

# Discourse Analysis of Marketing of Medical Skincare Products in Health-Related We Media

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**Abstract.** More and more marketing methods that borrow health knowledge popularization to marketing are used in the medical skincare products industry. Based on the discourse analysis method proposed by Fairclough, this paper explores the establishment of situational dialogue in the marketing of skincare products in health-related We Media. Besides, it subverts the original cognition and explains the three discourse strategies in a simple way to reflect the “scene-based” consumption situation. In addition to analyzing the “story-based” communication strategy of advertising content, this paper also plumbs the marketing logic that appeals to “sensibility” and “rationality” in vision as well as the unity of advertising discourse order and knowledge science discourse order. Consumers, producers, and knowledge owners struggle for discourse, a social power.

**Keywords:** Medical Skincare Products, Health Communication, New Media Marketing, Discourse Analysis.

## 1. Introduction

The development of new media not only promotes the popularization of health knowledge but also provides an important marketing method. In recent years, many personal accounts that popularize health science have taken advantage of professional medical knowledge to publicize medical products. The concept of medical skincare products whose identity is between medicines and cosmetics was born in France. Giving up the known harmful substance to human skin with side effects, they can treat and care for skin, showing aesthetic life (Xiang, 2009). Medical skincare products not only offer a new market segment but also create a new marketing means for this industry (Ye, 2010). Marketing in the form of health science popularization is commonly used in medicines, health tonics, etc. With the increasing emphasis on the safety and efficacy of skincare products, it is now used in the medical skincare industry. By studying the content of Chinese medicine skincare products marketing in health-related We Media, this paper explores the discourse strategy, marketing logic, and the change of power relationship behind it.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Health Communication

Since the 1980s, medical records and other discourse forms have been studied in medicine (Zhu, 2007). Any human communication involving health is health communication (Nie, 2017). “Health communication is on the way to being a marketing chess to break the barrier between brands and consumers” (Yao & Feng, 2022). Health communication and health marketing are inseparable (Wu, 2007). The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines medical health marketing as “equally creative, good at communication, able to provide health information and related interventions with consumers as its core and science as its basic strategy and method to protect the health of different groups.” (Zhang, 2016). With WeChat subscription becoming the main new media platform for health communication (Song, 2021), health marketing makes the public realize the importance of health and then carries out product promotion step by step, which meets the psychological expectation of the audience and results in purchasing behavior (Deng, 2014). Therefore, purposeful and gradual health marketing is the necessary guarantee for the long-term development of health communication (Fu, 2007). In the previous studies in China, their research mostly adopts

questionnaire survey and content analysis, but seldom uses discourse analysis, except for one or two papers on communication discourse strategies as only case studies of DXY.com.

## 2.2 New Media Marketing

New media marketing is mainly based on the Internet, mobile media, and digital media technology, which carries out a series of marketing activities such as advertising communication, product promotion, and corporate image display under the network environment (Zhai, 2019). With the characteristics of new media platforms, such as combining mass communication with interpersonal communication, and diversifying communication channels and forms, the WeChat public platform where many accounts related to medical science popularization publicize medical skincare products on WeChat public platform adds a new perspective to the development of new media marketing.

## 3. Research Methods and Data Collection

### 3.1 Research Method

Discourse analysis was first proposed by American linguist Harris as a research method of text analysis (Zhu, 2007). Fairclough (1989) complements the three-dimensional structural model of discourse analysis in Language and Power, that is, text, discourse practice, and social practice, focusing on the basic problems of discourse and ideology, society, control, and power. After that, many Western scholars (Baldry & Thibault) put forward multi-modal discourse; the interaction between image and language put forward by Barthes supplemented multi-modal discourse analysis and expanded the research object of discourse analysis from words to other forms of expression such as images, sounds, and videos. The representative one is the visual image analysis method proposed by Kress & Van Leeuwen, which is composed of “reproduction meaning”, “interaction meaning”, and “composition meaning”.

