



**A STUDY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING HEYTEA'S WORD-OF-
MOUTH MARKETING**

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**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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This Independent Study Has Been Approved as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Business Administration

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the factors influencing HEYTEA's word-of-mouth marketing based on the 5T Theory. Specifically, the study investigated the influence of the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, namely talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking, on the brand image of HEYTEA, as well as the influence of brand image on consumers' word-of-mouth intention toward HEYTEA. In addition, the study examined the mediating role of brand image in the relationships between the five dimensions of the 5T Theory and consumers' word-of-mouth intention.

This study adopted a quantitative research design. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire from consumers who were familiar with HEYTEA and had previous purchase experience with the brand. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, 431 were returned, and 417 valid questionnaires were used for data analysis. The collected data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, validity analysis, Pearson correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, and mediation analysis through SPSS.

The results showed that talkers, topics, tools, and taking part had significant positive effects on the brand image of HEYTEA, while tracking did not have a significant effect. Among the five dimensions, topics had the strongest influence on brand image. The findings also revealed that brand image had a significant positive effect on consumers' word-of-mouth intention toward HEYTEA. Furthermore, brand image significantly mediated the relationships between talkers, topics, tools, and taking part and word-of-mouth intention, but did not significantly mediate the relationship between tracking and word-of-mouth intention.

This study contributes to the literature on word-of-mouth marketing by applying the 5T Theory to the tea beverage industry and highlighting the mediating role of brand

image. It also provides practical implications for HEYTEA and similar brands in improving word-of-mouth marketing strategies, strengthening brand image, and enhancing consumers' willingness to recommend the brand.

Keywords: HEYTEA, word-of-mouth marketing, 5T Theory, brand image, word-of-mouth intention



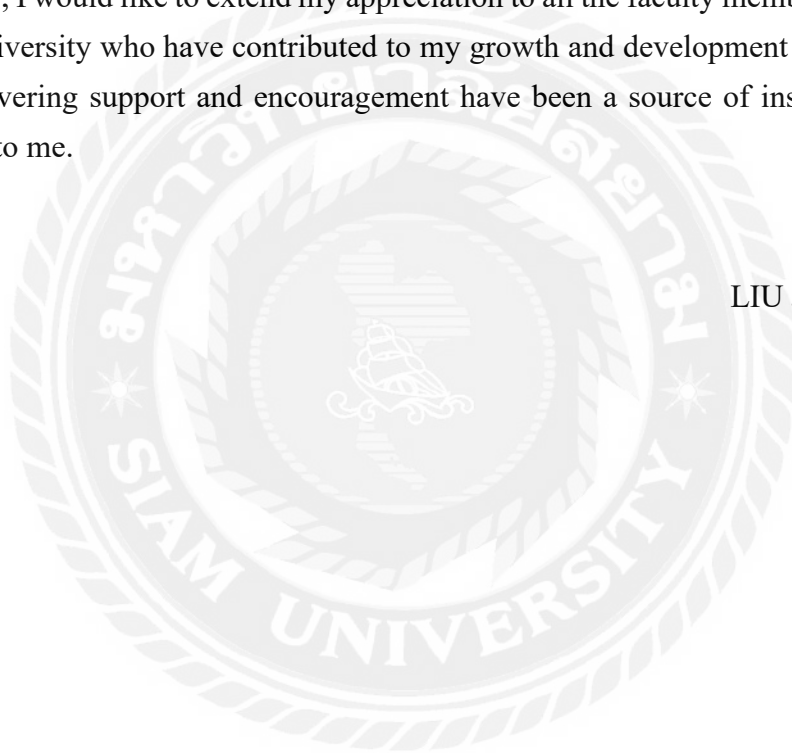
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LIU JUANJUAN



DECLARATION

I, LIU JUANJUAN, hereby declare that this Independent Study entitled “*A Study of Factors Influencing HEYTEA’s Word-of-Mouth Marketing*” is an original work and has never been submitted to any academic institution for a degree.

(LIU JUANJUAN)

Apr 17, 2026



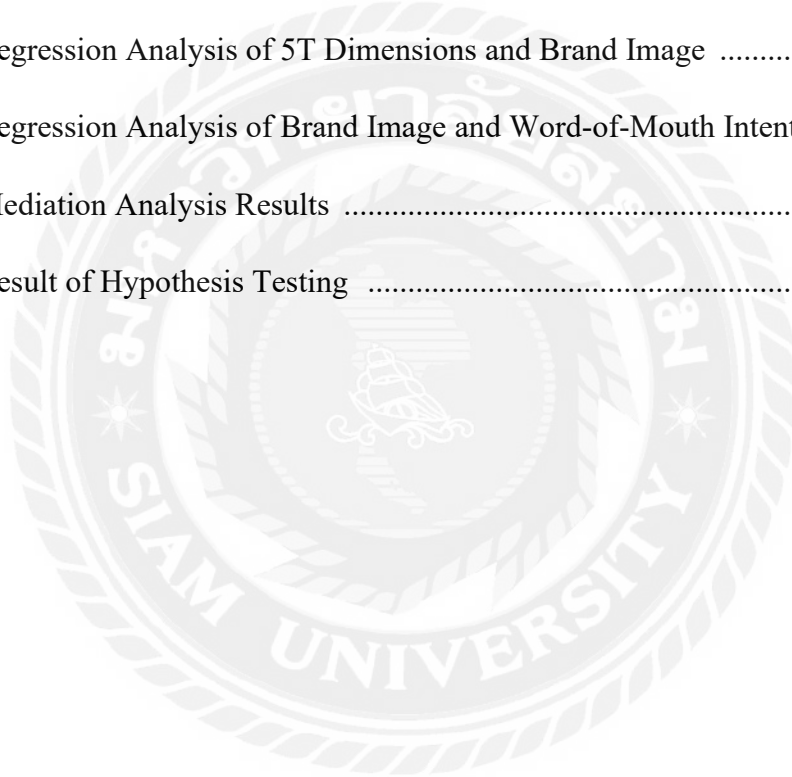
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In today's highly competitive food and beverage market, word-of-mouth marketing has become an important factor influencing consumer behavior and brand development. For tea beverage brands, consumers are not only concerned with product quality and price, but also with brand experience, service interaction, visual appeal, and social sharing. Recent studies have shown that positive word-of-mouth can enhance brand visibility, attract new consumers, and strengthen competitive advantage (Kim et al., 2024a; Usiña-Báscones et al., 2024).

With the rapid development of social media, word-of-mouth communication has become faster and more influential. Electronic word-of-mouth and digital interaction now play an essential role in shaping consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions. Recent research indicates that interactive communication, engaging content, and information credibility can significantly affect consumers' responses to brands and their willingness to share brand-related information online (Ngo et al., 2024a; An & Ngo, 2025).

Among the factors influencing consumer behavior, brand image has been widely recognized as a key mechanism. Recent studies suggest that marketing communication and word-of-mouth activities often influence consumers indirectly by first shaping their brand image, which then affects their purchase intention, loyalty, and recommendation behavior. For example, Tafolli et al. (2025) found that electronic word-of-mouth affects purchase intention through brand image and brand trust. Similarly, Chen and Demirci (2025) showed that stronger brand-related perceptions can enhance eWOM and loyalty in the coffee shop context. These findings indicate that brand image serves as an important bridge between marketing activities and consumers' word-of-mouth intention.

This issue is especially relevant in the tea beverage industry, where consumers are highly sensitive to brand atmosphere, product innovation, store design, and social media presence. As a leading new-style tea brand in China, HEYTEA has established a strong market reputation through innovative products, fashionable brand identity, and high online visibility. Therefore, HEYTEA provides an appropriate case for examining the factors influencing word-of-mouth marketing.

Although many recent studies have discussed eWOM, social media marketing, and brand-related outcomes, limited research has specifically examined how the dimensions of the 5T Theory influence consumers' word-of-mouth intention toward HEYTEA

through brand image. Based on the 5T Theory, word-of-mouth marketing can be understood through five dimensions: talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking. Therefore, this study explored how these five dimensions affect consumers' word-of-mouth intention through brand image. The study was expected to enrich the literature on tea beverage marketing and provide practical suggestions for HEYTEA in optimizing its word-of-mouth marketing strategy.

1.2 Questions of the Study

This study was based on the 5T Theory and aimed to explore how its five dimensions influence consumers' word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA through brand image.

