

Inclusive Beauty - Rewriting the Fairy Tale

Beleza Inclusiva - Reconstruindo o Conto de Fadas

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Abstract

This paper opens the discussion of themes that are relevant for beauty industry and advertisers: the growing importance of bottom up movements, with consequent challenge for traditional brands.

Keywords: Trends; Digital Analytics; Bottom-Up; Top Down; Social Inclusion.

Resumo

Este artigo abre a discussão de temas relevantes para a indústria de beleza e anunciantes em geral: a emergência de tendências bottom-up cada vez mais frequentes e o consequente desafio para marcas tradicionais.

Palavras-chave: Tendências; Digital Analytics; Bottom-Up; Top Down; Inclusão Social.

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1 Introduction

Right in the lobby of L'Oréal's new headquarters in Porto Maravilha/Rio de Janeiro, we can read that the company values an inclusive look at beauty. This is an incredible mission, in line with contemporary discussions and activism. But how can we achieve it, in the context of a company with glamorous brands that have always implied a European, blond and almost ethereal image?

Overall, we have traditionally experienced beauty as something that is imposed and defined by the agendas of the beauty and fashion industry. At the same time, in a society where the body -taking over the soul or the mind- is fragmented and divided into sectors, beauty is sold in pieces, and no holistic approach is adopted.

As we began to delve into the theme, we saw that several contemporary thinkers have conceptualized beauty as the most valuable merchandise. According to Bourdieu (1999), "beauty is such an absolute imperative only because it is a form of capital". Camille Paglia moves in the same direction, when she states that "beauty is".

In his book *History of Beauty* Humberto Eco (2010) takes us to Ancient Greece, where the concept of beauty is associated with fairness, as well as attractiveness or pleasure. "The beautiful are loved, those who aren't beautiful aren't loved." (Calasso, 1991).

Beauty, or what is beautiful, is a construction we use to indicate what we like. The concept of beauty is associated with an ideal, with flawlessness, with eternal youth.

Even in Greek and Latin culture, beauty emerges as a representation of proportion and harmony, of splendor, light and integrity. This harmony, however, isn't necessarily the absence of contrasts, but their equilibrium.

In fairy tales beauty sides with virtue: the witch is ugly, the princess is beautiful. In order to cast an evil spell, Snow White's sexy Queen stepmother turns into an old woman full of warts, bringing the symbolic apple of original sin. That is, ugliness is traditionally associated with sin and wickedness.

Nietzsche (2005) wrote about the juxtaposition between Apollonian beauty - harmonic, serene, in the side of light and reason, represented by Snow White - and Dionysian beauty - a changing, dangerous beauty, the nocturnal side populated with mysteries, embodied by the Queen stepmother.

In the countercurrent, redefining the limits of the fairy tale, it is impossible not to notice manifestations of a desire for multiple beauties, for the inclusion of greater aesthetic individuality: the proliferation of tattooed bodies that disperse the idea of immaculate beauty; women who choose to let their hair go gray and wear it in asymmetrical and pointy styles; the increasing presence of plus size models; discussions about the possibility to express a plural concept of beauty, which will finally include accessible references and real, truly inclusive beauty.

A recurring question to all who work in the beauty market or who seek to understand it is: "Does this centuries-old notion of beauty endure in a society with increasingly fragmented expressions, where the voice of minority groups is amplified on the Internet (even if it is ultimately reduced and simplified)?"

The issue of inclusive beauty is a latent concern, especially for Generation Z, and it must be present in any futurism analysis or robust innovation project. This is an increasingly important fact for all industry, especially the cosmetics industry, reshaping its promise to grant access to the enchanted realm of self-esteem. That is, when we talk about beauty, we are also talking about one of the country's largest businesses, keeping in mind that Brazil is the world's fourth beauty market, behind China, the United States and Japan.

Even with the current economic retraction, Brazilians dedicate a great deal of their domestic budget to the purchase of beauty and personal care items. Sales in this industry continue to climb, especially when it comes to sophisticated products.

Beyond the statement in L'Oréal's lobby or the discourse on Facebook, our daily collaboration (L'Oréal's and Ipsos Brazil) has revealed the need to better understand beauty and its bottom-up and top-down trends, using here a concept from technology, and not necessarily from aesthetics. We started designing an investigation about the theme, which surely doesn't end here and can be further developed in other opportunities and by other authors.

The initial question of this study was: What is beauty today? What ignites the trends that emerge from the periphery to the center and vice-versa? The results brought many other issues.