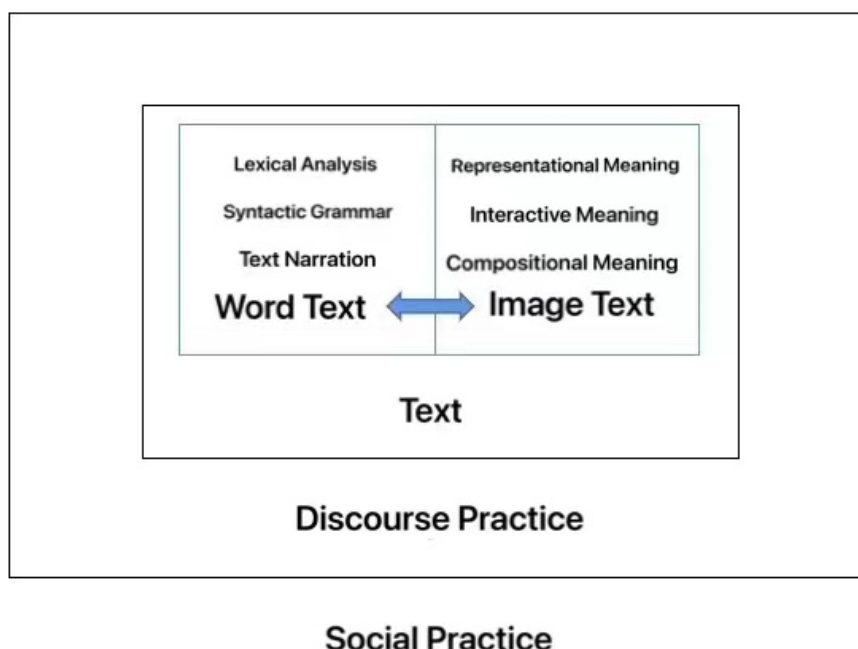


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Discourse Analysis

### 3.2 Data Collection

According to the classification of six medical skincare products summarized by He Li (2011), 24 posts in We Media accounts were sampled.

**Table 1.** Sampling Criteria, Classification of Medical Skincare Products, Text Sources of Discourse Analysis

Sampling Criteria	Classification of Medical skincare Products	Account Name (Number of Posts)
1. WeChat official accounts ranked in the top 50 in the monthly new list of health (April-May 2022) 2. Marketing content of medical skincare products recommended by the top 50 health-related We Media accounts from April to May 2022	Cleaning Agent Moisturizing Agent Sunscreen Oil control and Acne Clearing Agent Whitening and Freckle Removing Agent Anti-wrinkle Agent	Dr. Clove (9) Eleventh Clinic (5) Yangshengtang in Beijing TV (1) Lilac Life Research Institute (7) Mother Clove (1) Burn Superman A'bao (1)

#### 4. Discourse Strategy Analysis of Marketing of Traditional Chinese Medicine Skincare Products in Health-Related We Media

##### 4.1 Text Analysis

##### 4.1.1 Texts

Text analysis is based on three dimensions, including lexical analysis, syntactic grammar, and text narration to analyze the discourse characteristics of medical skincare products marketing.

##### (1) Lexical Analysis

The rich vocabulary and the proper use of personal pronouns draw close to the consumers; proper nouns are used many times to highlight professionalism and win the trust of the audience; listing data is to support professionalism; emotional interjections are used frequently to express wonder. Interjections are generally used in two scenarios, one is dissatisfaction with the status quo at the beginning, and the other is praise for products after use; network buzzwords keep up with the trend. In terms of vocabulary selection, there are various choices, and the combination of professional and buzzwords makes the vocabulary very scene-oriented.

