

Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Beauty Practices within the Consumer Culture Perspective: A Case Study of Rednote Bloggers

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Abstract:

In the context of the booming consumer culture, beauty practices have gradually emerged as a key topic on social media platforms. As a typical community for sharing beauty content, Rednote offers abundant cases for researching the consumerist practices of beauty bloggers. This study aims to explore how rednote beauty bloggers implement beauty practices through multimodal discourse analysis and to reveal the underlying consumerist logic. A case study approach is adopted, which involves selecting graphic and video content from typical beauty bloggers and analyzing their discourse strategies and influencing factors by integrating visual, auditory, and textual modalities. The research findings suggest that the multimodal discourse of beauty bloggers is shaped by factors such as platform algorithm recommendations and user interaction preferences, with their content production exhibiting both strategic and adaptive characteristics. The conclusions indicate that beauty bloggers effectively shape the consumerist paradigm of beauty practices through the synergistic interplay of multiple modalities-visual presentation, linguistic expression, and interactive behavior-thereby driving user engagement and consumption decisions. This study presents a novel analytical perspective on understanding the culture of beauty consumption on social media platforms.

Keywords: Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Beauty Bloggers, Consumer Culture ,Rednote Platform, Digital Consumption

1 Introduction

In today's society, where digitalization and consumer culture intersect, beauty practices have evolved from mere functional consumption to become a significant social and cultural phenomenon. The rise of social media platforms, particularly the "grassroots recommendation" economy exemplified by Rednote—where beauty and skincare content constitutes 36.4% of all posts—has restructured the discourse system of beauty consumption and reflects profound shifts in contemporary consumer culture [1]. This transformation manifests not only in the migration of consumption behaviors online but also in the evolution of beauty practices from private individual routines into publicly visible performative acts. Beauty bloggers serve as crucial intermediaries in this process: they disseminate aesthetic ideals and consumption values through makeup tutorials, skincare insights, and "product recommendations"; simultaneously, they utilize social interactions such as live-stream conversations and comment section engagements to facilitate identity construction, address emotional needs for social recognition, and ultimately construct a comprehensive consumerist framework for beauty practices. This phenomenon is not only a reflection of consumerism's infiltration into daily life but also an embodiment of how individuals engage in self-expression and social participation through digital practices.

From the perspective of consumer culture, the construction of beauty practices is closely linked to multimodal discourse on social platforms. As typical representatives, rednote beauty bloggers express themselves by outputting viewpoints through texts, pictures, videos, and other forms, and this communication process involves multiple factors such as gender, consumption, and platform algorithms. With the rapid advancement of information technology, many beauty brands have gained widespread favor among consumers through innovative consumption channels like e-commerce and emerging media, along with communication strategies incorporating multimodal combinations [2]. Existing studies have mostly focused on the field of foreign language teaching and consumer behavior analysis in the beauty industry, yet few have examined the connotation of their cultural practices from the perspective of multimodal discourse [3,4]. Therefore, this study focuses on the following core questions:

1. How do beauty bloggers construct beauty practices within the consumerist culture through multimodal strategies like images, texts, and videos?
2. What structural factors impact and constrain the multimodal discourses of beauty bloggers?

2 Literature review

Beauty practices refer to a social behavioral process in which individuals or groups use cosmetics, beauty tools, and related techniques to enhance their strengths, compensate for weaknesses, refine the balance between facial features, and achieve a fresh and vivid appearance [5]. Consumer culture is defined as a system composed of commercially constructed images, symbols, discourses, experiences, and objects [6]. Baudrillard's theory of symbolic consumption notes the shift from consuming objects to consuming signs, arguing that consumerism influences the development of modern economic societies. This theory can support the analysis and discussion of issues such as the digital economy and aesthetic economy [7]. Domestic research tends to focus on elaborating consumerism-related theories and interpreting specific phenomena from the perspective of consumer culture, with some scholars conducting studies on marketing strategies within the context of consumer culture [8].

Multimodal discourse was initially proposed by Western scholars Kress and van Leeuwen. Their theory transcends the traditional language-centric, single-modal analytical approach by integrating diverse semiotic systems—including visual images, audio, and gestures—into a framework for comprehensive analysis and interpretation. Subsequently, they conducted in-depth research on the communication mechanisms between multimodality and media, emphasizing that the essence of media communication lies in the dynamic configuration and meaning-making of multimodal signs such as images, text, and sound within specific sociocultural contexts [9]. Multimodal discourse analysis has progressively narrowed its focus from the macro level of media to specific social platforms, individual works, or even particular behaviors. Many scholars have also applied this analytical approach to live-streaming e-commerce to examine its functions and impacts [9]. Additionally, the investigation of complex phenomena in new media editing practices has incorporated multimodal discourse analysis from an interdisciplinary perspective, which involves screening, processing, and producing new media content as the core editing objects [10]. These applications collectively demonstrate the diverse scenarios in which multimodal discourse analysis can be employed. In conclusion, in recent years, multimodal discourse analysis has been increasingly cited in new media research. However, within the broader research landscape, its primary application domain remains foreign language education. While some scholars have introduced this theory to social platforms such as live streaming rooms, its application to beauty bloggers on Rednote is relatively limited.

3 Methodology

This study centers on the multimodal discourse analysis of beauty practices from the perspective of consumer culture, aiming to explore how beauty bloggers on social media construct identity, convey consumer cultural values, and influence audience practices through multiple symbols. The research involves discussions on aesthetic guidance, identity construction, and consumption values. Case studies offer enhanced timeliness, reflect a phenomenon-driven orientation, maintain research depth, and facilitate understanding of the processes and mechanisms behind specific phenomena. Therefore, a qualitative research method is adopted for case analysis [11].

