

## THE DEVIATION GAME: CAN DEVIATION FROM STANDARD BEAUTY BECOME APPEALING? AN AGE PERSPECTIVE

**Objective:** This article aims to qualitatively explore the possibilities of amplifying the female representations in advertising and other types of marketing communication that embraces mature women by the beauty industry.

**Method:** We interviewed women who are 40 years old and older, and leaders from multinational and Brazilian beauty companies. We also ran a survey experiment testing the persuasiveness of a fashion ad.

**Main results:** Consumers are persuaded by ads displaying mature women, but the industry representatives are skeptical about the commercial appeal of these images.

**Contributions:** The usual communication and marketing practices from leader companies are not grounded by the logic of value co-creation. These companies seem not to be consumer-oriented as a prominent practice.

**Relevance/Originality:** Beauty standards and communication and marketing content should be understood from a social and political configuration that belongs to the organizational field from the contemporary fashion and cosmetic industries. Marketing practices are oriented by power and prestige relations, and by values and norms that are shared within this field.

**Managerial Implications:** It is possible to amplify beauty standards and, by doing so, to better meet mature women's aspirations.

**Keywords:** Beauty Industry. Marketing Practice. Beauty Standards. Aging. Social Transformation.

## O JOGO DO DESVIO: O DESVIO DO PADRÃO DE BELEZA PODE TORNAR-SE ATRAENTE? UMA PERSPECTIVA DA IDADE

**Objetivo:** O objetivo deste artigo é explorar qualitativamente as possibilidades de amplificar as representações femininas na propaganda e em outras formas de comunicação que envolvem mulheres maduras pela indústria da beleza.

**Método:** Entrevistamos mulheres de 40 anos ou mais e líderes de empresas de beleza brasileiras e multinacionais. Também rodamos um experimento em forma de questionário, testando a persuasão de um anúncio de moda.

**Principais resultados:** Os consumidores são persuadidos por propaganda que mostram mulheres maduras, mas os representantes da indústria são céticos em relação ao apelo comercial dessas imagens.

**Contribuições:** As práticas usuais de comunicação e marketing de empresas líderes não são baseadas na lógica de co-criação. Essas empresas parecem não ter suas práticas proeminentemente orientadas para o consumidor.

**Relevância/Originalidade:** Padrões de beleza e o conteúdo da comunicação e do marketing devem ser entendidos sob uma configuração social e política que pertence ao campo organizacional das indústrias de moda e de cosméticos contemporâneas. As práticas de marketing são orientadas por relações de poder e prestígio e pelos valores e normas que são compartilhados neste campo.

**Implicações Gerenciais:** É possível amplificar os padrões de beleza e, ao fazer isso, atender às aspirações das mulheres maduras.

**Palavras-chave:** Indústria da Beleza. Prática do Marketing. Padrões de Beleza. Envelhecimento. Transformação Social.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, several premium brands in the international fashion and cosmetics industries have chosen older women for their advertising campaigns. This change in the fashion advertising image map has gained widespread media coverage, with reviews going from compliments to analyses about whether it is just another marketing ploy or whether the beauty construct is being enlarged.

Besides these initiatives, it is safe to assume that in western culture the body image generally sold in advertising revolves around three factors: youth, slimness, and whiteness (Wolf, 1992; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Their output influences how beauty standards are formed and viewed by the public. Because of this idealized women's beauty standard shown by the media, one in every two women declares to be unsatisfied by her body (Hendriks, 2002; Novaes, 2006).

Under the market lens, when a woman ages, she gains visible stigmas in her body that should be avoided and postponed (Vilhena, Novaes, & Rosa, 2014, Cordeiro, Pereira, Barros & Gomes, 2017). The choice of young models to compose most ads in the beauty industry follows this standard.