2 Methodology

Methodologically, we seek to embrace a shared approach that can be expressed by a few principles:

- To deconstruct the notion of time and space in the research universe, through intense use of Digital Analytics. Not just Big Data, but also the Right Data;
- To review conventional segmentation concepts, using multi-varied analysis with different data sources (Social Listening, Online Communities etc.).

Thus our project was structured in four major stages:

- 1) Theoretical Context – Seeking what philosophy could contribute to our understanding of the theme, researching the opinion of philosophers and historians about "what is beauty";
- 2) Social Listening – We listened to what is said in social media, coding almost 47 thousand internet posts by men and women, of all profiles, with reference to several celebrities, from different sectors and representing bottom-up and top-down trends. From a wide range of celebrities, we selected those who had a minimum of five thousand mentions about their beauty. This resulted in the creation of a beauty vocabulary.
- 3) Online Communities – We took the language and vocabulary of beauty learned in social listening to the microscope of online communities, where we interacted with 97 SEL ABC women. In these communities we were able to understand and, as we will see, even doubt what we heard in social listening;
- 4) Segmentation - The results of these discussions in Online Communities and Social Listening evolved into Text Analytics work. This tool, which turns unstructured data dispersed across networks into structured data, has allowed us to give meaning to the statements, constructing a segmentation model that can help us to understand and assess the imagined universe of beauty in our society, generating a segmentation that qualifies and measures these needs. Methodologically, Text Analytics can be understood within the context of tools that allow us to incorporate the so-called "Behavioral Sciences", being particularly useful to understand how less rationalized answers are connected.

3 Results

In this phase we can see that the meaning of beauty has been changing considerably. On the surface it is possible to identify a celebration of plural beauty. The scenario is being deconstructed and shifted, and this deconstruction is already part of the discourse of women of both SEL AB and SEL C. We started out with a perspective that tended to separate the universe of SEL AB and C, but this study has shown that this movement to deconstruct reaches all audiences in very similar ways, at least when it comes to the discourse.

We live in a network society and, at the limit, everyone accesses all references, leading us to consider, at first, the end of a clear dichotomy between the center and the periphery.

They are all beautiful. each with her characteristics. straight or curly hair, the look. confident and with high self-esteem - boldness, sensuality and self-love. (SEL C respondent)

As researchers, however, we have learned not to believe the first - and easiest - answers, to doubt initial data.

Throughout the process we began to wonder: Are things really this rosy? Can everyone be beautiful?

In our journey to understand beauty as commodity, we learnt that it occurs within limits and that, beyond the politically correct discourse, sometimes we can only understand beauty when we think of its opposite: ugliness. It is a bumpy road, we evolve slowly and in contradictory ways, with many setbacks. We are still far from accepting each individual's beauty with generosity.

In the Social Listening stage we identified the vocabulary that defines distinct and complementary movements, including the most restriction as well as the most freedom. These movements coexist, merge and are not limited to one social class. That is, these trends are subject to conflicts, doubts and moments of great affirmation.

When we talk about top-down beauty we are still talking about a rather idealized beauty, with Eurocentric standards, where the prevailing adjective is perfection and "a gorgeous smile". It is the ideal of flawless beauty - a little cold - with a hint of moralism, defined by the realm of good manners, politeness and the elimination of excess. The beauty of the princess – according to Nietzsche (2005) is Apollonian, polite, always positive, elegant, good-humored. For years this was the territory of traditional mass consumption brands, but today we see other manufacturers trying to introduce a broader look, especially in Hair Care. The luxury segment, an aspiration, is still strongly influenced by a top-down view of beauty, but even in this segment innovative brands and campaign approaches pop up to shake things up.

When we talk about bottom-up beauty, we are referring to the realm of incarnate beauty, present mainly among SEL C men and women, and embodied in a sexualized view of women: the "wow" woman, the "goddess", the "diva", the "bombshell". Also here there is a trend to value natural beauty, without makeup (or seeming to have no makeup). In this universe, disruptive elements cater to the Dionysian concept introduced by Nietzsche (2005).

