MANAGING BRAND POSITIONING ON THE INTERNET AMONG RAPIDLY DEVELOPING BEAUTY STANDARDS

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Abstract. This article considers the problem of the brand image management importance, while taking into account the changing trends of "beauty standards" in order to attract the target audience and increase the company's profits. The problem of companies' image and branding is widely discussed in scientific circles today; however, there are not so many studies devoted to brand positioning through the prism of existing beauty stereotypes. The purpose of the study was to consider the management of brand positioning and image to influence the purchasing consumers' behavior, including the younger generation. In this article we described the characteristics of each of the beauty standards. The author suggests adapting and customizing the entire brand "platform" on the Internet to the changing standards of female beauty images broadcast by fashion brands, since fashion actively influences the audience buying behavior. The used research methods are general scientific methods: comparative analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction.

Keywords: management; positioning; brand; beauty standards; target audience; fashion; Internet.
JEL codes: D12; L81.

Introduction

Relevance of the topic. Beauty standards are often used in marketing as a powerful tool to influence consumer behavior. Advertisers often capitalize on society's perceptions of beauty by using images that conform to prevailing ideals of beauty to create a desired impression. By using certain images, marketers and brand managers seek to evoke emotions and desires associated with beauty and the "ideal."

By presenting their products or services as a means of achieving or maintaining these standards of beauty, brand companies can influence consumer attitudes towards the product.

However, this approach has also been criticized for often being based on unrealistic beauty standards and can lead to the development of insecurities in some audiences. Due to the influence of "body-positivity" culture in society, brands are adapting and also showing a movement towards a more inclusive and natural portrayal of beauty in marketing. This is especially significant in online and social media advertising as the advertising market is growing.

This is also supported by data from the Association of Communication Agencies of Russia. The source states that "the total volume of advertising in all major segments of its distribution - video, audio, publishing, and Internet services - in 2023 amounted to almost 731 billion rubles, which is 30% more than a year earlier"[1].

Academic development of the problem. The issues of company positioning and branding on the Internet are currently covered in scientific circles in detail [1; 2] and widely enough: some authors emphasize that the Internet today is actively exploited by brands for self-promotion. Thanks to the Internet environment, "positive images and new perception of known and unknown brands are formed, new values of target consumers are created" [3, p. 111].

Researchers Dzhambinova T.S. and Koroleva L.A. talk about the concept, brand meanings, unique selling proposition (USP), the importance and necessity of developing a map of brand positioning in the Internet as a communication strategy [4; 5].

Specialist Tabaeva A.U. notes that "the digital economy significantly expands the possibilities of brand formation and positioning. Therefore, one of the most sought-after ways to increase brand awareness is brand promotion using digital technologies" [6]. Researcher Terenina N.L. identifies significant "factors that influence effective online brand promotion" [7]. A number of authors report the importance of brand positioning in social networks depending on the segmentation of the target audience [8; 9].

The researchers' emphasis on "adherence to the principles of a healthy lifestyle and conscious attitude to the world around us is noteworthy. As a reflection of these ideas, the trend for conscious, ethical consumption is actively developing" [10], which brands want to comply with, as well as the development of other values in innovative business models [11].

The author, however, proposes to consider the process of brand positioning management through the prism of the existing standards of "beauty stereotypes".

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[1] Data from the Association of Communication Agencies of Russia. Source: https://www.akarussia.ru/press_centre/news/id10634

Purpose of the work. The purpose of the work was to consider the management of brand positioning and image to influence the purchasing behavior of consumers, including the younger generation. The author proposes to adapt and customize the entire brand "platform" on the Internet to the transformed clichés of female images of beauty, demonstrated not only by fashion houses, but also covered in the media, since fashion globally affects the buying behavior of the target audience.

1. Description of materials and research methods

The research methods used are: comparative analysis of photos of brand models in online catalogs, photos from catwalks and shows of fashion houses, mainly for the last four years; as well as general scientific methods - synthesis, induction and deduction.

2. The results of the study and their discussion

A brand is a strong trademark, the benefits of who's product or service a customer is willing to pay extra for.

The purpose of branding is to convey the image and value that the company believes is important to communicate to consumers. Brand in the digital world has become "one of the key strategic assets of the company" [12, p.7]. Brand positioning, especially on the Internet and new media, helps to broadcast the company's image.