Goldenberg (2011, 2013, 2015) shed some light to the changes that happened in the social category that contains people who are 50, 60, or 70 years old. Women aged 40 years old or more interviewed by Goldenberg (2011, 2013, 2015) state to be ignored by the market, which keeps on reproducing images of the elderly from the last century. They do not embrace new forms of contemporary existence, which express more freedom, irreverence, and activity. The market, according to Goldenberg (2016), does not see the "new old", who have life projects, health, love, happiness, freedom, and beauty.

This article aims to qualitatively explore the possibilities of amplifying the female representations in advertising and other types of marketing communication that embraces mature women by the beauty industry. Due to this problematic complexity, since this phenomenon does not respond to only one analysis dimension, we aimed to answer to questions in three different levels – consumption, marketing agents' practices, and the beauty industry field – going from the micro to macro.

We understand consumption as a phenomenon embedded in a socio-cultural dimension (Douglas & Isherwood, 2004; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Barbosa & Campell, 2006). In relation to it, we aimed to verify if ads depicting mature models are accepted by the female public. Can mature models in ads be persuasive to consumers? How does this fact relate with mature

women's concepts of beauty and aging? We explored this level by making interviews with consumers and by running a survey experiment.

In our second level of analysis, we explore the practices from the beauty industry agents, in a debate with communication's sociology (Cochoy, 1999, 2007, 2011; Ariztia, 2013) and the consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). How do industry representatives see the use of mature women in ads and magazines? We also aim to understand the logic of action that grounds the predominance of a young beauty standard anchored in both the physical shape in this industry's ads and in their vision of international campaigns that used mature models. We explored this level by making interviews with companies' representatives from the global beauty industry.

Finally, since this is an exploratory study, we noticed the need to relate the production of beauty standards with a debate about the constitution of the organizational field of the beauty industry. Our data "asked" for this discussion. For this reason, we used some approaches from the new institutional economics and from the market sociology (DiMaggio, 1990; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Fligstein, 2007; Granovetter, 1985, 1992; Smelser & Swedberg, 2005, Steiner, 2006). They properly dialogue with our research material, indicating fruitful paths for future research.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### Body, Aging, and Female Identity

The beauty industry has great influence in the way that beauty standards are formed and perceived by the public. Several studies point out the impact of today's unrealistic beauty standards on people's self-esteem and the widely perceived phenomenon of body dissatisfaction (Antioco, Smeesters, & le Boedec, 2012; Miner-Rubino, Twenge & Fredrickson, 2002; Tiggemann, 2004). Because of this idealized women's beauty standard shown by the media, one in every two women declares to be unsatisfied by her body (Hendriks, 2002; Cassidy & van Schijndel, 2011). Wolf (1992) is among the first and strongest criticism of the images produced by the beauty industry, understanding them as a contemporary way to imprison women after the feminism's achievements.

When exploring new perspectives on the impact of non-idealized vs. idealized body image in advertising, studies have focused mainly on body size, i.e., thin vs. heavy (Antioco *et al.*, 2012; Wan, Ansons, Chattopadhyay, & Leboe 2013). Age remains largely unexplored, and most ads in the market depict young models (Smeesters & Mandel,

2006). Even though some marketers have started using less idealized models in their advertisements (e.g. Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty), little is yet known about their impact on consumers. The concept of "real" versus "ideal" can vary across several dimensions, but it is safe to assume that in western culture the body image generally sold in advertising revolves around three factors: whiteness, slimness, and youth (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Guiot, 2001).

It is still not clear which dimensions have the strongest impact on mature women's perceptions of the ideals of beauty portrayed in the media, although the literature indicates that individual differences such as self-esteem, age, and culture all play a part in how women see themselves and the world around them (Antioco *et al.*, 2012; Englis, Solomon, & Ashmore, 2010; Tiggemann, 2004).

Research on the aging representation of marketing communication emphasizes a process of its recurrent stigmatization through symbolic associations with illness, debility, and inability (Szmigin & Carrigan, 2001; Debert, 2003). Under the market lens, women should postpone aging through the purchase of product and services, since their signs on the body are considered visible stigmas (Cordeiro, Pereira, Barros, & Gomes 2017). This representation negatively impacts women by making them reject their own appearance and continuously search for meeting idealized beauty standards (Clarke, 2001).