1. How do the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, including talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking, influence the brand image of HEYTEA?
2. How does brand image influence consumers' word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA?
3. Does brand image mediate the relationships between the five dimensions of the 5T Theory and consumers' word-of-mouth intention toward HEYTEA?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the influence of the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, including talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking, on the brand image of HEYTEA.
2. To examine the influence of brand image on consumers' word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA.
3. To explore the mediating role of brand image in the relationships between the five dimensions of the 5T Theory and consumers' word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focused on examining the factors influencing HEYTEA's word-of-mouth marketing based on the 5T Theory. The research specifically investigated how the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, namely talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking, influence brand image, and how brand image further affects consumers' word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA. In addition, the study examined the mediating role of brand image in the relationships between the five dimensions of the 5T Theory and consumers' word-of-mouth intention.

In terms of research content, the study included three main aspects. First, it examined the influence of the five dimensions of the 5T Theory on the brand image of HEYTEA. Second, it investigated the influence of brand image on consumers' word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA. Third, it analyzed whether brand image mediates the relationships between the five dimensions of the 5T Theory and consumers' word-of-mouth intention.

In terms of target population, this study focused on consumers who are familiar with HEYTEA and have consumption experience with the brand. The respondents were selected because they were able to evaluate HEYTEA's word-of-mouth marketing activities, brand image, and their own word-of-mouth intention based on actual experience.

In terms of variables, the independent variables are the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, including talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking. The mediating variable is brand image. The dependent variable is consumers' word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA.

In terms of methodology, this study adopted a quantitative research approach. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed by using statistical methods to test the proposed hypotheses and relationships among variables.

1.5 Significance of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the existing literature on word-of-mouth marketing by applying the 5T Theory to the tea beverage industry, with HEYTEA as the research case. Although previous studies have widely examined electronic word-of-mouth, social media marketing, brand image, and consumer behavioral intention, relatively limited research has focused on how the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, namely talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking, influence consumers' word-of-mouth intention in the context of new-style tea brands. Therefore, this study extends the application scope of the 5T Theory and enriches the theoretical understanding of word-of-mouth marketing in the beverage industry.

In addition, this study introduces brand image as a mediating variable to explain the relationship between the five dimensions of the 5T Theory and consumers' word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA. This helps to provide a clearer explanation of the internal mechanism through which word-of-mouth marketing factors affect consumer intention. By examining both direct and mediating relationships, the study offers a more systematic framework for understanding how word-of-mouth marketing influences

consumer responses. Thus, it contributes to the development of research on brand communication, consumer behavior, and word-of-mouth marketing.

2. Practical Significance

From a practical perspective, this study provides useful insights for HEYTEA and similar tea beverage brands in optimizing their word-of-mouth marketing strategies. By identifying the effects of talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking on brand image and consumers' word-of-mouth intention, the findings can help brand managers better understand which aspects of word-of-mouth marketing are most influential in shaping consumer perceptions and encouraging positive recommendations.

Furthermore, the results of this study can assist HEYTEA in improving its brand communication practices, strengthening consumer engagement, and enhancing its overall brand image. For example, the company may use the findings to select more effective brand advocates, create more attractive communication topics, improve digital communication channels, participate more actively in consumer interaction, and monitor consumer feedback more efficiently. In this way, the study not only provides strategic guidance for HEYTEA's marketing management, but also offers practical reference for other beverage brands seeking to improve their market competitiveness through word-of-mouth marketing.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Talkers refer to people who spread information, opinions, or recommendations about a brand to others. These may include consumers, influencers, loyal customers, or other individuals who actively share their experiences with HEYTEA. In this study, talkers refer to the communication subjects who influence others' perceptions of HEYTEA through word-of-mouth.

Topics refer to the content or issues that consumers discuss and share about a brand. These may include product quality, taste, packaging, service experience, store atmosphere, innovation, and promotional activities. In this study, topics refer to the main discussion content related to HEYTEA that may stimulate consumers' willingness to communicate and share.

Tools refer to the channels or media through which word-of-mouth communication is delivered. These may include social media platforms, online review platforms, messaging applications, and other communication media. In this study, tools refer to the communication channels that help consumers spread information and opinions about HEYTEA.

Taking part refers to the brand's active participation in communication with consumers. This includes responding to consumer comments, engaging in online interaction, addressing feedback, and joining conversations related to the brand. In this study, taking part refers to HEYTEA's involvement in consumer communication and interaction within the word-of-mouth process.

Tracking refers to the process of monitoring, collecting, and analyzing consumer feedback, comments, and discussions related to a brand. It helps firms understand consumer attitudes and improve marketing strategies. In this study, tracking refers to HEYTEA's efforts to observe and manage word-of-mouth information and consumer responses.

Brand image refers to consumers' overall perception, impression, and evaluation of a brand formed through their experience, information, and communication exposure. In this study, brand image refers to consumers' overall perception of HEYTEA, including their views of its uniqueness, attractiveness, reputation, and market position.

Word-of-mouth intention refers to a consumer's willingness or tendency to share positive opinions, recommend, or discuss a brand with others. In this study, word-of-mouth intention refers to consumers' willingness to recommend HEYTEA, share their consumption experience, and communicate positive information about the brand to other people.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Word-of-mouth marketing has long been recognized as an important form of informal communication that influences consumer attitudes and behaviors. Early studies emphasized that consumers are often more willing to trust information from other consumers than direct promotional messages from firms. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) explained that interpersonal influence plays a key role in shaping individual decisions, while Dichter (1966) described word-of-mouth as a naturally occurring communication process through which consumers share opinions and consumption experiences. Arndt (1967) further defined word-of-mouth as oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial. These classic studies established the theoretical foundation for later research on word-of-mouth marketing by showing that interpersonal recommendations are highly persuasive in consumer decision-making. This general understanding continues to be reflected in later literature reviews of WOM and eWOM.

Subsequent research expanded the study of word-of-mouth from simple interpersonal recommendation to a broader relational and network-based perspective. Brown and Reingen (1987) highlighted the importance of social ties in the diffusion of word-of-mouth information, showing that social networks shape how recommendations travel among consumers. Westbrook (1987) further linked word-of-mouth with post-purchase consumer communication, suggesting that consumers share their evaluations after consumption as part of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction response. These earlier studies indicate that word-of-mouth is not merely an outcome of communication, but also a social process embedded in relationships, trust, and consumption experiences.

With the development of the Internet and social media, traditional word-of-mouth evolved into electronic word-of-mouth, which refers to consumer-generated opinions shared through online channels such as review platforms, social networking sites, blogs, and forums. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) made a major contribution by conceptualizing eWOM as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company and made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet. Later, Cheung and Thadani (2012) systematically reviewed eWOM studies and showed that online consumer-generated information has a substantial influence on information adoption, attitude formation, and purchase intention. More recent reviews continue to confirm that eWOM has become one of the most influential forms of market communication in the digital environment.

In recent years, research on word-of-mouth marketing has increasingly focused on how eWOM affects consumer behavioral outcomes. Studies published in recent years show that online reviews, digital interaction, and social media communication significantly influence consumers' purchase intention, brand loyalty, and recommendation behavior. Kim et al. (2024b) found that word-of-mouth is closely associated with personal interaction and product attachment, indicating that word-of-mouth is connected not only with communication itself but also with consumers' emotional and relational experiences. Similarly, recent studies show that eWOM credibility, engagement, and source characteristics can significantly affect information adoption and behavioral intention in online settings.

Another important development in the literature is the increasing attention to brand-related mechanisms, especially brand image. Earlier studies often treated word-of-mouth as a direct predictor of purchase or recommendation intention. However, more recent research suggests that word-of-mouth frequently operates through psychological variables that shape how consumers interpret brand-related information. Tafolli et al. (2025) found that eWOM did not exert a significant direct effect on purchase intention, but significantly influenced purchase intention through brand image and brand trust. Likewise, Kumar et al. (2024) showed that brand attitude and brand image can mediate the effect of consumers' susceptibility to eWOM on purchase intention, and that this mediating process may differ across platform types. These findings suggest that brand image is a key explanatory mechanism linking communication exposure with later behavioral intention.

In addition, recent studies have shifted attention from the consequences of word-of-mouth to its antecedents and management mechanisms. Research has shown that factors such as message quality, information usefulness, source credibility, interaction, and digital engagement can stimulate consumers' willingness to share and adopt eWOM. This indicates that word-of-mouth can be strategically managed rather than treated as a purely spontaneous outcome. In this respect, the 5T Theory, including talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking, provides a structured framework for understanding how brands can encourage and manage word-of-mouth communication. Although this framework has been widely cited in practice-oriented marketing discussions, empirical research that quantitatively tests these five dimensions in an integrated model is still relatively limited.

