

Evolving Herborist Packaging and Traditional Chinese Medicine: Impact of Semiotic Transitions on Customers

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Abstract: *This paper focuses on the dynamic shift in packaging design for Herborist, a cosmetics brand that is based on Traditional Chinese Medicine and explores how cultural signs affect consumer responses. Exploratory research was conducted with the help of Visual Semiotics of Herborist's products and by conducting surveys to gauge the response of consumers to changes in packaging. According to the key discoveries, it is stated that Herborist's packaging not only reflects the classic patterns but also illustrates that the packaging material is authentic and heavy such as glass, botanical and Chinese calligraphy writing and now the packaging has changed the modernistic and sustainable packaging. Unfortunately, reactions to the use of lighter and more sustainable materials have been mixed but the green and white colors, the Chinese motifs and the overall contextual relevance of TCM are adored by many. Some customers consider the new packaging as environmentally friendly and fashionable throughout the world while others think that it has a negative impact on the brand image of the product. In conclusion, the packaging symbols applied in Herborist remain effective today in building the trust of the customers. The authors recommend future research to look into the reflections of these changing packaging strategies in other categories of beauty and wellness products especially the global appropriation of culturally embedded brands.*

Keywords: Packaging of Chinese Herbal medicine, TCM, Cosmeceuticals, Semiotics and Visual Interpretation Analysis

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Product packaging is one of the most important aspects of branding since images are always important and have specific cultural and psychological connotations in the beauty products sector. Herborist is a brand that combines TCM with modern cosmetics, so its packaging serves as an essential way of transmitting information about both traditional and new values. Cosmetic packaging is not just a practical aspect of the product's physical packaging but also an important cultural signifying system for the product quality, brand identity and culture of the product (Oswald, 2012). Based on the theoretical lens of semiotics, this research paper explores how the 'packaging' of Herborist has changed over the years and how symbols and cultural stories influence consumers' perceptions of the brand. Herborist was born when Hong Kong when Korean products such as Shiseido have dominated the Western market in cosmetics over the last 10 years (Lu, 2020). Launched in 1995 by Jahwa Group, Herborist was created to offer consumers a distinct concept wherein the tenet of TCM becomes the ethos of the beauty and personal care range (Herborist, 2024). The history of Herborist nevertheless, goes far beyond

the time of its creation, as the company was started by Fung Fook-tien in 1889, but was initially named Kwong Sang Hong (Farmer, 2015). The company began diversifying its products in the early part of the twentieth century with cosmetics, medicines and fruit essences.

The concept of adopting TCM to form an international and luxury beauty brand originated from the societal rising demand for natural cosmetics and health solutions. This made strategic differentiation become Herborist's competitive edge especially in an industry that requires a high degree of entry barriers due to the presence of international players. Today, Herborist has become a known brand in Asia and other parts of the world and has developed through stores, franchising, a partnership with Sephora and a spa model that captures the potential of the brand (Yeomans, 2015). Herborist, which specialises in merging TCM concepts with advanced skin care treatments, has established its brand name based on traditional Chinese philosophy and current scientific knowledge (Stefano, 2021). That is why its distinctive wrapping, based on the Chinese pattern and traditions of art, is an important component of its brand and popularity in other countries. In connection with the purpose of the study, it is proposed to focus on the changes that have occurred in packaging in terms of brand tradition and globalization.

This research is supported by the principles of semiotics which is the science that deals with signs and symbols and how they are used in communication (Yakin & Totu, 2014). By identifying the denotative and connotative meanings of packaging design, this paper aims to unravel the received information of consumers through the packaging of Herborist. The symbolic aspects of packaging are about colours, font style and type, material and images, and they are a literal interpretation. However, what is embedded in the connotative aspects of packaging are the messages of cultural, feelings, and symbolic significance. For example, certain shades of colour in Herborist's packaging may convey a direct association with natural elements or purity and at the same time can bear the shades of the Chinese philosophy of yin & yang (Santini, 2023).