The increase in the world population's life expectancy made the contemporary process of aging a phenomenon with singular characteristics, in which new practices and values reshape age identity. This is the case of the urban and contemporary women who are between 40 and 60 years old. In common sense, they are not associated with the youth category; however, they do not recognize themselves as old (Goldenberg, 2016).

Goldenberg (2008, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016) extensively explores the problematic of the body, gender, and aging. Inspired by Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, Goldenberg (2005) regards the body as a prominent form of capital in Brazilian culture. After years of research with urban middle-class Brazilian men and women, she reports that the body is a central category in their discourse, where it is viewed as an asset – noticed, admired, envied, and worth working for. The body mentioned here is not a natural one; it is a cultivated body: worked out, healthy, and sculpted. Even though this notion cannot be generalized to the whole Brazilian culture, it is the most admired and imitated body image in the country and it is reproduced normatively by the media.

In her research, Goldenberg (2008) has reported that women who have managed to create

other forms of capital besides the body seem to feel less oppressed by such body image. In an interesting comparison between cultures, she interviewed mature German women who explained that they believed interesting women – ones that are considered interesting by others and by themselves – had a connection with the intellectual world. They had interesting ideas, were intelligent, confident, assertive, and economically independent, but above all, did not adjust their behaviors/appearance to suit other people. To them, the physical body, beauty, youth, slimness, and curves had no part to play in defining what an interesting woman was (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 94). Contributing to this analysis, Tiggemann (2004) reported that although body dissatisfaction remains stable across the adult lifespan ("women consistently wish to be thinner"), the importance of body shape, weight, and appearance decreases as women age.

Goldenberg (2013, 2016) created the expression "Old is beautiful" – as an analogy of the cultural movement "Black is beautiful" – to indicate the need of a redefinition of aging, both from the market and the society's perspectives. She called attention to changes in lifestyle and world vision of the "new old", which does not resemble the traditional model of aging.

The phenomena of rejecting and contesting the representations widespread in the marketing deserve attention from marketing research (Berger & Heath, 2007), and grounds the search for alternative positions and identities that manifest themselves via consumption (Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Barnhart & Peñaloza, 2013, Peñaloza & Gilly, 1999).

Discussing the process of negotiation and transformation of female aging in the Brazilian society requires debating how it continuously defines and redefines what is normative and what deviates from it among consumers and the industry.

### Market agents

Media agents (magazine editors, retail buyers, creative professionals in advertising, etc.) work as cultural gatekeepers, creating messages that shape the numerous stimuli used to build product and brand images (Solomon, Ashmore, & Longo, 1992). Advertising, movies, TV programs, books, among others are cultural texts that spread consumer behaviors considered culturally appropriate (Hirschman, Scott, & Wells, 1998; O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997; Sibilia, 2011).

The consumption of the images projected by cultural texts is intrinsically related to how individuals understand their role and place in society (Hirschman & Stern, 1994). The investigation of these texts contributes to the understanding of beliefs, imagination, norms, patterns, contexts, and

ideologies that are responsible for forming and transforming the culture in which these texts are embedded (Hirschman, 1988; Campos & Casotti, 2016).

Experts in marketing and advertising can be analyzed as *cultural intermediaries* (Bourdieu, 1984; Nixon, 1997) since they must connect production and consumption. They mobilize cultural and symbolic repertoires (Baudrillard, 1981, Featherstone, 1995) from a determined social and marketing context (Nixon, 1997).

Social identity is built when the marketing field produces and circulates categories and evaluations about the social life. Marketing professionals have knowledge and abilities that symbolically produces the collective with which they aim to communicate (Callon, 2006; Latour, 2005). Market agents play an important role in building identities that can be chosen and adopted by consumers (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Market segmentation strategies are examples of this mechanism (Dávila, 2012; Lamont & Molnár, 2001).