**Table 2.** Word Use

Lexical Classification	Specific Form	Collocation Vocabulary
Proper Noun	Medical Proper Nouns, Full Names of Hospital Doctors	R&D, Production, Certification; Data
Data	Arabic Numerals, Percentages, Line Charts	Proper Nouns of Component, Use Time, Effect
Interjection	Modal Particles and Onomatopoeia Mostly For Praise; Sigh	Awesome, Wow, Sister!
Fixed Collocation	Network Abbreviations, Network Buzzwords	“Novice friendly” “I buy it this time”

**Table 3.** Emotional Vocabulary

Emotional Classification	Content Included	
Rational Vocabulary	Proper Noun, Doctor Name, Research and Development Team, Data, etc.	Function: Highlight professionalism, Emphasize authority and enhance trustworthiness
Emotional Vocabulary	Mantras, Negation, Adjective, Interjection, etc	Function: Emphasize the sense of use and experience

Emotionally, vocabulary can be classified into rational vocabulary (such as proper nouns, data, charts, etc.) and complementary emotional vocabulary (such as interjections, modal particles, etc.), which expresses consumer demands with words combining perception and reason to enlarge the expressiveness and persuasiveness of scenes constructed by words. In addition, the word frequency of 24 posts is statistically analyzed. Keywords such as skin, doctor, sense of use, components, and recommendation will be emphasized when marketing medical skincare products in health-related We Media.

(2) Syntactic Grammar

The text structure of marketing posts can be roughly divided into the title, introductory words, main body, and conclusion. The title names highlight the purpose of this article; the introduction points out the pain points of consumption by setting up scene dialogue and down-to-earth language; the main body introduces the products, and the conclusion demonstrates the purchase methods and discounts. From the analysis of the topic, introductory words, main body, conclusion, sentence patterns, syntactic structures, and grammatical units, the following table is obtained:

**Table 4.** Syntactic Grammar Use

<b>Posts Section</b>	<b>Syntactic Structure and Form</b>	<b>Rhetoric Device</b>
Title	Exclamatory Sentence, Hypophora, Rhetorical question	Exaggeration
Introductory Words	Exclamatory Sentence, Rhetorical Question	Antithesis
Main Body	Exclamatory Sentence, Interrogative Sentence, Declarative Sentence	Contrast, Analogy, Example, Personification
Conclusion	Exclamatory Sentence	Exclamation

Generally speaking, in terms of the syntactic structure and form, the product introduction mostly uses declarative sentences, while exclamatory sentences, ellipsis, and questions are often used in introductory words and topics; exclamatory sentences often appear in the conclusion. Concerning rhetorical devices, the title often uses exaggeration; In the main body, there will be contrast used to describe effects before and after using products, the analogy that makes product knowledge easier to understand, and the anthropomorphic effect that personifies product elements. The use of questions in posts deepens the topic and transmits to products, which triggers readers’ thinking and arouses consumers’ resonance. Finally, the questions are answered, which not only completes the marketing purpose but also enhances the persuasion effect, further deepening the relationship between consumers and commodities to promote purchase behavior.

(3) Text Narration

Posts on WeChat public platform have their narrative style. Generally, their narrative style is situational and life-oriented with a unified language used under a unified account. The narrative logic is generally “the introduction at the beginning, the introduction of scenarios, the introduction of demand, the proposal of products to solve demand, scientific and professional products, purchase channels and methods, use methods, use effects of products, call for purchase/purchase discount, references”.

**4.1.2 Image Text**

WeChat public platform is a combination of pictures and texts. Therefore, the role of image text cannot be ignored. There are two forms of image text in this study: one is the vertical comic, and the other is the explanatory picture inserted to promote understanding. This part is premised on the visual image analysis method proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen, which consists of representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning.

(1) Representational Meaning

Pictures can present real life more realistically. Vertical comic pictures are represented and introduced into products with a certain life scene. Then, products are marketed by discussing real

skincare questions, so as to restore the needs in reality and arouse more audience resonance in this representational way. The interaction between images and audiences is a vector, through which the audience judges the interaction between participants (Huang, 2021). Representing product pictures and contrast before and after product usage also increases consumers' trust.