For the tea beverage industry, this issue is especially meaningful. Tea beverage brands rely heavily on visual identity, consumer experience, social sharing, and digital interaction, all of which are closely related to word-of-mouth generation. However,

compared with sectors such as tourism, fashion, cosmetics, and e-commerce, relatively limited research has examined how a structured word-of-mouth framework such as the 5T Theory influences consumers' word-of-mouth intention in the context of new-style tea brands. Moreover, although brand image is increasingly recognized as an important mediator, its role in connecting the dimensions of word-of-mouth marketing with consumers' word-of-mouth intention remains insufficiently explored. Therefore, examining HEYTEA from the perspective of the 5T Theory can help extend the literature on word-of-mouth marketing and provide a clearer explanation of how brand image links word-of-mouth strategy to consumers' intention to recommend and share.

2.2 Brand Image

Brand image is one of the core concepts in marketing and consumer behavior research. Early branding studies pointed out that consumers do not respond only to the physical attributes of products, but also to the symbolic meanings and impressions associated with brands (Gardner & Levy, 1955). Later, Keller (1993) defined brand image as consumers' perceptions of a brand reflected by the brand associations held in their memory, and this definition has become one of the most widely accepted conceptualizations in branding research. From this perspective, brand image is a multidimensional representation formed through consumers' experiences, information exposure, and accumulated cognitive and emotional associations (Gardner & Levy, 1955; Keller, 1993).

Subsequent research further emphasized the strategic role of brand image in shaping consumer evaluation and market performance. Brand image has generally been understood as the overall impression of a brand that helps consumers recognize, differentiate, and evaluate brands in competitive markets. Because consumers often cannot fully assess all product information, brand image serves as an important simplifying cue in decision-making, thereby influencing brand preference, perceived quality, loyalty, and behavioral intention (Keller, 1993). Later studies on brand equity and related consumer outcomes have continued to support the view that brand image is closely associated with consumers' willingness to recommend, repurchase, and pay a premium for a brand.

In recent years, research on brand image has increasingly focused on digital and social media environments. As brand communication has shifted from one-way firm promotion to interactive online engagement, brand image is now shaped not only by firm-generated content but also by online reviews, social media interactions, and peer communication. Recent studies show that social media marketing activities, digital

engagement, and online communication can significantly strengthen brand image by increasing exposure to attractive, interactive, and emotionally engaging brand-related content (Peng et al., 2024; Ismael et al., 2025). In turn, a stronger brand image can improve consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions in online and offline purchase contexts.

Another important trend in the literature is the recognition of brand image as a mediating variable. Earlier studies often treated brand image as a direct predictor of purchase intention or loyalty. However, more recent empirical studies indicate that brand image frequently functions as an internal psychological mechanism through which marketing stimuli influence consumer responses. Kumar et al. (2024) found that brand image mediates the relationship between eWOM exposure and purchase intention, and that the strength of this mediation may vary across different review platforms. Likewise, Nguyen (2025) showed that electronic word-of-mouth significantly affects purchase intention through brand image, suggesting that consumers often interpret communication cues first through brand-related perceptions before forming behavioral intentions. Similar conclusions have been reported in studies examining eWOM, online advertising, and social media influence on consumer decision-making (Al-Dmour et al., 2021; Tafolli et al., 2025).

This mediating role is especially meaningful in industries where symbolic value, consumption experience, and social expression are central, such as food service, coffee, cosmetics, and tea beverages. In these sectors, consumers are highly sensitive not only to product quality but also to store atmosphere, packaging, visual identity, social media visibility, and lifestyle symbolism. Brand image therefore becomes a central bridge between marketing communication and consumer response. For a brand such as HEYTEA, which is strongly associated with youth culture, aesthetic presentation, product innovation, and online popularity, consumers' word-of-mouth intention is unlikely to be generated only by isolated communication factors. Instead, these factors are likely to influence word-of-mouth intention by first shaping a favorable overall perception of the brand (Keller, 1993; Nguyen, 2025; Tafolli et al., 2025).

Despite the extensive literature on branding, several research gaps remain. First, although brand image has been widely examined in relation to purchase intention, loyalty, and brand equity, fewer studies have specifically analyzed it as a mediator between structured word-of-mouth marketing dimensions and word-of-mouth intention itself. Second, many recent studies focus on general social media marketing or eWOM effects, but relatively limited attention has been paid to how a multidimensional framework such as the 5T Theory shapes brand image. Third, evidence from the tea

beverage industry remains limited compared with sectors such as fashion, tourism, and online retail. Therefore, examining brand image in the context of HEYTEA can help clarify how the five dimensions of the 5T Theory influence consumers' word-of-mouth intention through a brand-related psychological mechanism.

Overall, the literature suggests that brand image is not only an outcome of marketing communication but also an important explanatory mechanism through which communication activities influence consumer responses. Classic branding theory established brand image as a set of stored brand associations in consumers' memory, while more recent studies have shown that digital interaction, eWOM, and social media communication can significantly shape brand image and, through it, affect consumer intention (Gardner & Levy, 1955; Keller, 1993; Kumar et al., 2024; Nguyen, 2025). Based on this perspective, this study treats brand image as a mediating variable linking the five dimensions of the 5T Theory with consumers' word-of-mouth intention toward HEYTEA.

2.3 Word-of-Mouth Intention

Word-of-mouth intention refers to a consumer's willingness or tendency to share opinions, experiences, and recommendations about a brand, product, or service with other people. Although early studies more often focused on actual word-of-mouth behavior, later consumer research increasingly treated intention as an important predictor of whether consumers would recommend a brand after evaluation or consumption. Classic studies on post-purchase processes showed that consumers' affective and evaluative reactions after consumption are closely related to subsequent communicative responses, including recommendation and other post-purchase expressions (Westbrook, 1987). Later WOM research also showed that positive and negative word-of-mouth can influence brand-related judgments and purchase probability, which helped establish recommendation intention as an important outcome variable in consumer research (East et al., 2008). At a broader level, literature reviews on WOM and eWOM have continued to describe recommendation-related intention as a core consequence of consumer evaluation and interpersonal influence in both offline and online contexts (Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

Subsequent studies further clarified that word-of-mouth intention is not merely a spontaneous expression, but a meaningful behavioral tendency shaped by consumers' perceptions, emotions, and relational judgments. In many service and consumption contexts, consumers who experience satisfaction, emotional attachment, or favorable brand evaluation are more likely to express intentions to recommend the brand to others.

Recent work has also emphasized that WOM can be highly relevant to consumers' decision processes, to the point that scholars have developed and validated a specific "WOM relevance" construct to capture the importance of WOM in purchase decisions across categories (Babić Rosario et al., 2024). This suggests that word-of-mouth intention should not be seen as a minor secondary outcome, but as a central indicator of how consumers translate their evaluations into potential advocacy behavior.

With the expansion of digital platforms, research on word-of-mouth intention has increasingly moved into the context of electronic word-of-mouth. In online environments, word-of-mouth intention includes consumers' willingness to post reviews, share brand content, recommend products on social media, or engage in other forms of digital advocacy. Recent studies indicate that consumers' online recommendation intention is influenced by factors such as information credibility, eWOM engagement, online rapport, digital content quality, and the perceived usefulness of shared information. For example, recent research has shown that digital engagement and eWOM-related factors significantly affect purchase-related and sharing-related intentions in online settings, especially among digitally active consumers. The digital-age literature also indicates that consumers allocate attention across face-to-face WOM, online review sites, and social media platforms differently, which further highlights the strategic importance of WOM intention in contemporary consumer decision-making (Bartschat et al., 2022; Ghosh et al., 2025; Saif et al., 2026).

Another important trend in recent literature is the examination of antecedents of positive word-of-mouth intention. Earlier work often focused on the consequences of WOM, but more recent studies increasingly investigate what drives consumers to recommend a brand. In tourism, retail, and food-related contexts, factors such as satisfaction, value perception, service experience, customer engagement, and brand-related emotions have been found to enhance positive WOM intention. For instance, Toyama (2020) examined factors influencing positive word-of-mouth intentions in tourism, while more recent research in food and retail contexts shows that brand experience, perceived value, customer engagement, and store-related attributes can significantly increase both repurchase intention and WOM intention. These findings indicate that WOM intention is best understood as a downstream outcome of favorable consumer experiences and evaluations rather than as an isolated communication event.