We may think that an idealized beauty standard is a resource used by the industry based on its sales potential. Market research evaluating the consumer reaction to different ads is used for this purpose. Traditional marketing actions are grounded in aspirational tendencies, in which consumers are persuaded by images of who they would like to be or what they would like to achieve (Berger & Heath, 2007, Dimofte, Goodstein, & Brumbaugh 2015). The choice for young, slim, white, and blond models, for instance, could be based on the logic that they are persuasive even for a diverse public, such as Brazilian consumers. In contrast, the choice of images that shows a beauty standard that is more real and less idealized could be based on the recent theories of value co-creation (Lusch & Vargo, 2011). In other words, consumers would be more inclined to buy a product if they can interact with the industry, helping it to adjust what is shown to their own profile, needs, and lifestyle (Dion & Arnould, 2011).

Ariztía (2013) proposes that marketing professionals act as “*amateur sociologists*”, converting the marketing expertise in a study object to understand its logic and interaction with the society. We may think that, through their practices, market agents reveal specific ways of “reality social building” (Berger & Luckman, 1985).

### Markets sociocultural dimensions

We associate the beauty industry here with the institutional perspective and the market sociologies. We understand that the environment where the organizations’ act becomes a fundamental unity of analysis, formed by the relations that are established among them. The institutional

environment includes the rules and norms from a specific context, as well as its shared values system, beliefs, and moralities.

It is possible to recognize a place for this theoretical approach in marketing, but mainly in articles about transactions costs and the formation of international networks (Guerrazzi, Brandão, Campos & Lourenço, 2015). Specifically, market sociology timidly appears as an interesting perspective in marketing (Nascimento, 2016). To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies that use these theoretical perspectives to interpret the production of symbolic representations in advertising.

We propose to understand the female representations that are produced and broadcasted by the beauty industry within a specific *organizational field* (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The organizational field is a relevant concept of the institutional theory that means the space where many related organizations are and relate among themselves. A field can be defined as a social space where a community of organizations that interact with each other defends their own interests and shares their fate (DiMaggio & Powel, 1983). Adopting Granovetter (1985)’s perspective of embeddedness, we propose that marketing actions should be understood as organizational actions that are socially embedded. It means that it is not possible to understand the choice of symbolic content in a beauty advertising campaign as if it simply was a result of an instrumental and rational logic of profit maximization. This content is embedded in a social structure that is built by actors and public of interest that interacts in different power positions, sharing and negotiating values, norms, interests, and beliefs (Etzioni, 1988; Smelser & Swedberg, 2005).

A central concept in the institutional theory is isomorphism: organizations seek legitimacy and absorb structures and processes from the institutional environment and become similar to other organizations that act in the same environment. This concept is useful for us to understand the organizational field from the beauty industry. We shed light to the specific type of mimetic isomorphism, which happens when organizations mimic behaviors, structures, and practices from other organizations because they consider them to be successful (DiMaggio & Powel, 1983, DiMaggio, 1990, Fligstein, 2007). Under uncertainty, mimicking saves time and resources if compared to testing new initiatives.

In the beauty industry, multinational fashion, cosmetics, and publishing companies build their reputation throughout the time, gaining legitimacy to dictate how things should be done. Therefore, these companies occupy a privileged position in terms of legitimacy of the aesthetic

standards and images that are dominant in the market.

### 3 METHOD

First, nine interviews were held with middle- and upper-middle-class women recruited in two marketplaces: an upscale lingerie store in Ipanema and an exclusive beauty salon in Leblon, both high-end neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro. The women were all educated at least to degree level and were all economically independent with a high income by Brazilian standards. In this study, they characterize the consumer perspective of an elite group who are affluent and intellectually empowered. Even though they represent a small subgroup of the Brazilian population, they often embody the behavioral vanguard in Brazil, which, as

anthropologist Velho (1981) has noted, means that their practices often are valued and imitated by other segments of the population.

