewing these pictures, and even the enterprises's commitment to environmental protection and quality, thus realizing the pursuit of personal goals and ideals. Therefore, in marketing using product pictures on e-commerce platforms, Chinese and US tea enterprises not only promote their products but also guide consumers to accomplish their self-actualization needs. However, an analysis of various aspects such as shooting angles and image elements shows that the diverse images used by Chinese enterprises are more likely to provoke consumers' desire for a higher level of self-actualization.

#### 4.2.3 Compositional Meaning

In the part of compositional meaning, three aspects, namely specific framework structure and relation, reasonable control of information value, and significant independence and connection, are designed to convey the value and significance of the complete image (Pan, Tian & Liu, 2021; Wei & Wang, 2017; Huang, 2022). At the same time, focusing on the composition logic of the products of an enterprise is also a way to explore the "touch points" in the aspect of composition. Information value is the planning of various placement structures based on the provided information category and amount, commonly including left-right style, up-down style, and central circle style.



**Figure 7. Advertising Picture of a Chinese Enterprises**



**Figure 8. Advertising Picture of a US Enterprises**

In Figure 7, “Chrysanthemum Buds Display” above the image is the ideal information that the enterprise wants to convey, and “Dry & processed buds” below is the real information that highlights the essential attributes of the product. Significance refers to the attractiveness level of each element in the image, which differs significantly for the public. The most attractive element is undoubtedly the most significant component of the entire image. The adjustment and evaluation of the significance of each element in the image can be achieved by the synergistic effect of element combinations, hues, color gamut, etc. In Figure 9, the Chinese enterprise’s chrysanthemum buds are in the center of the picture as the most significant component because of the bright color. “Chrysanthemum Buds Display” is the ideal information, so it has almost the same brightness as the chrysanthemum buds below, making it another most significant element in the image.

The advertising picture of a US enterprises shown in Figure 8 also has an up-down structure layout. “Born to be bold” at the bottom is the ideal information that shows product innovation and the striving spirit of the enterprises. The description below the image is the real information that shows the boring nature of traditional tea and the reality of the product’s certain uniqueness. The bright yellow tea in a glass in the middle is the brightest part of the entire image, so it is a significant part of the image. “Born to be bold” above is bold and matches the color of the tea, making it one of the significant elements in the image. The text box below has a color similar to the above significant elements, contributing to a

degree of consistency in the image in terms of color brightness and thus enhancing the coherence between the various elements.

When designing the composition of product pictures, both Chinese and US tea enterprises have considered people's safety needs, namely the need for safety and guarantee, and complete value and significance can be conveyed through the three aspects of composition. First, a specific structure and relation can control the value and attractiveness of information, thereby satisfying people's safety needs. Second, the design of the pictures highlights the essential attributes of tea products, thereby enhancing people's trust in and dependence on the enterprises's products. Last, the adjustment and evaluation of the significance of each element of an image and the synergistic effect of element combinations, hues, color gamut, are used to consolidate the safety and reliability of the product, thus satisfying people's needs for safety and guarantee. It can be argued that both Chinese and US tea enterprises have achieved a relatively rational composition design, which helps viewers feel safe and makes themselves more trustworthy, thereby achieving the goal of meeting consumer safety needs.

#### *4.3 Video Analysis*

Image analysis often involves multimodal analysis of static pictures. With technological development, multimodal discourse analysis of dynamic images has gradually become a key point. An analysis of dynamic video discourse is mainly conducted using visual image grammar from the perspectives of both visual and auditory modalities (Huang, 2022; Li, 2017).

In recent years, due to the acceleration of the Internet and industrial digitalization and the low entry barriers, attractive content, and dynamic expressions of short videos, a new type of marketing relying on short videos has gradually emerged. Compared with traditional static methods such as marketing based on text and pictures, videos can display products more vividly, help customers obtain product information, and increase conversion rates. In this section, video information from 10 Chinese tea enterprises (including Beikouliuxiang, Cha Wu WarmSun, China Mist, etc.) and 10 US tea enterprises (including Barry's Tea, Bigelow Tea, Buddha Teas, etc.) on Amazon was selected. The customers touch points image was analyzed through the information presented in the videos to provide references for future video optimization and information presentation of tea enterprises on Amazon through a comparison between Chinese and US enterprises.