Back in 2003, branding professor David Aaker made a conclusion about the uniqueness of the brand, the importance of conveying the unique meanings of the company's brand to the consumer, since the brand is always tied to either the product or the company as a whole. In the dissimilarity of communicating unique brand meanings and "character" [13] of the company's trademark to the consumer is the purpose of brand positioning.

The set of meanings and unique statements of the company that define brand positioning management constitute the brand platform. Let us depict the elements of the brand platform in Figure 1.

Thus, the brand platform is made up of: the brand mission, metaphor; how the brand communicates with consumers; the values that the brand communicates; the external characteristics of the brand; the unique selling proposition; how the company sees the portrait of the ideal customer and what affects customer insights.

We propose to consider the process of brand positioning management through the prism of the existing standards of "beauty stereotypes".

Figure 1: Elements of the brand platform[2]
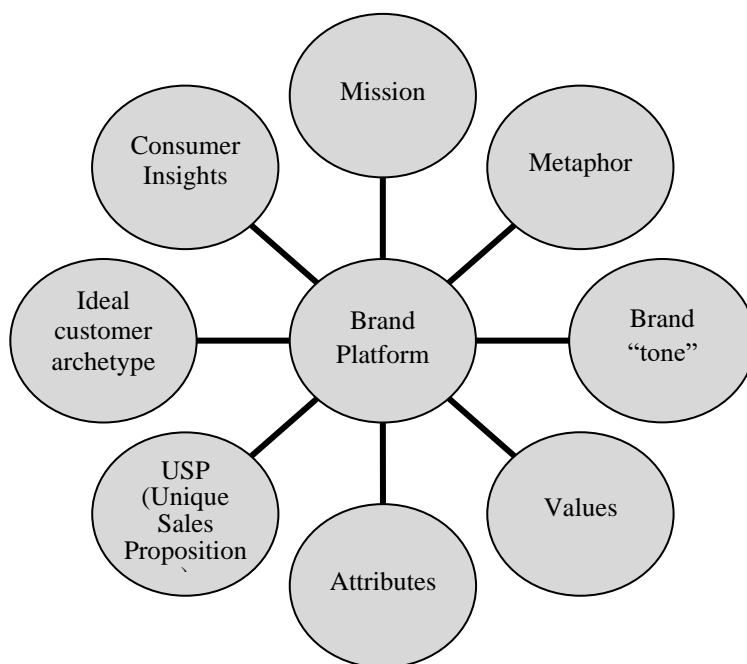
It should be noted that today there is a whole range of "beauty stereotypes" of female images in Internet advertising, media resources, on company websites, presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Existing "beauty standards" in modern society[3]

Trend Name	Trend characteristics
Body positivity	Since about 2000. Showing the imperfection of the body is an example – social advertising of the NIKE brand about people with disabilities) and a person's acceptance of himself
Accessibility for recreating the image of the "beauty standard"	Since about 2003. Accessibility of "beauty standards" for the target audience (director himself)
Tolerance of "beauty standards"	Mid-2000s. Democratization of "beauty standards", including through blogging and social networks, "recommendation services"[15]
Customization of beauty standards for the target audience	Since about 2015, under the influence of the development of YouTube video hosting, Personalization of "beauty standards" in advertising - brands have been adapting to the age and behavior of consumers, since 2020 - the development of their own brands by influencers
Naturalism of beauty	Since about 2019. Brand positioning through plus-size models. Digital naturalness
Retouching of images	Since about 2019. The desire of brands to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality. The impetus for this was given by social networks with the possibility of Photoshop and other filters

To summarize, with the multivariability of "beauty standards" trends, it is easier for brands today to position their image for their target audience.

How brands are adapting, adjusting, and changing their platforms to accommodate trends:

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[2] Developed by the author based on [14]

[3] Developed by the author

Female beauty standards change from one to another almost every season, but there is one that has been reinforced for decades - and that is thinness. Now heroin chic may be becoming popular again, with the typical " chunky and sloppy" as a memory for the older generation of their teenage years and as a new trend for the younger generation.

Fashion houses and fashion shows broadcast the retro trends of the beauty standard: thinness:

From the 1990s to the 2000s, there was a cyclical trend of thinness. For example, another spike occurred in 2007, when French fashion house Guy Laroche presented skinny models with bulging ribs to the extreme during the presentation of its spring-summer 2007 ready-to-wear collection in Paris.