In addition, recent studies have increasingly linked word-of-mouth intention with brand-related variables, especially brand image. Consumers usually do not recommend a brand merely because they have seen or received communication stimuli. Rather, they are more likely to recommend a brand when those stimuli contribute to a favorable

overall perception of the brand. Recent empirical studies show that brand image can influence recommendation-related outcomes directly and can also mediate the relationship between communication variables and consumer intention. Research published in 2025 and 2026 continues to show that online reviews, eWOM, and brand image jointly shape consumer satisfaction and intention-related outcomes in service and tourism settings. Likewise, recent studies on eWOM and purchase intention suggest that communication effects are often translated into consumer intention through intervening brand-related perceptions, especially brand image and trust (Nguyen, 2025; Tafolli et al., 2025). This makes word-of-mouth intention especially relevant to the present study, where consumers' willingness to recommend HEYTEA is expected to arise not only from 5T-related communication dimensions but also from the favorable brand image formed through those dimensions.

For the tea beverage industry, word-of-mouth intention is particularly important. Tea beverage consumption is closely connected with product taste, store atmosphere, aesthetic presentation, novelty, and social sharing, all of which can stimulate consumers to discuss and recommend brands. Compared with some durable goods categories, tea beverage products are often highly visible in everyday life and highly shareable on social media, which means that recommendation intention can become a powerful source of market diffusion and brand influence. However, despite the importance of consumer advocacy in this industry, relatively limited research has examined word-of-mouth intention in the context of new-style tea brands using a structured communication framework such as the 5T Theory. Existing studies have paid more attention to general eWOM, review credibility, or purchase intention, while fewer studies have specifically examined how talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking influence consumers' intention to recommend a tea beverage brand.

Overall, the literature suggests that word-of-mouth intention is a key consumer outcome reflecting the likelihood that consumers will translate their evaluations, experiences, and brand perceptions into recommendation behavior. Classic studies linked post-purchase evaluation with communicative responses, while later WOM and eWOM research confirmed that recommendation-related intention is shaped by interpersonal influence, information value, digital engagement, and brand-related perceptions. Recent evidence further suggests that brand image is an important mechanism connecting communication exposure with intention. Based on this perspective, this study treats word-of-mouth intention as the dependent variable and examines how the five dimensions of the 5T Theory influence consumers' word-of-mouth intention toward HEYTEA through brand image.

2.4 5T Theory

The 5T Theory is a practical framework for understanding and managing word-of-mouth marketing. It was popularized by Andy Sernovitz and later circulated through Word of Mouth Marketing Association materials. The framework proposes that effective word-of-mouth marketing can be understood through five core elements: talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking. These five elements respectively refer to who talks, what they talk about, how the message spreads, how the firm participates, and how communication outcomes are monitored and evaluated (Sernovitz, 2009; Word of Mouth Marketing Association, 2012). Recent applied studies and case analyses continue to use these five dimensions as a basic structure for examining word-of-mouth strategy in digital communication contexts (Hu & Wu, 2019; Wang, 2023).

From the perspective of the theory, talkers refer to the individuals who are willing and able to spread information about a brand, such as satisfied customers, loyal users, opinion leaders, and influential community members. Topics refer to the content that gives people a reason to talk, including product novelty, service quality, user experience, emotional stories, and promotional activities. Tools refer to the channels or mechanisms that help messages travel, such as social media platforms, online communities, recommendation systems, and face-to-face sharing opportunities. Taking part means that firms should actively join conversations by replying, guiding discussion, and maintaining interaction with consumers. Tracking refers to monitoring consumer responses and communication effects so that firms can evaluate and optimize their strategies (Sernovitz, 2009; Word of Mouth Marketing Association, 2012). These five dimensions transform the broad idea of word-of-mouth into a more operational framework for marketing practice (Sernovitz, 2009; WOMMA, 2012).

Although the 5T Theory originally emerged from practice-oriented marketing literature rather than formal academic theory-building, it has gradually been introduced into applied research and case analysis. For example, Hu and Wu (2019) applied the 5T word-of-mouth marketing model to analyze Alipay's "Chinese Koi" campaign on Weibo and argued that the coordination of talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking contributed to the campaign's strong communication effect. Likewise, later case-based studies have used the same framework to interpret the word-of-mouth strategies of consumer brands, indicating that the 5T Model remains relevant for analyzing online buzz, brand interaction, and communication diffusion in the social media era (Hu & Wu, 2019; Wang, 2023).

In addition, some recent empirical and applied studies have started to operationalize word-of-mouth using the five dimensions proposed by Sernovitz. Recent quantitative papers in applied business contexts explicitly list talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking as measurement dimensions of word-of-mouth, which suggests that the 5T framework has begun to move from descriptive guidance toward empirical measurement (Parera & Tapa, 2025). This is important because it indicates that the 5T Theory can be adapted for quantitative research when scholars aim to test how structured word-of-mouth dimensions influence consumer attitudes, brand-related outcomes, and behavioral intentions.

The value of the 5T Theory lies in its ability to translate the general idea of word-of-mouth marketing into a clearer managerial logic. Traditional WOM research often focuses on why consumers share recommendations, whereas the 5T framework explains how firms can stimulate, support, and supervise such communication in practice. In this sense, the framework is particularly suitable for industries that depend heavily on interaction, visibility, and peer influence, such as food service, retail, cosmetics, and tea beverages. For these industries, the five elements of the 5T Theory offer a practical lens for understanding how brand communication can be transformed into consumer discussion and recommendation (Sernovitz, 2009; WOMMA, 2012).

However, several limitations remain in the existing literature. First, the 5T Theory is still cited more often in professional marketing materials and case discussions than in highly developed academic theory-building studies. Second, many existing studies using the 5T framework are descriptive or case-based, while fewer studies test all five dimensions in a single integrated quantitative model. Third, although the framework has been applied in social media and online campaign analysis, limited research has examined how the five dimensions influence brand image and, through it, affect word-of-mouth intention. Finally, evidence from the tea beverage industry remains scarce, even though this industry is strongly associated with social sharing, visual identity, experiential consumption, and active consumer interaction (Hu & Wu, 2019; Wang, 2023).

Overall, the literature suggests that the 5T Theory provides a useful framework for explaining how word-of-mouth marketing can be strategically designed and managed. The five dimensions of talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking offer a practical structure for analyzing how brand-related communication is initiated, diffused, supported, and evaluated. While previous studies have demonstrated the explanatory value of the 5T framework in case and applied contexts, further quantitative research is still needed to test how these five dimensions affect brand-related perceptions and

behavioral intentions. Based on this perspective, the present study adopts the 5T Theory as its main theoretical foundation and examines how its five dimensions influence consumers' word-of-mouth intention toward HEYTEA through brand image.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

This study was based on the 5T Theory and examined the factors influencing HEYTEA's word-of-mouth marketing. The conceptual framework proposes that the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, namely talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking, serve as the independent variables. These variables are expected to influence brand image, which functions as the mediating variable. In turn, brand image is expected to influence consumers' word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA, which is the dependent variable.