In this paper, the evolution of Herborist's packaging design is discussed based on its historical timeline and the significant cultural changes related to the identified patterns of design transformation. By using semiotic analysis, the study will be able to classify the identified trends into being dominant, emergent and residual trends. Dominant trends essentially pertain to trends that have been carried forward from the past and are still adhered to in defining a brand, while emergence trends are those trends in response to which the brand adapts to the newer consumer needs such as sustainability, minimalism, or modernity. Some recurrent trends draw attention to parts that are retained over time, primarily because they have a profound, cultural meaning, even as the brand changes.

1.2 Research Questions

- 1) What has happened to the packaging design of Herborist cosmetics over time in consideration of culture in the region and internationally?
- 2) What are the main semiotic features—colour, signs, and material, that have influenced consumers' perception of Herborist's packaging?
- 3) In what ways are the denotative and connotative meanings shown in the packaging of Herborist aligned with Traditional Chinese Medicine practice and the application of modern cosmetics?
- 4) How have the new consumer trends including the green and the less is more trends impacted Herborist's packaging design?

1.3 Aims and Objectives

It is the first objective of this study to investigate the cultural and semiotic change of Herborist's packaging design. In this research, there are studies on how the semiotic components like symbols, motifs, and colours have transformed to reveal how the three aspects; trust, brand loyalty and authenticity are affected.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Semiotic Analysis

One of the key constituents of packaging of Chinese Herbal medicine is semiotics which analyses the signification and significance of signs and symbols in packaging communication. However, the packaging of Chinese Herbal medicine is not only used to shield the product; it is also a means of conveying information through a non-verbal method concerning the quality, and values as well as culturally referred attributes of the product. According to Fournier and Alvarez (2019), packaging can be understood through two layers of meaning: the primary meaning or referent meaning and the secondary meaning, which is the cultural symbolic or contextual meaning. In light of Ji and Lin's (2022) semiotic perspective about cosmetic packaging, colour, material, typography and imagery are used as components of signs that consumers read and make sense of within their culture and experience. Similarly, Sousa et al. (2020) explained how people can be affected emotionally and how they anticipate the product in the food packaging through shape and color. This is especially relevant to cosmetics, where aspects of packaging are particularly important in forming consumer attitudes towards luxurious, clean or efficient products.

In cosmeceutical domains, packaging is not only a means of protecting a product but also a means of proclaiming a lifestyle and a set of values. Hence, it is possible to build trust, convey information about products' advantages, and relate to the market stakeholders through specific sign codes. Current research has also looked at the impact of semiotic signs in the packaging that affect consumers' buying behaviour. According to Su and Wang (2024), colour, shape and texture in visual design greatly influence consumers' willingness to purchase products. These cues are particularly important when customers are unaware of a product and will thus make judgments on the value and quality of the product on such factors. This is even applicable in the cosmetics industry since packaging is considered crucial, primarily because many products are purely visual and people's perception of them is largely influenced by exterior design. Hence, semiotics gives an understanding of the impact of these gestural signs, rooted in culture on the brand image and consumer-company relationship.

2.2 Role of TCM in the Cosmetic Industry and Culture

TCM is the backbone of the Chinese traditional health care system with most of its concepts addressing the central ideas of balance and harmony. In recent years, TCM has gone beyond the sphere of pharmacology affecting numerous fields including the cosmetic industry. The Chinese beauty industry has applied TCM concepts to make distinctions in products in a highly saturated market. Herborist employs TCM-derived ingredients along with its concepts to produce skincare products that are considered by consumers more natural and health-oriented and associated with Chinese culture (Santini, 2023). The research focused on the incorporation of TCM into cosmetics shows how this concept aligns with consumer values, especially at a time when more and more people are concerned with natural and wellness cosmetics. RH (2015), also agrees that Chinese TCM cosmetics are popular because they are presented as organic and traditional remedies that adapt to modern global trends. Especially for Chinese

consumers, TCM-based cosmetics mean a combination of contemporary global beauty expectations with traditional values that give them pride in their culture.