The visual modality is mainly reflected in the three aspects of a video, namely the representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning. The representational meaning of the videos used by Chinese and US tea enterprises mainly focuses on the objective representation of the product, such as packaging display, product display, production process, product certificate, and brewing process. Specifically, Chinese enterprises pay more attention to the brewing process, the atmosphere of tea tasting, and the representation of the quality and color of tea leaves. According to the existing data, almost all Chinese tea enterprises on Amazon, unlike their American counterparts, include some brewing processes in their videos. It is widely acknowledged that China has a long history of tea culture, so Chinese enterprises may hope to resonate with consumers by spreading tea culture. In

addition, they hope that tea products can meet consumers' love and belonging needs, so there are many social scenarios in their videos, which indicate that tea can play a role in bringing people closer and reflect the interaction between the videos and the customers. In contrast, brand certificates and production environments are repeatedly emphasized in the videos of US tea enterprises, which reflects their hope to meet the safety needs of consumers. For example, Buddha Teas highlights the natural ingredients of its tea, which benefit metabolism and regular menstrual cycles of the human body. Davidson's, another example, underscores that its organic tea helps with sleep, relieves stress, and strengthens the immune system. In summary, we can see that Chinese tea enterprises' videos tend to highlight consumers' love and belonging needs, while American ones tend to highlight safety needs.

The auditory modality in videos mainly refers to the voice-over and background music. The former is the main protagonist's voice introducing the product while the latter is the background music that runs throughout the entire video. In the promotional videos of Chinese tea enterprises, voice-overs are largely mechanical sounds and soft female voices, while the music is usually light and slow interspersed with natural sounds such as rustling leaves and raindrops. As Chinese tea generally grows in regions with abundant waters in the south, these sounds are integrated with footage of tea-growing environments, picking processes, and tea drinking. This combination of audio and visual effects creates a beautiful and graceful atmosphere that brings consumers closer, thus enhancing the video's influence and making the most of dynamic videos. In contrast, in the promotional videos of US tea enterprises, voice-overs are largely powerful and clear male voices, accompanied by jazz music and some light and cheerful music, interspersed with sounds such as tea making, horn honking, and chatter in a restaurant, all of which bring the videos closer to people's everyday lives.

In summary, the analysis of the promotional videos used by Chinese and US tea enterprises based on the multimodal theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs revealed that the videos combined signs such as text, images, voice-overs, and music to reinforce information dissemination, impress consumer touch points, and promote purchases to can better achieve their functions and purposes.

## **5. Conclusions and Implications**

In this study, the product promotion information of Chinese and US tea enterprises on Amazon was compared and analyzed from three perspectives, namely text, image, and video to explore the similarities and differences between their consumer touch points and the underlying reasons for their characteristics, similarities, and differences. The conclusions and implications are as follows:

First, the consumer touch point images reflected in the product promotion information of Chinese and US tea enterprises are similar as both highlight consumers' physiological and safety needs. Thus, underlining the effectiveness and attributes of related products while reducing useless information is suggested in the design of product promotion information.

Second, the consumer touch point images reflected in the product promotion information of Chinese and US tea enterprises are different as Chinese enterprises pay more attention to satisfying consumers'

esteem, love and belonging, and self-actualization needs than US enterprises. For example, at the text level, Chinese enterprises focus more on the use of action verbs and modality systems in process analysis, not just limited to satisfying consumers' physiological and safety needs. Therefore, in the design of product promotion information, it is recommended for cross-border tea enterprises to use language politely, considering consumers' diverse needs, and organically combine the products with consumers' personal development and social life.

Third, the similarities and differences in consumer touch point images reflected in the product promotion information of Chinese and US tea enterprises are related to the social and cultural backgrounds of both countries. Chinese tea culture has a long history, and Chinese enterprises pay more attention to blending cultural artistic conception with tea leaves in marketing, which has typical Chinese cultural characteristics and caters more to consumers' love and belonging needs and self-actualization needs. In contrast, US enterprises, influenced by the strict management system of food security and unique eating habits, exhibit a lower level of dependence on context. They only focus on the product information itself to satisfy consumers' physiological and safety needs. Therefore, it is recommended that cross-border tea enterprises organically link the cultural backgrounds of products to consumers' multi-level needs, rather than being confined to the products.

Fourth, compared to text and static images, dynamic images have unique advantages in product promotion and can overcome the drawbacks of flatness in the other two forms. From the video analysis, video discourse can combine multiple elements such as text, images, voice-overs, sound effects, and background music to realize the information transfer between consumers and product promotion information. This pattern enables consumers to deepen their understanding of product information from multiple dimensions. Therefore, it is recommended that cross-border tea enterprises reasonably and effectively use dynamic images to assist the product marketing process, appropriately add product-related elements, and use dynamic ways to present their products more vividly in front of consumers.

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