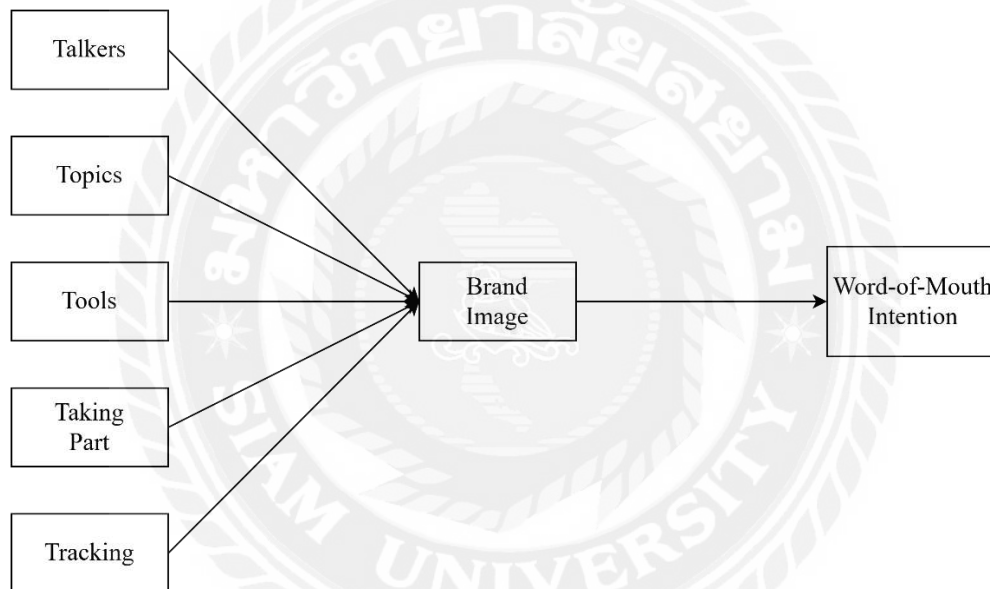


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

More specifically, the framework suggests that effective word-of-mouth marketing activities, including the selection of appropriate talkers, the creation of attractive topics, the use of effective communication tools, the active participation of the brand in consumer interaction, and the monitoring of consumer feedback, can enhance consumers' overall perception of HEYTEA. A more favorable brand image will then increase consumers' willingness to recommend HEYTEA, share positive experiences, and spread favorable information about the brand to others.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the factors influencing HEYTEA's word-of-mouth marketing based on the 5T Theory. The quantitative approach was considered appropriate because this study aimed to test the relationships among clearly defined variables, including the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, brand image, and consumers' word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA. By using quantitative methods, the study was able to measure consumers' perceptions systematically and analyze the causal relationships among variables through statistical techniques.

The study was based on a structured conceptual framework in which talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking were treated as the independent variables, brand image is treated as the mediating variable, and word-of-mouth intention is treated as the dependent variable. The research sought to determine whether the five dimensions of the 5T Theory significantly influence brand image, whether brand image significantly influences consumers' word-of-mouth intention toward HEYTEA, and whether brand image mediates the relationships between the five dimensions of the 5T Theory and word-of-mouth intention.

In terms of data collection, this study used a structured questionnaire as the main research instrument. The questionnaire was designed to collect data from consumers who are familiar with HEYTEA and have consumption experience with the brand. The items in the questionnaire were measured by using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, in order to assess respondents' perceptions of the variables included in the study.

In terms of data analysis, the collected data were analyzed by using statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were used to explain respondents' demographic characteristics. Reliability and validity analyses were conducted to examine the quality of the measurement scales. In addition, inferential statistical techniques, including correlation analysis, regression analysis, or structural equation modeling, were used to test the proposed hypotheses and examine the relationships among variables.

Therefore, this study employed a quantitative research design because it provided an appropriate and effective method for testing the conceptual framework and verifying the relationships among the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, brand image, and consumers' word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA.

3.2 Questionnaire Design

The measurement items of this study were adapted from relevant literature on the 5T Theory, brand image, and word-of-mouth intention, and revised to fit the context of HEYTEA. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Table 3.1 Measure Items

| Variable | Code | Measurement Item | Source |
|----------|------|---|------------------|
| Talkers | TA1 | People who talk about HEYTEA are trustworthy. | Sernovitz (2009) |
| | TA2 | Consumers who share information about HEYTEA can influence others' opinions. | |
| | TA3 | Recommendations from people who know HEYTEA make me pay attention to the brand. | |
| | TA4 | HEYTEA has many consumers or followers who are willing to talk about it. | |
| Topics | TO1 | HEYTEA provides interesting topics for consumers to discuss. | Sernovitz (2009) |
| | TO2 | HEYTEA's products and brand activities easily become discussion topics. | |
| | TO3 | The content related to HEYTEA is attractive enough to encourage sharing. | |
| | TO4 | HEYTEA creates topics that make consumers interested in talking about the brand. | |
| Tools | TL1 | Social media and online platforms make it easy to spread information about HEYTEA. | Sernovitz (2009) |
| | TL2 | HEYTEA uses appropriate channels to support consumer communication. | |
| | TL3 | Consumers can easily share their opinions about HEYTEA through different platforms. | |
| | TL4 | The communication tools used by HEYTEA help information spread quickly. | |

| | | | |
|-------------------------|-----|---|--|
| Taking Part | TP1 | HEYTEA actively interacts with consumers in communication channels. | Sernovitz (2009) |
| | TP2 | HEYTEA responds to consumer comments or feedback in a timely manner. | |
| | TP3 | HEYTEA is willing to participate in discussions with consumers. | |
| | TP4 | HEYTEA's active participation makes consumers feel closer to the brand. | |
| Tracking | TR1 | HEYTEA pays attention to consumer feedback and opinions. | Sernovitz (2009) |
| | TR2 | HEYTEA monitors discussions about the brand on relevant platforms. | |
| | TR3 | HEYTEA appears to manage consumer feedback effectively. | |
| | TR4 | HEYTEA can improve its communication based on consumer responses. | |
| Brand Image | BI1 | HEYTEA has a good overall image in my mind. | Keller (1993) |
| | BI2 | HEYTEA is a distinctive brand compared with other tea beverage brands. | |
| | BI3 | HEYTEA is an attractive and appealing brand. | |
| | BI4 | HEYTEA is a brand with a positive reputation. | |
| Word-of-Mouth Intention | WI1 | I am willing to recommend HEYTEA to others. | Zeithaml et al. (1996) ; Maxham and Netemeyer (2002) |
| | WI2 | I am willing to say positive things about HEYTEA to other people. | |
| | WI3 | I am willing to share my experience of HEYTEA with others. | |
| | WI4 | I would encourage my friends or relatives to try HEYTEA. | |

3.3 Hypothesis

H1: Talkers positively influence brand image of HEYTEA.

H2: Topics positively influence brand image of HEYTEA.

H3: Tools positively influence brand image of HEYTEA.

H4: Taking Part positively influences brand image of HEYTEA.

H5: Tracking positively influences brand image of HEYTEA.

H6: Brand image positively influences consumers' word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA.

H7a: Brand image mediates the relationship between talkers and word-of-mouth intention.

H7b: Brand image mediates the relationship between topics and word-of-mouth intention.

H7c: Brand image mediates the relationship between tools and word-of-mouth intention.

H7d: Brand image mediates the relationship between taking part and word-of-mouth intention.

H7e: Brand image mediates the relationship between tracking and word-of-mouth intention.

3.4 Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of consumers who are familiar with HEYTEA and have purchased HEYTEA products. These consumers were regarded as the target population because they have direct consumption experience and are therefore able to evaluate HEYTEA's word-of-mouth marketing, brand image, and their own word-of-mouth intention based on actual experience.

Since it is difficult to investigate the entire population, this study selected a sample from HEYTEA consumers by using non-probability sampling, specifically convenience sampling. This sampling method was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to collect data efficiently from accessible respondents who met the screening condition of having purchased HEYTEA products before.

A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed to consumers who had experience purchasing HEYTEA products. Among them, 431 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a response rate of 95.78%. After data screening, 417 questionnaires were identified as valid, while 14 questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete responses, repeated answers, or obvious response bias. Therefore, the valid response rate was 96.75% based on the returned questionnaires, or 92.67% based on the distributed questionnaires.

Thus, the final sample size of this study was 417 valid respondents, which was considered adequate for quantitative data analysis, including reliability analysis,

validity analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and structural equation modeling.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed by using statistical methods in order to answer the research questions and test the proposed hypotheses. The analysis in this study included both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

First, descriptive statistics were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, education level, occupation, and monthly income. Frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize the basic characteristics of the sample and the overall responses to the questionnaire items.

Second, reliability analysis was conducted to examine the internal consistency of the measurement scales. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess whether the items under each construct were consistent and reliable.

Third, validity analysis was conducted to test the suitability of the measurement items. This included Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity to determine whether the data were appropriate for factor analysis. In addition, factor loading values were used to examine the construct validity of the scales.

Fourth, correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships among the variables, including the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, brand image, and word-of-mouth intention. This analysis helped identify whether the variables were significantly associated with one another.

Fifth, multiple regression analysis was used to test the direct effects of the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, namely talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking, on brand image, as well as the effect of brand image on word-of-mouth intention.

Finally, mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether brand image mediated the relationships between the five dimensions of the 5T Theory and consumers' word-of-mouth intention toward HEYTEA. The mediation effect was tested by using appropriate regression procedures to determine whether the indirect effects were significant.