The semiotics used in packaging of Chinese Herbal medicine also support the symbolic representation of the ingredients that are used in TCM. For example, applying lotus flowers or herbal plant motifs – which are Chinese sends out a message of aesthetics, endurance and self-harmony (Pianese, 2021). For example, Yuan and So (2020) and Ostapenko (2015) described how Chinese brands in the beauty market help consumers create an emotional bond by using TCM as a cultural resource. Leveraging on the TCM cultural understanding, Herborist manages to steer its products within the culturally acceptable category thereby enjoying the trust that consumers within the TCM system have placed on it. In the global market, there exist different cultures hence TCM-based cosmetics will have to face different perceptions. However, to the Chinese consumer, there might be an immediate link between these identities and the cultural beliefs and principles of TCM but for the global consumer, this might not be as easy to understand.

2.3 Case Study of Herborist

Herborist is one of the most famous Chinese cosmeceutical companies which has been able to put into practice conventional Chinese medicine and contemporary knowledge in the sphere of cosmetic science. Established in 1998 the brand continuously accentuates a concept of naturism within beauty and wellness with the help of TCM-inspired products (Herborist, 2024). The concept of TCM's concept of Yin-Yang is the beautification of the skin should not only make the outside appearance look better but also improve the inside. Some of the skincare products offered by Herborist are specific series which are made from ingredients like ginseng, Ganoderma, and green tea which in China are considered coins of health and long life (Herborist, 2024). Its main collections such as the Imperial Wu-Xing Collection and the T'ai Chi Mask have become rather popular owing to the mix of science and ancient philosophy (Centdegrés, 2021). Hence, these collections promote natural and plant extracts and many contain packaging that is associated with TCM symbols and style.

Currently, the cosmeceutical company has expanded its market globally especially in Europe and Southeast Asia since people are embracing natural products that enhance their beauty. However, brand success depends on the effectiveness of the presentation of cultural symbols through packaging of Chinese herbal medicine and its promotion. Chau and Neringa Kudevičiūtė (2017) mention that Herborist's packaging shows TCM origin but also tries to convey the luxury of present days and internationally. The Wu-Xing line and other designs that include gold accents, minimalistic typefaces and patterns based on the motifs of traditional Chinese porcelain convey values associated with the concept of luxury, authenticity and health. Therefore, it can be pointed out that Herborist is successfully orienting both domestically and internationally, having successfully integrated semiotic insights into the packaging design into the combination of traditional Oriental imagery and contemporary cosmetic trends.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study design

The paper followed a qualitative approach through analysis of various products by conducting focused group discussions to gain the perception of the consumers. For this qualitative study, a range of Herborist cosmeceutical products were used, which included products that have been packaged in various eras for this brand. The chosen products focus on the benefits of natural ingredients and their role in TCM within Herborist's brand. The first three main products

included the Herborist Imperial Wu-Xing Collection and Tai Chi Series packaging from the earlier products and series over the years. This is why analysing such products concerning the changes in their packaging provided valuable information on the shifts in the aesthetic and semiotic potentials of the brand.

3.2 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through two primary methods which included visual interpretation analysis and focus group discussions with consumers. The packaging designs were analyzed from three selected Herborist products: the Imperial Wu-Xing Collection, the Tai Chi series and the older green tea series. Emphasis was put on alterations within elements of materiality, colour, iconography, and type that reflect Chinese virtues of health, purity, and wealth. Further, focused group discussions with four Herborist consumers were used to explore how they perceive the change in packaging and the cultural meanings that hide behind them. The focus group discussions for the study ranged between 20-30 minutes and provided detailed information regarding the consumer preference for the packaging design, the meaning that consumers associated with the semiotics, and how this semiotics influenced their trust and brand engagement.

3.3 Analytical Framework

Qualitative analysis of the collected data was done regarding the semiotic analysis models developed by Barthes in 1967 and Saussure in 1959 (Rudrakumar & Venkatraman, 2022). These components were the denotative and connotative features of the prints' colours and materials, as well as their cultural references.