### (2) Interactive Meaning

In the recommending posts, interactive meaning is achieved by adding hyperlinks to the pictures or inserting emoticons, pictures, and other forms. Leaving directly from photos to mini-programs where one can purchase by clicking reduces the tedious process and stimulates the purchase behavior to a certain extent. Inserting emoticon pictures is to ease the advertising atmosphere and increase intimacy and emotional connection.

### (3) Compositional Meaning

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, the compositional meaning has three aspects, that is, information value, framing, and salience. Generally speaking, the picture composition style under the same account is relatively unified. The information value of the main body is relatively high, and the framing is mostly centered. Meanwhile, the salience is reflected by bold, enlarged, and repeated forms. The products tend to have poor salience but high unity.

**Table 5.** Analysis of Compositional Meaning

Posts Section	Information Value	Framing	Salience
Title	Text Information without Visual information	No Visual Framing	No Visual Salience
Introductory Words	Product Demand	Centered Framing	More Salient Scene
Main Body	Product Information	Life Scene	Contrast and Emphasize (Bold Text, Enlarged Effect) Product Picture (Dissolved into pictures with Poor Salience but High Unity)
Conclusion	Product Efficacy	Dynamic Framing	Dynamic Emphasis on WeChat Official Account Information

## 4.2 Discourse Practice Analysis

This part will explore the content generation and transmission of marketing posts of Chinese medicine skincare products in health-related We Media, in order to analyze and summarize their recommending strategies and discourse strategies.

**Table 6.** Discourse Communication Practice

Recommending Strategy	Discourse Strategy
Situational Dialogue Form	Life Situation
Subvert the Original Cognition	Establish a Sense of Authority
Simple Explanation of Obscure Nouns	Establish professionalism and Popularity

### 4.2.1 Recommending Strategy and Discourse Analysis

#### (1) Situational Dialogue Form – Life Situation

Through the graphic form of situational dialogue, a scene when using products is established, which is a two-dimensional life situation based on the purchase in reality. It is easier to promote consumers' decision-making by considering consumers' purchase mentality, demands, and questions on products, which reduces consumers' discomfort and avoidance of advertisements as well as maintain the viscosity between WeChat official accounts and consumers.

#### (2) Subverting the Original Cognition – Establishing a Sense of Authority

It can be seen from the title of the article that its theme can start from the public views such as inherent cognition. Then, medical professional knowledge and related data are used to discuss,

overthrow public cognition, and popularize new health knowledge, so as to establish the WeChat official account's sense of authority and enhance the audience's trust. Therefore, consumers are more emotionally biased when making further consumption decisions.

### (3) Simple Explanation of Obscure Nouns—Establishing Professionalism and Popularity

Medical proper terms and medical principles are personified by combining pictures and texts. On the one hand, medical knowledge is popularized and simplified to be easy to understand for the public; On the other hand, products are personified by cartoons, because consumers pursue lovely elements, which virtually increases consumers' closeness to products.

## 4.2.2 Marketing Logic

### (1) Construction of “Scene-Based” Consumption Situation

Consumption scenes can enable consumers to generate demand according to commodity usage scenes (Qiao, 2022). Through text dialogue and cartoon images, pictures such as “ancient mistakes in skincare” and “bargaining” in real life are reflected, combining user demand scenes with actual use scenes to construct a “consumption scene” for skincare products, where a virtual purchase environment containing location, characters, behaviors, and other elements can be seen. In addition, a living two-dimensional virtual situation world is established with implicit advantages of products, which creates a sense of the scene, interaction, and immersion for consumers to solve their possible questions and immerse themselves. Moreover, the relevance between products and consumers is improved, triggering consumer purchase demand and achieving marketing.