3.6 Reliability and Validity Analysis of the Scale

Reliability analysis was conducted by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to examine the internal consistency of the measurement scales. The results showed that all variables had Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability.

Table 3.2 Reliability Analysis Results

| Variable | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|-------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Talkers | 4 | 0.841 |
| Topics | 4 | 0.856 |
| Tools | 4 | 0.848 |
| Taking Part | 4 | 0.832 |
| Tracking | 4 | 0.826 |
| Brand Image | 4 | 0.873 |

The results indicate that all constructs in this study had good internal consistency. Therefore, the questionnaire items were considered reliable and suitable for further analysis.

Validity analysis was conducted by using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The results showed that the KMO value was 0.921, which was higher than the acceptable threshold of 0.60, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. This indicates that the data were suitable for factor analysis.

Table 3.3 KMO and Bartlett's Test

| Test | Value |
|------------------------------------|----------|
| KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy | 0.921 |
| Bartlett's Test Approx. Chi-Square | 4863.572 |
| df | 276 |
| Sig. | 0.000 |

In addition, factor loading values for all questionnaire items ranged from 0.671 to 0.842, exceeding the commonly accepted standard of 0.50. Therefore, the construct validity of the scale was acceptable.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed in this study. Among them, 431 questionnaires were returned, and 417 valid questionnaires were retained after data screening. The valid response rate was 96.75% based on the returned questionnaires.

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

| Variable | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 178 | 42.69 |
| | Female | 239 | 57.31 |
| | Total | 417 | 100.00 |
| Age | 18–25 years old | 227 | 54.44 |
| | 26–30 years old | 104 | 24.94 |
| | 31–35 years old | 51 | 12.23 |
| | 36 years old and above | 35 | 8.39 |
| | Total | 417 | 100.00 |
| Education Level | High school or below | 38 | 9.11 |
| | Junior college | 88 | 21.10 |
| | Bachelor's degree | 256 | 61.39 |
| | Master's degree or above | 35 | 8.39 |
| | Total | 417 | 100.00 |
| Occupation | Student | 146 | 35.01 |
| | Company employee | 158 | 37.89 |
| | Self-employed | 49 | 11.75 |
| | Public servant | 28 | 6.71 |
| | Other | 36 | 8.63 |
| | Total | 417 | 100.00 |
| Monthly Income | Less than 3,000 RMB | 109 | 26.14 |
| | 3,001–5,000 RMB | 132 | 31.65 |
| | 5,001–8,000 RMB | 97 | 23.26 |
| | 8,001–10,000 RMB | 46 | 11.03 |
| | More than 10,000 RMB | 33 | 7.91 |
| | Total | 417 | 100.00 |

In terms of gender, 178 respondents were male, accounting for 42.69%, while 239 respondents were female, accounting for 57.31%. In terms of age, most respondents were between 18 and 25 years old, accounting for 54.44%, followed by those aged 26 to 30, accounting for 24.94%. This indicates that the respondents were mainly young consumers, which is consistent with the target consumer group of HEYTEA. In terms of education level, most respondents held a bachelor's degree or were currently pursuing one, accounting for 61.39%, followed by those with junior college education, accounting for 21.10%. In terms of occupation, students and company employees constituted the majority of the respondents. This reflects that HEYTEA's consumers are concentrated among younger and relatively educated groups.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics Analysis

The descriptive statistics of the main variables showed that respondents generally had positive perceptions of HEYTEA's word-of-mouth marketing, brand image, and word-of-mouth intention. Among the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, topics had the highest mean score, indicating that consumers believed HEYTEA provided attractive and discussable content. Talkers and tools also received relatively high mean scores, showing that respondents perceived HEYTEA as a brand that could be discussed and shared through suitable channels. Taking part and tracking received slightly lower mean scores, suggesting that consumers perceived somewhat less direct brand participation and feedback monitoring compared with the other dimensions.

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Variables

| Variable | Mean | S.D. | Level |
|-------------------------|------|------|-------|
| Talkers | 3.89 | 0.71 | High |
| Topics | 4.02 | 0.68 | High |
| Tools | 3.94 | 0.73 | High |
| Taking Part | 3.76 | 0.75 | High |
| Tracking | 3.72 | 0.77 | High |
| Brand Image | 4.05 | 0.66 | High |
| Word-of-Mouth Intention | 4.08 | 0.69 | High |

Overall, the results indicate that respondents had favorable perceptions of HEYTEA. In particular, brand image and word-of-mouth intention obtained relatively high mean values, implying that HEYTEA had already established a positive market impression and strong consumer recommendation tendency.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the main variables. The results showed that all five dimensions of the 5T Theory were positively and significantly correlated with brand image and word-of-mouth intention. In addition, brand image had a strong positive correlation with word-of-mouth intention.

Table 4.3 Correlation Analysis Results

| Variable | Talkers | Topics | Tools | Taking Part | Tracking | Brand Image | WOM Intention |
|---------------|---------|--------|-------|-------------|----------|-------------|---------------|
| Talkers | 1 | | | | | | |
| Topics | 0.604 | 1 | | | | | |
| Tools | 0.587 | 0.619 | 1 | | | | |
| Taking Part | 0.541 | 0.563 | 0.598 | 1 | | | |
| Tracking | 0.519 | 0.548 | 0.572 | 0.611 | 1 | | |
| Brand Image | 0.648 | 0.691 | 0.663 | 0.622 | 0.603 | 1 | |
| WOM Intention | 0.589 | 0.634 | 0.617 | 0.576 | 0.561 | 0.732 | 1 |

Note: $p < 0.01$.

The results indicate that the relationships among the variables were positive and statistically significant. Among them, brand image showed the strongest correlation with word-of-mouth intention, providing preliminary support for the proposed mediating role of brand image.

4.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

4.4.1 Effects of 5T Dimensions on Brand Image

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the effects of talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking on brand image. The results showed that all five dimensions had positive effects on brand image, and four of them were statistically significant.

Table 4.4 Regression Analysis of 5T Dimensions and Brand Image

| Independent Variable | Beta | t-value | Sig. |
|----------------------|-------|---------|-------|
| Talkers | 0.186 | 3.921 | 0.000 |
| Topics | 0.274 | 5.604 | 0.000 |
| Tools | 0.213 | 4.338 | 0.000 |
| Taking Part | 0.121 | 2.487 | 0.013 |
| Tracking | 0.089 | 1.915 | 0.056 |

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.621$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.616$, $F = 134.287$, $p = 0.000$

The results indicate that talkers, topics, tools, and taking part significantly and positively influenced brand image. Among these variables, topics had the strongest effect on brand image. However, tracking did not reach the 0.05 significance level. Therefore, H1, H2, H3, and H4 were supported, while H5 was not supported.

4.4.2 Effect of Brand Image on Word-of-Mouth Intention

Regression analysis was then conducted to examine the effect of brand image on word-of-mouth intention.

Table 4.5 Regression Analysis of Brand Image and Word-of-Mouth Intention

| Independent Variable | Beta | t-value | Sig. |
|---|-------|---------|-------|
| Brand Image | 0.732 | 21.487 | 0.000 |
| Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.536$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.535$, $F = 461.692$, $p = 0.000$ | | | |

The results show that brand image had a strong and significant positive effect on word-of-mouth intention. Therefore, H6 was supported.

4.5 Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis was conducted to test whether brand image mediated the relationships between the five dimensions of the 5T Theory and word-of-mouth intention. The results showed that brand image significantly mediated the effects of talkers, topics, tools, and taking part on word-of-mouth intention. However, the mediating effect of brand image on the relationship between tracking and word-of-mouth intention was not statistically significant.

Table 4.6 Mediation Analysis Results

| Hypothesis | Indirect Effect | Result |
|--|-----------------|---------------|
| H7a: Talkers → Brand Image → WOM Intention | 0.136 | Supported |
| H7b: Topics → Brand Image → WOM Intention | 0.201 | Supported |
| H7c: Tools → Brand Image → WOM Intention | 0.156 | Supported |
| H7d: Taking Part → Brand Image → WOM Intention | 0.089 | Supported |
| H7e: Tracking → Brand Image → WOM Intention | 0.065 | Not supported |

These findings indicate that brand image plays an important mediating role in transforming several dimensions of word-of-mouth marketing into consumers'

recommendation intention. In particular, topics and tools exerted relatively stronger indirect effects, suggesting that attractive content and effective communication channels are especially important in shaping HEYTEA’s brand image and subsequently encouraging consumer word-of-mouth intention.