Table 1: Summary of Denotative and Connotative Analyses of Herborist's Packaging Strategies

Type of Analysis	Focus	Example	Themes Identified
Denotative Analysis	Literal interpretations of packaging material	White porcelain is associated with luxury and purity, linked to TCM and health.	Consumer trust, cultural appeal, TCM-based semiotics
Connotative Analysis	Cultural and symbolic aspects of packaging of Chinese Herbal medicine	Gold material associated with success, money, and links to traditional Chinese empires	
Thematic Analysis	Analysis of focus group discussion transcripts	Themes include consumer trust, cultural appeal, and the effects of TCM-based semiotics on brand effects.	Determines appropriateness of packaging strategies for consumers and cultural consistency

3.4 Ethical Issues

The study followed strict ethical standards. All participants were fully assured of having given their informed consent, that they were in full control of knowing the purpose and objectives of the research and knew their rights. All the research participants had confidentiality followed in the study, and participants had the right to withdraw at any time. All participants were protected during the research based on institutional guidelines on ethical issues.

4. Findings

4.1 Overview of Findings

In selected Herborist product packaging, the elements relevant to semiotics observed, and used by Herborist ensure that consumers trust, are loyal and are culturally relevant to TCM culture. Key themes that emerged from the visual analysis and focus group discussion with consumers.

In terms of packaging design, Herborist maximizes the use of traditional Chinese elements and symbols which make the consumers respond positively to TCM. Such elements make it easy for the consumers to relate the brands with their overall health, trust and brand loyalty being boosted. With the change of material from relatively heavier glass material to more environmentally friendly ones, the perception of the consumers changed. While some consumers welcomed the shift to sustainability, other users were concerned that the shift to using lightweight materials reduced the brand equity of the products.

4.2 Architecture of the Packaging: Product Analysis

4.2.1 Newly launched Tai Chi Series vs. Traditional Chinese Herbal Packaging



Figure 1: The recent Herborist packaging design (Tai Chi Series). Source: Pamper.My, 2022)



Figure 2: The earlier Herborist packaging design (Green Tea Series). Source: (Herborist_Skincare, 2024)

Material Comparison

Different packaging designs of the 2023 launched Tai Chi Series imply luxury and innovation with new material with glass containers that give the impression of luxury and tenacity (Figure 1). Both the material and product colour of the silver alignment also help to support the brand image of the product as a luxury skincare line. Instead, the Traditional Chinese Herbal Series

uses more environmentally friendly materials that have a matte finish to convey a more traditional feel (Figure 2). Using the paper label along with orthodox fonts and illustrations makes it natural and reflects the traditional Chinese philosophy for those consumers who have a preference for natural plant-based ingredients which also reflects that Herborist is following the true values of TCM.

Colour Schemes and Typography

The colour dark green used in the Tai Chi Series represents rebirth and nature based on the T'ai Chi symbols of equilibrium and energy flow central to Chinese culture (Figure:1). The white typeface gives it a more contemporary look that works to give the luxury feel. On the other hand, the Traditional Chinese Herbal Series bears softer colours of green and off-white that symbolize purity and association with nature (Figure 2). The illustrations in the form of botanical drawings and fonts used in the products that look like calligraphy add to the product's eastern roots as many consumers seem to be drawn to products that have associations with ancient Chinese healing.

Semiotic Elements

In the T'ai Chi Series, imagery is brave and juvenile, combining contemporary geometrics and symbolism of plants and flowers (lotus pads). This conveys an image of power and regeneration, which will be attractive to clients concerned with the latest skincare treatment that is consistent with ageless concepts of health. In the traditional Chinese Herbal Series, the packaging draws on vernacular styles; using intricate illustrative prints of herbs and roots to create a familiar and trustworthy image. The message of health, beauty and cultural values which is embodied in the simplicity of the design attracts the consumers who seek ritual in the process of skincare.