In the research process, Xin Hong Data—a prominent domestic data analysis service platform for Rednote—was

used to screen 142 representative Rednote beauty bloggers. Based on metrics including platform follower count, commercial promotion capacity, and average interaction volume, KOLs were ultimately selected as research cases (Table 1). These KOLs were chosen for their high total follower counts, significant influence on users' aesthetic preferences and consumption decisions, and distinct multimodal characteristics in video presentation. Multiple high-interaction videos posted by these KOLs between 2024 and 2025 were collected, and multimodal discourse analysis was conducted on these videos using case study methodology, focusing on the collaborative operational mechanisms of three modes: visual, auditory, and textual (Table 2).

Table 1. Basic Information of Head KOLs

Blogger Code	Number of Followers
Blogger a	650.51w
Blogger b	235.52w
Blogger c	234.37w
Blogger d	225.74w
Blogger e	211.43w
Blogger f	108.86w
Blogger g	242.59w
Blogger h	201.21w
Blogger i	394.83w
Blogger j	182.60w

Table 2. Multimodal Analysis of Popular Beauty Bloggers' Videos

Modality Type	Type Characteristics
Visual Modality	The cover is processed by means of cutting out and superimposing to highlight the effects before and after.
	The cover features contrast and difference graphics with high-saturation colors
	Real person appears on the cover, with text embellished
Auditory Modality	Adding BGM creates a sense of atmosphere
	Oral humor with memorable points
	Add interesting sound effects
	immersive makeup
Textual Modality	fixed title format
	The topic selection keeps up with the trend and directly targets the pain points
	Introduce the topic by reading fan comments

4 Results

The study found that among the short video samples of beauty bloggers, in terms of visual modality, five bloggers (b, c, d, e, j) usually appear in person to demonstrate makeup results, with text overlays to emphasize the theme; three bloggers (f, g, i) employ cutout overlays for their video covers to present comparisons and enhance visual layering; two bloggers (a, h) use comparison images on their video covers, paired with eye-catching fonts in high-saturation colors to highlight the theme's pain points, leveraging contrast to attract viewers' attention. Among these visual strategies, personal appearance is the most direct form of presentation, which strengthens the credibility of the theme and builds audience trust through textual emphasis on authentic makeup effects.

In terms of the auditory modality, beauty bloggers b, c, h, i, j, and k all included background music (BGM) in their beauty videos, which creates an atmospheric feel and reduces the dullness of tutorial content; beauty bloggers a, g, d, and c incorporated sound effects to enhance interestingness and bridge the gap between professional makeup expertise and viewers; beauty bloggers d and e delivered humorous commentary filled with punchlines, making their content memorable, providing strong emotional resonance, and boosting users' positive perception of the videos; beauty blogger f adopted an immersive makeup approach, drawing users into the beauty experience and heightening engagement. These strategies reveal that many beauty bloggers utilize BGM in short videos, as such music serves a scene-rendering function that optimizes the overall viewing experience and enriches the audio-visual elements of short videos [12].

In terms of the textual modality, nine bloggers, namely a, b, c, d, f, g, h, i, and j, have developed highly emotional and targeted discourse strategies by capturing social hotspots and precisely identifying user pain points (e.g., "Ugly on camera?"). Bloggers f and j have further employed fixed-format titles to create video series (e.g., "Contrast Color Makeup Tutorials"), which reinforces users' ritualistic expectations, maintains a coherent brand narrative for fragmented content within algorithmic distribution, and improves user stickiness and commercial monetization efficiency. Blogger e converts user-generated content into thematic introductions, offering personalized experiences that further foster identity recognition and strengthen community belonging. In the application of textual modality, the capture of hot topics and pain points is essentially an emotional mobilization mechanism. Affinity enhances purchase intention through emotional value, elevating beauty content from functional guidance to emotional solutions, which not only increases click-through rates but

also subtly awakens consumer demand [13].

5 Conclusion

The result of this study is that under the profound influence of digitalization and consumer culture, the multimodal practices of Rednote beauty bloggers exemplify contemporary consumer culture. Through the synergistic interplay of visual, linguistic, and interactive modalities, beauty is constructed as a sign form of consumption. The multimodal discourse of beauty bloggers is shaped and constrained by structural factors such as user engagement and platform algorithms. Individuals alleviate identity anxiety and gain social capital by consuming beauty content and products, while platforms utilize algorithms to transform these needs into quantifiable and predictable consumer data. This phenomenon not only reflects the rise of the "appearance economy" in modern society but also reveals how digital media reshape consumption logic through mechanisms like user interaction and platform algorithms. It enhances understanding of consumer culture construction in the social media era, embodies the positive role of the digital economy in empowering individual development, and demonstrates social media's unique advantages in connecting supply and demand and creating value.

However, this study is limited by its restricted sample size and insufficient multimodal perspective. It focuses solely on Rednote, a single social platform, and fails to incorporate other mainstream social media platforms such as TikTok and Bilibili for comparative analysis, which may compromise the generalizability of its conclusions. Furthermore, it primarily examines three modalities—visual, auditory, and textual—while overlooking the role of sign construction in sensory dimensions like touch and smell. Future research could advance cross-cultural comparative studies by exploring differences between Chinese and Western beauty bloggers, systematically comparing their aesthetic standards, consumption discourse, and interaction patterns to reveal the mechanisms of sign meaning construction in beauty consumption across different cultural contexts. Alternatively, methodological innovations could be implemented by combining quantitative data with qualitative research to investigate the complex influence mechanisms of multimodal discourse.

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