### “Story-Based” Communication Strategy of Advertising Content

Distinctive and representative consumption stories should be created with story-based content and real life scenes. Besides, we should select unique and typical virtual characters, that is, common portraits of consumers. Different from the hard and wide recommending strategy, the story-based marketing method forms the pull marketing strategy, which does not affect the original reading experience of consumers, reduces their advertising avoidance to a certain extent, and enhances the communication effect and marketing effect.

### Appeal to “Emotional” and “Rational” Means of Communication in Vision

Advertising demands can be divided into emotional appeals and rational appeals (Wen, 2021). Text and images in posts also reflect rationality and sensibility. On the one hand, interjections, catchphrases, online buzzwords, humorous words, anthropomorphic explanations of proper nouns in pictures, anthropomorphic fictional images, etc. are used to convey soft information of emotional demands, so as to enhance the attraction and loyalty to consumers with interest. On the other hand, the text content expresses true, accurate, and measurable objective facts by presenting data, tables, and proper nouns (such as R&D team and institution, product elements, etc.) many times, so as to enhance the professional image in consumers' minds, enhance their trust, and combine with emotional appeals to jointly stimulate their purchase decisions.

### Internal Unity of Advertising Discourse Order and Knowledge Science Discourse Order

Discourse order is an important yardstick for regulating social behavior (Li, 2013). Michel Foucault believes that there is order behind discourse, and power generates order. Different discourse forms and discourse rights exist in different social groups, resulting in different discourse orders. As two different discourse orders, advertising discourse order and knowledge science discourse order are unified in the posts of medical skincare products marketing. They borrow common discourse characteristics and look for the same discourse order in different channels. Foucault once said that discourse order has three principles of control: the principle of control by external forces over discourse, the principle of control within discourse, and the principle of control over discourse subject. In the marketing of skincare products for health-related We Media, there are three groups of We Media operators, consumers, and doctors. The external force is consumers, the internal control is doctors, and the discourse subject is We Media operators, which jointly build the relationship network and field between knowledge production and advertising marketing.

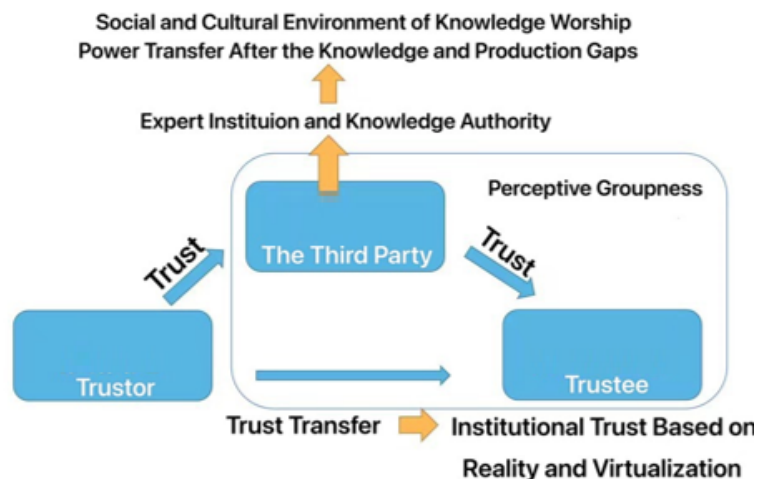
### 4.2.3 Social Practice Analysis

When conducting marketing on the We Media platform, the interest in marketing content and emotional connection with users are predominant factors in effectively conveying product information to users (Fang, 2020). In the posts on the marketing of medical skincare products, there are three power systems, including consumers (target audience in WeChat official account), producers (operators of WeChat official account), and knowledge owners (third-party doctors and medical institutions), reflecting that consumers have more power to choose goods in modern market and consumers are more dominant than producers. Producers, that is, operators in the WeChat official account, cater to consumers and provide them with related products and services by constructing life scenes for consumers, establishing emotional connections, exploring their pain points, and providing methods to solve these pain points in life, so as to present consumers' ideal living conditions and achieve marketing purposes. Medical skincare products have become a service for producers to provide consumers with solutions to practical problems, not only for sale.