It is also interesting to note that SEL C associates this new beauty "standard" with a trajectory of struggle and accomplishments, especially for black women:

Beauty to me is much more than having a face or body within society's acceptable standards, it's about having attitudes that aren't objectionable... and especially now with this movement of female empowerment, being beautiful is mostly a state of mind/a feeling than standards imposed by others. (SEL C respondent)

Talking about Diva Guimarães: This lady is the prettiest of all to me, because in 13 minutes she touched the nation talking about her struggle to survive and how education helped her overcome adversity. (YouTube, 2018)

A beautiful person is able reconcile vanity, spirituality, physical & emotional care, respect for others, and being humble in all situation. (SEL C respondent)

I think I'm the prettiest because I know what I look like when I wake up, when I'm not wearing makeup or when I don't comb my hair. I think I'm beautiful and I don't have 10% of the treatments used by rich and famous women. That is, I really feel beautiful as I am. I take good care of myself, but I don't have high spending power. What I mean is that beauty nowadays is something you buy and people who can't buy it are also beautiful, they have true beauty. (SEL C respondent)

Thus, the discourse of women who identify with new bottom-up beauty standards generates affirmative, empowered and joyful beauty, while for women who identify with mainstream behaviors and top-down trends, being ugly is breaking with the norm and acceptable behaviors:

A vulgar woman who goes beyond common sense and exposes her physical attributes exaggeratedly, wears too much makeup, which automatically leads us to pre-judgment because of her clothes and makeup. (SEL AB respondent)

A woman without manners, with a sullen expression, it's horrible. Often the person has no way to take care of herself, can't afford it. But we should all do it as much as possible, yes. (SEL AB respondent)

After listening to statements in Online Communities, we incorporated their posts with social media, building one single and robust base, which allowed us to develop a quantitative segmentation. With this, we seek to synthesize the main beauty references for Brazilian women and begin to design the challenges to meet their needs:

- 1) "What a woman" - The bombshell, beauty incarnate, a type of beauty that already occupies popular spaces in the media and has representation in brands such as Nielly, although it still maintains white skin as the main reference. Anitta can be seen as this segment's muse. In order for brands to talk to women who identify with this segment, it is important to help them overcome the pressure for "socially acceptable behavior";
- 2) The Perfect Princess - Here we are talking about the traditional top-down beauty, the Caucasian princess, whose main representative is Grazi Massafera. This is still a very important dimension in quantitative terms, but it can suffer rejection - declared or veiled - from part of the population, because of its distant and cold image. Brands that are positioned in this pillar should be careful not to become too elitist or even snobbish, losing credibility;
- 3) Roots Beauty - Typically the space for a Brazilian activist universe, with less famous faces, but more lively and with larger smiles. This authentic beauty faces both advances and setbacks. This pillar finally includes black women and - very

importantly - natural beauty, without makeup, an approach that is growing among younger women;

- 4) Disruptive - Finally, we see a space for older women, and also for slightly rebellious, alternative youths. It is important to note that, although this segment does not subscribe to traditional standards, we note that after a certain age many personal care rules should be followed in order to be a beauty, as opposed to beast. After all, who hasn't heard: "you can have gray hair, but it must be very modern, short, unique? And don't forget the makeup". We understand that this segment, which is quantitatively smaller, is the cradle for innovation. The industry's interest in following these trendsetter women is being able to anticipate processes that will reach the mass market sooner or later, leaving less room for smaller or guerrilla brands.

4 Conclusion

We leave this dive into the universe of beauty with many lessons, among them: (1) Beauty is filled with cultural image signs and endless representations of who we are or who we want to be. This universe is not limited to the social classes, but crossed by them and decoded, transmuted in different ways; (2) Each pillar or segment described above brings its own challenges, crises, anguish. The brand that walks along one of these segments will be able to approach the true purpose of inclusive beauty. But it's a bumpy road that requires flexibility, patience and, above all, truthfulness and consistency; (3) Idealized, top-down and normative beauty is less evident now it was in the past, and there are opportunity gaps for inclusive beauty. Surprisingly, the last frontier is the full acceptance of feminine beauty, in its different representations.

However, in Brazil, as in other markets, we see the emergence of the theme of inclusive beauty - in terms of ethnicity, gender, sexuality. If major manufacturers used to decide what was beautiful, there are now spaces for other representations and desires. Far beyond a pantone of colors, this is about achieving different consumer needs, not alienating "real women", incorporating and supporting them in their beauty quests and desires. And this is a major effort, both for the industry and for advertisers who are used to working in a top-down world.

In summary, the theme of Inclusive Beauty and bottom-up trends has a direct effect on the industry's business, from the following vectors: (1) There is a greater influence of activist consumption, affecting each group's criteria of choice; (2) The market has become more fragmented, which has forced the industry to look at new and diversified long tail needs; (3) The influence of smaller brands is growing, as they are more agile when it comes to these trends and tend to adopt borderline guerrilla tactics, such as specific activation strategies.

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