4.6 Results of Hypothesis Testing

Table 4.7 Results of Hypothesis Testing

| Hypothesis | Statement | Result |
|------------|--|---------------|
| H1 | Talkers positively influence brand image of HEYTEA. | Supported |
| H2 | Topics positively influence brand image of HEYTEA. | Supported |
| H3 | Tools positively influence brand image of HEYTEA. | Supported |
| H4 | Taking Part positively influences brand image of HEYTEA. | Supported |
| H5 | Tracking positively influences brand image of HEYTEA. | Not supported |
| H6 | Brand image positively influences consumers’ word-of-mouth intention toward HEYTEA. | Supported |
| H7a | Brand image mediates the relationship between talkers and word-of-mouth intention. | Supported |
| H7b | Brand image mediates the relationship between topics and word-of-mouth intention. | Supported |
| H7c | Brand image mediates the relationship between tools and word-of-mouth intention. | Supported |
| H7d | Brand image mediates the relationship between taking part and word-of-mouth intention. | Supported |
| H7e | Brand image mediates the relationship between tracking and word-of-mouth intention. | Not supported |

The results of data analysis showed that the scales used in this study had satisfactory reliability and validity. The correlation analysis indicated that all variables were positively associated with one another. Multiple regression analysis showed that talkers, topics, tools, and taking part had significant positive effects on brand image, whereas tracking did not have a significant effect. In addition, brand image had a strong positive effect on consumers’ word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA. The mediation analysis further revealed that brand image significantly mediated the relationships

between four dimensions of the 5T Theory and word-of-mouth intention. These findings provide overall support for the conceptual framework of the study.

4.7 Discussion

This study aimed to examine the factors influencing HEYTEA's word-of-mouth marketing based on the 5T Theory, with brand image as a mediating variable and word-of-mouth intention as the dependent variable. The discussion of the findings is presented according to each hypothesis.

The result showed that talkers had a significant positive effect on brand image, so H1 was supported. This finding indicates that the people who discuss, recommend, or share opinions about HEYTEA play an important role in shaping consumers' perceptions of the brand. When consumers are exposed to favorable comments from credible and influential talkers, they are more likely to develop a positive impression of HEYTEA.

The result showed that topics had a significant positive effect on brand image, so H2 was supported. Moreover, among the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, topics had the strongest effect on brand image. This means that the content consumers talk about, such as product taste, packaging, product innovation, seasonal drinks, store atmosphere, and promotional activities, strongly shapes how consumers perceive HEYTEA.

The result showed that tools had a significant positive effect on brand image, so H3 was supported. This finding indicates that the channels and platforms through which information about HEYTEA is shared can significantly influence how consumers perceive the brand. In other words, effective communication tools help the brand's messages and consumer discussions spread more widely and more efficiently, thereby contributing to a stronger brand image.

The result showed that taking part had a significant positive effect on brand image, so H4 was supported. This means that HEYTEA's active participation in communication with consumers contributes positively to how consumers perceive the brand. When the brand responds to feedback, joins conversations, and interacts with consumers in a timely and friendly manner, consumers are more likely to develop favorable impressions of the brand.

The result showed that tracking did not have a significant positive effect on brand image, so H5 was not supported. This finding suggests that although monitoring consumer feedback and discussions is an important managerial activity, consumers may not directly perceive tracking as a factor that enhances their evaluation of HEYTEA's brand image.

The result showed that brand image had a significant positive effect on word-of-mouth intention, so H6 was supported. This finding indicates that when consumers hold a favorable overall perception of HEYTEA, they are more willing to recommend the brand, share positive experiences, and speak positively about it to others.

The result showed that brand image significantly mediated the relationship between talkers and word-of-mouth intention, so H7a was supported. This means that talkers influence consumers' word-of-mouth intention not only directly through communication exposure, but also indirectly by shaping a more favorable brand image.

The result showed that brand image significantly mediated the relationship between topics and word-of-mouth intention, so H7b was supported. This indicates that attractive and discussable HEYTEA-related topics increase consumers' recommendation intention by first enhancing the brand image.

The result showed that brand image significantly mediated the relationship between tools and word-of-mouth intention, so H7c was supported. This means that effective communication tools help consumers build a positive brand image of HEYTEA, which in turn increases their willingness to recommend the brand.

The result showed that brand image significantly mediated the relationship between taking part and word-of-mouth intention, so H7d was supported. This indicates that HEYTEA's active participation in communication strengthens consumers' word-of-mouth intention through the improvement of brand image.

The result showed that brand image did not significantly mediate the relationship between tracking and word-of-mouth intention, so H7e was not supported. This result is consistent with the non-significant direct effect of tracking on brand image.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the relationships among the five dimensions of the 5T Theory, brand image, and consumers' word-of-mouth intention for HEYTEA.

First, the results showed that talkers significantly influenced brand image, which suggests that consumers who share opinions and recommendations about HEYTEA play an important role in shaping the brand's overall perception. This finding supports the idea that credible and influential communicators can strengthen consumers' favorable impressions of a brand. In the HEYTEA context, friends, loyal customers, online reviewers, and influencers may all function as important talkers who affect brand evaluation.

Second, the study found that topics had the strongest positive effect on brand image. This indicates that the discussion content related to HEYTEA, such as product innovation, packaging, store atmosphere, taste, and promotional activities, strongly influences how consumers perceive the brand. This result suggests that in the tea beverage industry, creating attractive and shareable topics is especially important for strengthening brand image and stimulating later word-of-mouth behavior.

Third, tools significantly influenced brand image, indicating that the communication channels through which brand-related information is shared are also important. In the digital era, social media, online reviews, and other communication platforms make it easier for consumers to access and spread information about HEYTEA. As a result, these tools contribute not only to communication efficiency but also to the formation of a more positive brand image.

Fourth, the study showed that taking part significantly influenced brand image. This means that HEYTEA's active participation in communication, such as responding to comments and engaging with consumers, can improve the way consumers view the brand. This finding reflects the importance of interaction in modern marketing, where consumers increasingly expect brands to be responsive, approachable, and involved in conversations.

Fifth, tracking did not significantly influence brand image. A likely explanation is that tracking is mainly an internal management process that consumers may not clearly perceive. Unlike visible communication factors such as topics or brand interaction, tracking takes place behind the scenes. Therefore, although it may still be useful for

managerial decision-making, it does not appear to directly shape consumers' impressions of HEYTEA.

Sixth, the result that brand image significantly influenced word-of-mouth intention confirms that consumers are more willing to recommend HEYTEA when they perceive the brand positively. This finding is consistent with branding theory and indicates that a favorable brand image is an important driver of recommendation behavior in the tea beverage market.

Seventh, the mediation results further enrich the discussion. Brand image significantly mediated the relationships between talkers, topics, tools, and taking part and word-of-mouth intention, showing that these four dimensions influence recommendation intention partly by first improving the brand image of HEYTEA. This means that consumers do not simply respond to communication activities directly. Instead, they interpret these activities through their perceptions of the brand, and those perceptions then shape their willingness to engage in positive word-of-mouth.

However, brand image did not mediate the relationship between tracking and word-of-mouth intention, which is consistent with the non-significant effect of tracking on brand image. This result further suggests that tracking functions more as a background support mechanism than as a directly perceived driver of consumer advocacy.

Overall, the discussion indicates that consumer-visible dimensions of word-of-mouth marketing are more effective than background managerial processes in shaping brand image and encouraging word-of-mouth intention. For HEYTEA, the most effective strategy appears to be strengthening attractive discussion topics, encouraging influential talkers, improving communication tools, and participating actively in consumer interaction. These dimensions can build a favorable brand image, which in turn enhances consumers' willingness to recommend the brand to others.

5.2 Recommendation

First, HEYTEA should place greater emphasis on creating attractive and shareable topics, since this dimension showed the strongest influence on brand image. The company should continue to develop innovative products, seasonal drinks, visually appealing packaging, and engaging promotional themes that can stimulate consumer discussion. Topics that combine novelty, aesthetics, and emotional appeal are more likely to encourage consumers to talk about the brand and form favorable impressions.

Second, HEYTEA should actively identify and encourage influential talkers. Loyal customers, satisfied consumers, influencers, and online reviewers can all serve

as important communicators who shape public perceptions of the brand. HEYTEA may strengthen this dimension by encouraging user-generated content, building consumer communities, and cooperating with suitable opinion leaders who match the brand image.