2017 Lily Collins, Hollywood actress, starred in the film "To the Bone". At the time of filming, the girl lost weight beyond recognition, the model and now remains very slim and petite. In some photos of Lily can be seen how she has visible from under the skin ribs and shoulder blades, bony arms and pelvis.

The reemergence of the thinness trend occurred in 2022. The concept of "heroin chic" came back into fashion and the whole world was subjected to it, girls started to lose weight urgently, and brands and online stores began to choose girls with a similar type of appearance.

Let's illustrate our thought with examples:

Milan Fashion Week 2022. Milan Fashion Week 2022 shows that all the models look very skinny and like "skeletons", which proves that "heroin chic" is back.

Photo on the internet:

2022г. Hunter Schafer, actress and model, ambassador of Mugler brand. The girl is emaciated, bony physique. Thin hands, protruding collarbones, sharp cheekbones, with all this, the girl in the photo does not look unhealthy

2022г. Lily Rose-Depp. Actress and model of Chanel brand. The girl is naturally bony. Ribs sticking out from under the skin, bony collarbones, arms and legs, thin neck, but the girl is very beautiful and has no problems with eating disorder.

2023: premium brand "Prada" launched a new collection. The collection featured skinny models with dark eye makeup. The brand aims to continue the trend of focusing on this style - the models are dressed in dark suits, makeup is made with dark shadows and circles under the eyes, which looks depressing.

2023: Dior fashion show: models are refined and feminine at the same time, accents are made on thin cheekbones, thin hands, narrow waist.

2023: daring collection of clothes brand Diesel. Specific super slender models are chosen to showcase the dresses.

Acne Studios brand, spring-summer 2024 collection. At the Acne Studios collection show, very skinny models with a "frown" look also took to the catwalk (this was the "cloudy" look of girls when the fashion for "heroin chic" was just emerging).

Mowalola brand, Spring-Summer 2024 collection in London. At the Mowalola show not only skinny girls with bruises, but also with cuts and band-aids defile.

Photo on the Internet:

2023: Sofya Arzhanykh, Russian actress and model, is distinguished by her physique, the girl is thin, in some pictures even skinny, thin neck, bony arms, narrow waist.

Another trend: photographers deliberately promote the stereotype of physical weightlessness. For example, a photographer from Russia, Elena Rubtsova, specializes in models of this style, she photographs only skinny and pale models. Also, to emphasize this style, the photographer captures models in open clothing to clearly describe this style in her work. She specializes her content on such models to show the active trend of the "Heroin Chic" style.

Brand representation on the Internet, in online stores, messengers

For example, a model advertises a T-shirt from Russian MODIS store and it can be noticed that the girl has excessive thinness. Models advertising clothes from the Spanish store MANGO: you can see that the models' bodies are too thin. Online catalog of the Russian clothing brand INCITY: the models advertising clothes are very thin, with dark circles under the eyes and very pale skin (not without reason in history there was a fashion in girls for whitewash and "cough chic"). Models with unhealthy thinness of the body represent the clothing catalogs of the Russian store GLORIA JEANS.

On the expanses of the Internet beauty studio "GlamourDIVA" presents a new collection of promotional materials in the style of "heroin chic" for 2023-2024. It is also quite an interesting idea for fans of this style. The studio invites its customers saying the following: "Forget about the standard and conventional advertising, because our unique images will take you to the exciting and mesmerizing world of passion".

"Heroin chic" was also found in 2011 in an advertisement for Dior Addict fragrance. The advertisement makes an unconventional impression, betraying a non-trivial solution for advertising perfume, while at the same time causing some dissonance. Not without reason, the launch of the ad provoked public outrage in the United States.

2023 Love Republic branding: Love Republic clothing brand is a Russian brand that is based on fashion trends and strives to create stylish and modern clothing for women. Love Republic is

oriented to women who follow fashion and appreciate quality and style in clothes. The photo shows one of the models of slim build in a transparent black blouse.

2023-2024 H&M Branding: The H&M brand is a Swedish clothing retailer known for its diverse range of fashionable clothing at affordable prices. H&M is based on the concept of "fashion for all", offering a wide range of styles and sizes for different ages and body types. The photo shows girls with swarthy skin, black eyes, hunched back.