4.2.2 Early Packaging Yin-Yang Series

The earlier packaging like the Yin-Yang jar includes strong, clear glass bottles with a natural hue of green; it pointed to nature and TCM (Figure:3). Glass as a material gives a perception of reliability and naturalness to consumers interested in folk solutions. It also retains the luxury look and feel while also maintaining an environmentally friendly appeal as is the cultural norm about raw materials. Moreover, the design motifs show a unique black-and-white yin-yang symbol which is the universal symbol for balance, a key concept in TCM. The design instantly aligns the product with Chinese tradition and this is done through a potent symbol of health. As it is with most 'balanced' 'synd' products, the packaging of the Matcha protein powder aligns with the label's themes of health and beauty, as well as the physical duality of the product containers. Further, the use of green colour as a basis, in addition to black and white is associated with such concepts as purity, nature, and folk remedies. Interestingly, green also relates to nature and growth in Chinese culture, which also links the product with health and wellness practices; the shape of the yin and yang immediately brings to mind ancient Eastern philosophy and health and wellness.



Figure 3: The earlier Herborist packaging design (Yin-Yang Series). Source: (Herborist_Skincare, 2024)

4.2.3 Recent Luxury Packaging (Wu Xing Series) and packaging from the early 2000

The relative product, for instance, the Wu Xing Series includes packaging that is more contemporarily designed, smooth and opaque with metallic looks. From thick and heavy glass to more polished types of materials means that the brand is moving upmarket, to luxury, while embracing sustainability. The use of concealment and darkness also symbolises modernity and elegance. During the analysis of the Packaging design, it can be seen that the Herborist brand has gone through a massive transformation from Chinese Ethnic style to Luxury Design but still manages to include Traditional symbolism in their designs.



Figure 4: The Imperial Wu Xing Collection. Source: Pamper.My, 2022)

4.2.4 Older Herborist Packaging



Figure 5: The Herborist product from early 2000. Source: (Herborist_Skincare, 2024)

The older packaging is very dominated by Chinese characters and symbols related to TCM such as plants and herbal products. This reflects the brand's organic and herbal positioning strategy. The colours selected are earthy (greens and reds) to represent nature, health and the remedial properties of the product. The designs are illustrative, they have a kind of folk-art feel to them, with an implication of folk medicine. The bottle is unpretentious and functional, which could have served the purpose of emphasizing the qualities of the product instead of its class. Most of the visual components used here are anchored within the traditional and authentic context. The use of plant motifs and Chinese script also gives the product an organic and traditional image of skincare. It is used to convince the consumer about the origin and efficacy of its natural ingredients especially for a Chinese domestic audience or for a foreign audience interested in traditional Chinese remedies for skincare. Called traditional imagery, it gives a feeling of reliability and cleanness, associating the product with the curative function of TCM.

Newer Herborist Packaging (Imperial Wu Xing Series)

More recent packaging, especially from the Imperial Wu Xing series is sleek and more sophisticated and comes with fewer complications via plain and simple designs. The bottles are shiny, they have geometric designs at the bottom part and a golden finish which gives it a prestigious look. The font is up to date, and minimal, with less focus on the Chinese culture or script and more on a sleek international look. This shift preserves the continuity but shows the aim at the international audience by employing design solutions that refer to global luxurious traditions. As for the traditional aspect, it is still detectable in the symbolism such as yin-yang and Wu Xing which are the Five Elements of Chinese cosmogony, but the new image is more modern, innovative and elitist. The gold, glass-like elements continue the notion of high quality and can be interpreted as moving the product upmarket, closer to a different, desirably more glamorous, brand. This design is to bring tradition and innovation together to welcome consumers who look for both traditional wisdom and modern skincare technology.