Third, the company should continue improving its tools of communication. Social media platforms, online review channels, short-video applications, and digital sharing mechanisms are important pathways through which brand-related information spreads. HEYTEA should ensure that its content is easy to access, easy to share, and suitable for the communication habits of young consumers. Stronger digital tools can help extend communication reach and reinforce positive brand perceptions.

Fourth, HEYTEA should strengthen taking part in consumer interaction. The findings showed that active participation by the brand contributes positively to brand image and indirectly to word-of-mouth intention. Therefore, HEYTEA should respond to consumer feedback in a timely manner, participate in online discussions, and maintain a friendly and interactive communication style. This can make the brand appear more responsive, approachable, and consumer-oriented.

Fifth, although tracking did not show a significant direct effect in this study, it should not be ignored in practice. HEYTEA should continue monitoring consumer opinions, online discussions, and feedback trends in order to identify communication problems and improve internal decision-making. Even if consumers do not directly perceive tracking, it remains important for supporting long-term communication effectiveness and service improvement.

Finally, HEYTEA should pay particular attention to strengthening brand image, since the results showed that brand image had a strong direct effect on word-of-mouth intention and mediated several important relationships. The company should therefore integrate product quality, store atmosphere, communication content, and consumer interaction into a consistent and distinctive brand image strategy. A stronger brand image can effectively transform communication activities into positive consumer recommendation behavior.

5.3 Further Study

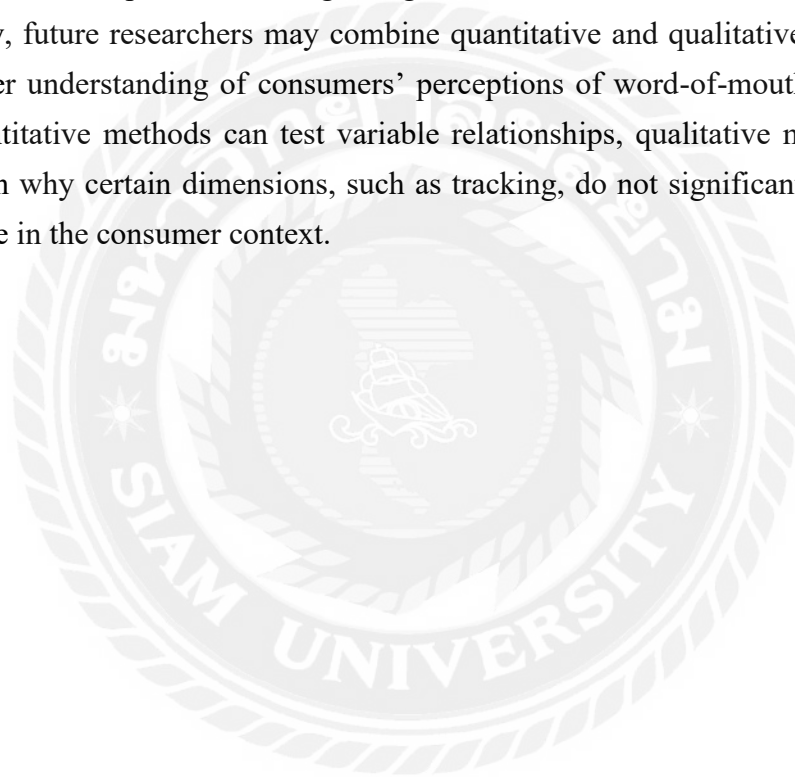
First, future studies may expand the research scope by including other variables that may influence word-of-mouth intention, such as customer satisfaction, brand trust, perceived value, consumer engagement, or purchase experience. This may provide a more comprehensive explanation of how word-of-mouth marketing affects consumer behavior.

Second, future research may test the model in other tea beverage brands or in different food and beverage contexts. Comparative studies between HEYTEA and other competing brands may help reveal whether the effects of the 5T dimensions differ across brands and market positions.

Third, future studies may adopt different sampling methods or larger sample sizes to improve the generalizability of the findings. Since this study used convenience sampling, future research may apply probability sampling or collect data from wider geographic areas.

Fourth, future research may use other analytical techniques, such as structural equation modeling, to test the relationships among variables more comprehensively. This may provide deeper evidence regarding direct, indirect, and overall model effects.

Finally, future researchers may combine quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a richer understanding of consumers' perceptions of word-of-mouth marketing. While quantitative methods can test variable relationships, qualitative methods may help explain why certain dimensions, such as tracking, do not significantly influence brand image in the consumer context.



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Appendix

Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is designed for academic research purposes only. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors influencing HEYTEA's word-of-mouth marketing based on the 5T Theory, with brand image as the mediating variable and word-of-mouth intention as the dependent variable. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for research analysis. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer each question according to your actual opinions and experiences.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Part I: Screening Question

1. Have you ever purchased HEYTEA products?

Yes

No

Part II: Demographic Information

1. Gender

Male

Female

2. Age

18–25 years old

26–30 years old

31–35 years old

36 years old and above

3. Education Level

High school or below

Junior college

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree or above

4. Occupation

Student

Company employee

Self-employed

Public servant

Other: _____

5. Monthly Income

- () Less than 3,000 RMB
- () 3,001–5,000 RMB
- () 5,001–8,000 RMB
- () 8,001–10,000 RMB
- () More than 10,000 RMB

Part III: Measurement of Variables

Instruction:

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

Use the scale below:

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly agree

| No. | Items | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|----------------|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Talkers | | | | | | |
| TA1 | People who talk about HEYTEA are trustworthy. | () | () | () | () | () |
| TA2 | Consumers who share information about HEYTEA can influence others' opinions. | () | () | () | () | () |
| TA3 | Recommendations from people who know HEYTEA make me pay attention to the brand. | () | () | () | () | () |
| TA4 | HEYTEA has many consumers or followers who are willing to talk about it. | () | () | () | () | () |
| Topics | | | | | | |
| TO1 | HEYTEA provides interesting topics for consumers to discuss. | () | () | () | () | () |

| No. | Items | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| TO2 | HEYTEA's products and brand activities easily become discussion topics. | () | () | () | () | () |
| TO3 | The content related to HEYTEA is attractive enough to encourage sharing. | () | () | () | () | () |
| TO4 | HEYTEA creates topics that make consumers interested in talking about the brand. | () | () | () | () | () |

Tools

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| TL1 | Social media and online platforms make it easy to spread information about HEYTEA. | () | () | () | () | () |
| TL2 | HEYTEA uses appropriate channels to support consumer communication. | () | () | () | () | () |
| TL3 | Consumers can easily share their opinions about HEYTEA through different platforms. | () | () | () | () | () |
| TL4 | The communication tools used by HEYTEA help information spread quickly. | () | () | () | () | () |

Taking Part

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| TP1 | HEYTEA actively interacts with consumers in communication channels. | () | () | () | () | () |
| TP2 | HEYTEA responds to consumer comments or feedback in a timely manner. | () | () | () | () | () |
| TP3 | HEYTEA is willing to participate in discussions with consumers. | () | () | () | () | () |

| No. | Items | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------------------------------|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| TP4 | HEYTEA's active participation makes consumers feel closer to the brand. | () | () | () | () | () |
| Tracking | | | | | | |
| TR1 | HEYTEA pays attention to consumer feedback and opinions. | () | () | () | () | () |
| TR2 | HEYTEA monitors discussions about the brand on relevant platforms. | () | () | () | () | () |
| TR3 | HEYTEA appears to manage consumer feedback effectively. | () | () | () | () | () |
| TR4 | HEYTEA can improve its communication based on consumer responses. | () | () | () | () | () |
| Brand Image | | | | | | |
| BI1 | HEYTEA has a good overall image in my mind. | () | () | () | () | () |
| BI2 | HEYTEA is a distinctive brand compared with other tea beverage brands. | () | () | () | () | () |
| BI3 | HEYTEA is an attractive and appealing brand. | () | () | () | () | () |
| BI4 | HEYTEA is a brand with a positive reputation. | () | () | () | () | () |
| Word-of-Mouth Intention | | | | | | |
| WI1 | I am willing to recommend HEYTEA to others. | () | () | () | () | () |

| No. | Items | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| WI2 | I am willing to say positive things about HEYTEA to other people. | () | () | () | () | () |
| WI3 | I am willing to share my experience of HEYTEA with others. | () | () | () | () | () |
| WI4 | I would encourage my friends or relatives to try HEYTEA. | () | () | () | () | () |

Thank you for your participation.