Pull & Bear branding: The brand provides products for the middle price segment, which can afford almost everyone. Today, the brand's website provides different types of models. In this case, the model with a light skin tone, a little with thinness, pronounced cheekbones, disheveled hairstyle and black eyes

Lichi branding: This brand provides goods of a higher price segment, but not luxury. The style on which the brand is positioned is mostly old money. In the online catalog, the photo shows models with long skinny legs in dresses characteristic of this fashion style (old money).

Zarina branding: Russian brand specializing in women's clothing and accessories. In the online catalog, the photos show girls with a graceful figure, refined facial features, pronounced cheekbones, with long arms and legs, with a slender posture.

The brand "Befree" published a photo of jeans on a very skinny model of the style "Heroin style". This model belongs to the "Heroin Chic" style, as we can see bulging ribs in the photo. It can be seen that this model was first photographed full-length, then, to show the details, raised the model's sweater and emphasized the thinness.

The brand "Diesel" also adheres to the "Heroin Chic" style on the models. A lot of models are shown on the site with a very skinny physique. Jeans are literally hanging off the models, which describes this style.

2023: brand Ashley williams, positioning itself as a brand of clothing for teenagers. In catalogs on the Internet, the models look specific: with circles under the eyes; some models show that excessive thinness does not correspond to the ideas of healthy lifestyle.

On the official website of MIU MIU brand on the first page is presented the brand "MIU MIU", spring-autumn 2024 collection. The model is a girl of Korean appearance, under 30 years old. The physique is thin, but at the same time a beautiful relief of the body is visible

On the official site of the brand "PRADA" with the collection Spring 2024. The photo shows a girl with a European face, and very obvious thinness, closer to anorexia. It is difficult to understand at first glance who is depicted in the photo: a man or a woman, as the model's face is very androgenous, and because of this cheekbones become too "sharp", which is characteristic of the male sex.

On the official website of the brand "LOUIS VUITTON" we see the collection of clothes for spring-summer 2024. In the photo we see a thin model, similar in figure to the model "MIU MIU". But the thinness here played a cruel joke on the model, because of the lack of the right amount of fat in the body, the girl has a teenage figure, it seems that the photo is a man rather than a woman. And to be sure of the opposite, you should first look at the photos from other angles.

On the Internet we can see the representation of the brand "BOTTEGA VENETA" of spring summer 2024 collection. The catalog on the official website presents a model of Korean appearance, very close to anorexic physique. Literally, the model's body is like "skin and bones".

The brand "HERMÈS" on its official website shows spring-summer 2024 collection. The photo shows a model of European appearance with a very thin build. The model is very similar to the model of "BOTTEGA VENETA" in terms of body composition

The online catalog of the brand Edikted: the brand has found a "heroin chic" style for teenagers. Skinny models are presented with makeup of the 90s.

The English brand Agent Provocateur positions itself as frank and provocative. At the modern stage, the brand is adapted to a hybrid between vamp style and "heroin chic". Perfume advertisements, as well as lingerie advertisements of the English brand Agent Provocateur are also presented with very thin models as heroines.

Thus, we can conclude that despite the democratization of stereotypes of beauty, tolerance of any body, non-acceptance of excessive thinness as an ideal by many consumers, online stores, following the fashion, often choose models with severe thinness.

Zara, a brand for teenagers, is trying to gain the trust of its young target audience: it is rapidly adapting its positioning. This brand follows the new styles that have come into fashion in a particular season. In the latest collection for teenagers and mature CA, the brand uses both the "heroin chic" style and shows plus-size models.

Conclusion

Thus, the article considers the issues of brand positioning management taking into account the changing trends of "beauty standards" in order to attract the target audience and generate value and profit for the company. The author identified the existing "beauty standards" of women's images in modern society. The author presents the results of analyzing the positioning of 25 Russian and foreign brands over the past four years, taking into account the coexistence of different trends of "beauty standards". According to the results of the analysis the tendencies of brands to hybrid positioning through different stereotypes of "beauty standards", as well as to custom positioning due to the specific behavior of consumers of young target audience are revealed.

The author has made practical conclusions regarding the management of brand positioning on the Internet through the brand platform. As the target audience continues to navigate the complexities of the digital age, the conversation about beauty standards will undoubtedly evolve under the influence of changing technologies, cultural shifts, and the voices of those brands that refuse to be defined by narrow ideals.

Directions for future research. Looking forward, we see a need to examine how retouching of model images occurs on the part of brands to promote the brand on social media.

Acknowledgements

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