4.3 Insights from the Focus Group Discussions

To gain an insight into the feelings that Herborist's visual interpretation analysis may elicit among consumers, a focus group discussion was conducted with four female Chinese consumers hereinafter referred to as Participants 1, 2, 3 and 4. The discussions among focus

groups lasted between 20-30 minutes and delved into three key themes: consumer preference towards packing design, the signification process involved in packing and the impact of those signs on consumer trust and brand loyalty. Discussing both traditional and modern packages, the participants shared their impressions of what they had interpreted about the cultural meaning of Herborist and the change in the brand's image.

4.3.1 Customer Perception of Packaging Design

Concerning the packaging of Herborist it was observed that the participants had the following preferences; majority of the respondents had a very strong and positive emotional appeal towards the traditional design style used in Herborist packaging. Participant 1 said, *"The older one looks far more traditional, very Chinese and reminiscent of grandma's chant bottle remedy." It feels trustworthy.* Participant 2 also mentioned that people aimed at getting natural remedies for skin problems so the old designs indicated a transparent and basic approach to skin treatment. *"If I see the traditional plants on the bottle, I feel I am consuming something natural and healthy. I do not have to doubt the components."* Nevertheless, as the discussion proceeded and shifted towards the more contemporary packaging, the participants' approach changed as well. Participant 3 said, *"The new one looks very lovely, very expensive and very classy." It gives me the feeling that the brand is growing with the advancement and that I like. I get the idea that now I am using something luxurious.* Although the recent design was criticized for its modern look and universal appeal, certain respondents were worried that the new design may take the production away from its cultural relevance. Participant 4 said, *"It's good, but sometimes they have tried to be too international." The old design was much more 'Chinese'.* Additionally, now, she believes that they are orientating to other people and not her.

4.3.2 Cultural Codes and Cultural Connotations

The findings of the discussion showed that consumers had deeper connotations that they assigned to the semiotics, which was identified in Herborist's old and new packaging designs. In the older packaging, where the characters are in Chinese and the plant illustrations are traditional, the association with cultural identity was much more apparent. I did not think that the characters and plant drawings were used to tell a story. *"It is like the brand is saying, 'This is our history, this is where our knowledge comes from,'"* participant 2 said. Participant 1 reiterated the relevance of the natural motifs and their relation to TCM, again. Much more the older packaging had such a strict relationship to Chinese herbal medicine. *"Not only is it a product, it is a part of tradition. I believe that because it seems to have some sort of knowledge backing it up."* However, the latest packaging, although featuring occasional references to Chinese culture, went for a sleek and glamorous look. Participant 3 perhaps did see this coming. *I appreciated their ideas about yin-yang in the two masks. It is contemporary but does not forget the principles of yin-yang philosophy. It is a wise approach to target younger and more international consumers.* Nonetheless, Participant 4 had a sensation that the graphic design in the latest version is not as genuine as the prior design as it is aimed more at being shiny, not profound culturally. *But it seems to be a bit too far removed from its origins.* She pointed out the gold and cleanliness, which is fine, but those do not have the narrative that the older design did.

4.3.3 Trust and Brand Engagement

Here, the semiotics present in Herborist's container influenced the participants' confidence in the brand to a large extent. Participant 1 also pointed out that the old packaging design gave traditional images which made the product be trusted. *"I relied on the old packaging because it had an impression as if it was manufactured by people who dealt with herbal products. She said it felt like it was something she knew."* This sense of trust though gained a new dimension

with the newer design in the pipeline. For Participant 2 there was some sort of conflict, she said. *“It’s very good looking: I wondered whether they changed the formula or the way they make their products because they look so different. This makes one wonder whether the brands are still the same.”*

Participant 3 on her part believed that the modern design enhanced their interaction with the brand. *“It looks like I want to put it on my shelf just for its sleek packaging. It looks very formal and professional. I feel engaged more with the brand because they are giving me something more of a high-end product.”* Participant 4 also said that even though the new packaging was more appealing, it was somewhat less personal. For example, *“a new design of a certain product might look much better but for me, I don’t find myself as close to it as I was before. I am stunned, and it looks more like something you’d find in a glossy store, not in a Chinese apothecary”.*

In summary, the above focus group discussion shows that there is an intricate association that exists between Herborist’s packaging and consumers. While the initial packaging was appreciated for its cultural sensitivity and its ability to convey information, the newer design was appreciated for being up-market and trendy. However, it has been seen that this change has raised questions as to whether this brand is relevant to its past, let alone all those traditional consumers who associated this brand with Traditional Chinese Medicine.