Besides producers and consumers, the power of knowledge owners also exists in this system. The complementary relations between producers and knowledge owners are an important difference between medical skincare marketing and traditional skincare marketing. The latter also involves proper nouns but does not popularize science, failing to establish channels for continuous communication and emotional contact with consumers like the marketing of medical skincare products. In the posts of medical skincare marketing, doctors and medical institutions, as knowledge owners, offer professional knowledge (such as dry skincare goods, etc.) to build trust, while producers are responsible for emotional connection with consumers (such as virtual images, etc.). Through subjective transplantation of consumers, the trust in professional knowledge is transferred to the function of medical skincare products under the action of emotion, which is finally transplanted to consumer behavior. Because of the high threshold of medical knowledge, the interpretation of professional vocabulary will strengthen the consumers' trust in producers, and form a trust transplantation path of "experts — knowledge — media — products" in marketing, where trust is a consumed resource. Trust is an important factor affecting consumers' online shopping willingness (Qin, 2020). Its transfer mechanism is a tripartite mechanism including credit granter, trusted party, and third party (as shown in Figure 2). The trust relationship between the credit granters and the trusted party is formed by the third party as an intermediary, where the credit granters trust the third party and the third party trusts the trusted party. Under the influence of the perceived group (Perceived groupness refers to judging the degree to which the trusted party (trust source) and the third party (transfer target) belong to the same group based on similarity, relevance, and intimacy. (Qin, 2020)), the credit granter thus trade trust with the trusted party. Qin Fen (2020) believes that the credit granter is the subscriber in the WeChat official accounts, the trusted party is the operator, and the third party is the content. Because the marketing of medical skincare products has certain particularity and professionalism (Kyle Barrick), the author thinks that in the marketing of medical skincare products, the credit granter is the reading user, the trusted party is WeChat official account, its e-commerce platform, and products, while the third party is medical institutions and experts based on medical knowledge. In marketing, the third party has a sense of authority brought by professional knowledge, and the knowledge it produced generates the trust of the credit granter for the trusted party. Since ancient times, the Chinese nation has respected knowledge. Before modern society came into being, knowledge learning was a privilege of a few people (Shao, 2009), and then there was the madness of knowledge worship (Liu, 2014) with the development of modern industry in modern society. In recent years, a trend of knowledge payment emerged on the Internet and knowledge became a tradable asset. The particularity of medical products determines their professionalism, which makes the platforms build trust and consumption trust through knowledge, which resorts to knowledge worship in the Chinese social context.

Under the social environment of knowledge worship, the power change is also reflected in the knowledge gap and production gap. Before the emergence of We Media, third-party doctors and medical institutions controlled knowledge through mass media after producing knowledge and then

controlled the consumers again. In the We Media era when everyone can produce knowledge, the main body of knowledge production has changed from an expert institution to a We Media institution specializing in content production. However, in We Media accounts in the medical field, We Media institutions still need knowledge assistance from third-party doctors and medical institutions, which shows that the knowledge gap still exists in some industries with higher professional requirements in the We Media era, even if the main body of media production has changed.



**Figure 3.** Trust Transfer Mechanism Behind the Marketing of Medical Skincare Products

## 5. Conclusion

This paper explores the establishment of situational dialogue in the marketing of medical skincare products by studying its marketing content in health-related We Media accounts. In addition to subverting the original cognition, it also explains the three discourse strategies of obscure nouns in a simple way and gives play to the consumption scenes. The dissemination of advertising content is story-based. In the vision, it appeals to the internal unified marketing logic of “emotions” and “rationality”, as well as the advertising discourse order and the knowledge science discourse order. Critical discourse analysis believes that discourse itself is social power, with the power struggling among consumers, producers, and knowledge owners behind this phenomenon. However, the contents of medical skincare product marketing in We Media accounts in China are polarized in quality at present, which is worth further exploring from an interdisciplinary perspective and mass communication thinking.

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