5. Discussion

5.1 Overview

This paper discussed the cultural changes in Herborist packaging design and the semiotic analysis and consumer response. The main research questions were: how has the packaging design of Herborist evolved, which cultural aspects: regional (China) and global, were taken into consideration, and what semiotics correspond to TCM and contemporary cosmetics? Based on these considerations, the key research questions concern how the packaging of the brand incorporates cultural transformations, how these transformations are understood by consumers and how they affect consumption. Thus, this discussion chapter aims to interpret the data collected about the current themes of cultural and semiotic understanding of Herborist’s brand identity.

5.2 History of Change in the Packaging Design of Herborist

As for Herborist’s packaging design, it has also been gradually changing in a few years and embodying the Chinese culture and international requirements. At first, the brand took many references from the TCM such as robust shapes and naturalistic decorations which associated the product with purity and health. These designs targeted domestic consumers who are conversant with TCM and the brand originating from China. However, as Herborist continued to grow its overseas business, the recent packaging designs became more contemporary and coded in simpler and glossier fonts, bolder colours and luxury types of packaging material for the overseas market. The change means a careful negotiation of its mission to protect the cultural identity of the brand and adapt to the global cosmetics market.

5.3 The Semiotic Analysis of the Product and Consumers' Perception

Indeed, Herborist’s packaging features several semiotic features such as color, material, and image symbols. The colour green which connotes health and nature in both Chinese and Western societal aspects predominate this aspect of packaging as the products are based on natural and herbal properties. The fact of using white colour is associated with purity, which is

the second connotation referring to TCM maintenance of balance and the third referring to the modern clean and minimalistic design. Graphic symbols such as Chinese characters or floral motives associated with traditional Chinese medicine are semiotically motivated by connotative meaning directly associated with TCM, as well as by the connotations associated with tradition, healing, and authenticity. These elements are therefore understood by the consumers about the stories told about the brand. Furthermore, Chinese customers consider packaging as the true representation of their culture, whereas global customers consider Herborist as a luxury brand that provides organic and comprehensive beauty products. Hence, this dual perception helps Herborists to create a complete global image, while at the same time retaining the image of a uniquely cultural product.

5.4 Effects of the Consumer Behaviour on the Packaging Design

Consumers' behaviour analysis is one of the most significant factors that influence the packaging design in nearly all industries with the cosmetics industry among the most affected. Recently the focus shifted to sustainability due to the increasing popularity of the "green" movement and the customer tendency towards buying environmentally friendly products. A study shows that the economic world is shifting towards companies that have embraced environmental conservation hence increasing the need for eco-friendly packaging (Reddy, 2023). Incorporating biodegradable materials and putting minimal or no packaging into the market makes the brand more attractive to a green-conscious consumer. The lesser is better trend supports this shift even more as brands are being forced to declutter their packaging and simplify things (Purcărea et al., 2022). Hence, this simplistic strategy aligns with consumer values, offering depth, and reducing the noise between the brand and its consumers.

5.5 Traditional Packaging Designs vs Modern Packaging Designs

Herborist packaging design is a combination of traditional and modern designs if one is inclined to separate them based on consumers' preferences and behaviour. Many traditional packaged products focus on complexity and imagery with cultural significance, which consumers enjoy perceiving as a product of traditional artisanship. On the other hand, present-day packaging has embraced simplicity, practicality, and environmental friendliness in a manner likely to meet present-day consumers' user-friendliness and eco-friendliness standards (Patel, 2023). Additionally, as shown by the focus group discussion, consumers' perceptions are different because some people like the emotional appeal of the traditional characteristic designs of packaging material while other people like the modern and environment-friendly designs of packaging material. This is an advantage and a disadvantage at the same time for Herborists since the company has to accommodate the two to cover the market without losing the company's individuality. More importantly, such insights enable Herborist to develop attractive and relevant packaging while at the same time communicating its cultural and environmental ethos.

5.6 Mapping of Results with Theories

The use of semiotic theory especially the works of Roland Barthes and Ferdinand de Saussure is effective in analyzing Herborist's packaging design. In semiotics, the idea of a myth as formulated by Barthes deals with the way that stories in culture shape the customers' expectations and the brands. In the case of Herborist, the packaging not only explains the usability of the product but also carries symbolic messages relating to TCM. The signifier and signified put forward by Saussure explain how the visual constituents of Herborist's packaging: the colours, symbols, and textures, generate ideas of natural components and comprehensive wellbeing (Dewanti, 2023). More so, the conclusions of this study show that consumers perceive these semiotic signs from the perspective of their culture thus deepening a bond with

the brand. Hence, this interpretation is in line with extant branding and consumer research where packaging goes beyond simple utility to build an emotional link with consumers.

5.7 Limitations of This Study

Notwithstanding the findings of this visual interpretation analysis, it is pertinent that some limitations be noted about the semiotic examination of Herborist's packaging. First, the research is mainly qualitative, using focus group discussions where the responses of the consumers might not be elaborate. This study shows that semiotic interpretation is subjective and might have different significances for different people, so the results might not be generalized. Further, the emphasis on one brand reduces the generalizability of the findings to other cosmetics brands or indeed other industries. Therefore, future research could further investigate the researched hypothesis more quantitatively and investigate how people of different demographics perceive and engage with semiotic elements within packaging design. Finally, the present study's emphasis on the existing literature might entail biases since the interpretations derive from the theoretical and cultural backgrounds by which theories originate.

6. Conclusion

As shown through the visual interpretation analysis of this work, cultural semiotics play an important role in determining the design of the packaging for TCM cosmetics. With TCM gradually entering the international cosmetic market, it is crucial in the marketing strategy of TCM cosmetics to effectively convey the culture behind the product. All the used semiotic signs – symbols, colour schemes, texts, images – help to connect the ancient knowledge of TCM with the contemporary client's expectations, especially today, when people tend to turn to holistic and natural products. These findings confirm that employing cultural semiotics in packaging design adds value to the brand appeal, while also enhancing the perceived credibility and rightful status of the product through cultural associations. This paper singles out several factors which define this relationship. The choice of colours such as green, fresh and closely connected to nature brings the idea that the Herborist's products are strongly connected with the natural cure and plant sources. First of all, the arrangement of traditional Chinese patterns like the botanical illustrations and the calligraphy makes the products look authentic and this aspect will attract consumers who have an interest in TCM from historical and cultural perspectives. These semiotic elements act as subtle but effective tools to communicate the brand's core message: which indicates that Herborist is the blend of the traditional Chinese remedies and the sophisticated techniques of the contemporary cosmetic industries.

This change in packaging materials from heavy luxurious glass to lightweight, environment-friendly materials is also seen in line with the emerging market trend of sustainability. Though some consumer at first think that lighter materials equal less luxury, many see this change as a part of the companies' investment in being environmentally friendly, which will help build up their confidence in the brand. Herborist has been able to maintain the other signs of luxury while changing consumers' perception of luxury hence making the product sustainable in appearance with other luxurious features like metallic touch and sleek design. The further development of this research can be expanded to analyse the semiotic effect of TCM branding on other sectors of the beauty and wellness industry, including spas, supplements, or aromatherapy services. Further, an international comparative analysis of consumer response to TCM branding in Western markets as opposed to Asian markets could enlighten as to how cultural semiotics are either employed distinctively for or perceived uniquely in various regions. Knowledge of how 'hybridized' or 'modernized' TCM brands work in the

international markets would be useful for gauging the global consumption of traditional health and beauty practices for better global branding.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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