When approached in one of the two market venues, the participants were invited to take part in a study being conducted as part of the data collection stage of a research project. After agreeing to participate, three introductory questions were asked to qualify the participants: their name, age, and profession. The goal was to interview women over 40 years old, who are hereafter referred to as mature women. The age of the respondents in the sample ranged from 45 to 73 (see Table 1). After the introduction, a script was followed where the respondents were asked to comment on topics such as aging, body figure, the definition of beauty, beauty standards, and their goals and role models regarding this theme.

**Table 1** - Characteristics of the Consumers

Identification	Age	Professional Occupation
C1	57	Psychologist and Visual Artist
C2	69	Psychoanalyst
C3	45	Sales Representative
C4	73	History and Philosophy Professor
C5	51	Interior Designer
C6	55	Film Maker
C7	47	Coach
C8	67	Engineer
C9	65	Sales Consultant

Source: developed by the authors

Towards the end of the interviews, the respondents were also asked to evaluate two different groups of images. The first images were extracted from a current beauty magazine and showed four fashion or beauty ads depicting young models. The second group of images illustrated five fashion or beauty ads portraying mature models, with ages ranging from 54 to 81. The images were presented one at a time without any further instructions or comments. The objective was to record the participants' spontaneous remarks, perceptions, and evaluations. The answers were either typed during the interview or recorded and subsequently transcribed. These data represented the *consumer perspective*.

We propose that women might be ready for different forms of representation and to further investigate this line of thought, we decided to test their acceptances of beauty deviation in

advertisements. For this purpose, we formulated a survey experiment.

Four hundred and five female participants ( $M_{age} = 43.52$   $SD_{age} = 15.98$ ; 96% has at least college degree; 40% earns a monthly payment above R\$16,350) were contacted online and asked to participate in a web-based study. The experiment employed a 3 (model age: young vs. mature vs. senior) x 3 (participant age: young vs. mature vs. senior) between-subjects design.

A fictitious brand called Maya was created, and three print ads were produced featuring three models: a young model (around 20 years old), a mature model (around 40 years old), and a senior model (around 60 years old). The subjects evaluated these ads in order to assess attitudes towards the ad. Since the brand logo, ad design, and product were exactly the same in all three ads; our goal with this ad evaluation was only to determine how each model affected the way the ad was evaluated.



Participants were recruited online, via e-mail and Facebook invitations. After agreeing to participate they were told the following:

Maya, a new brand for accessories, is about to be launched in the market. We invite you now to evaluate our ad campaign. Please notice that this ad is still in a prototype form. Thus your feedback is critical to us. Thank you for your collaboration.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three ads. Our dependent variables were operationalized by asking them to mark in a 5-point Likert Scale their level of agreement (1 = totally disagree; 5 = totally agree) to the following

sentences “The ad is good”; “The model is attractive”; and “This brand is for me”. After answering these questions, they answered to socio-demographic questions, which included their age.

The idea behind a controlled experiment is that consumers in our target group evaluate either an ad depicting mature models or a young model. We used a between-subjects design, in which each consumer saw only one ad, just like what happens in the real world. Therefore, they will not have room for comparing two ads.

To complement our research four in-depth interviews lasting 45 to 90 minutes were conducted with important players from the media, fashion, and beauty industry (see Table 2). Their observations represented the *industry perspective*, and we analyzed how close their views were to those presented by the other group of women. Also, it was

hoped that these interviews would reveal whether the respondents anticipated a shift in the current standards of beauty, and if so, whether this change embraced deviations like age. The interviews took

place either at the respondents' offices or in a restaurant. Three of the interviews were recorded, but because of technical problems, only one was fully transcribed.

**Table 2** - Profile of the Industry Representatives

Interviewee (Pseudonym)	Current Title	Industry	Company's Coverage	Date of Interview
I1 (Laura)	Owner and Creative Director	Fashion (Beachwear)	National	January 21 <sup>st</sup> , 2015
I2 (Carol)	Head of Branding & Creative	Beauty	Multinational	February 26 <sup>th</sup> 2015
I3 (Donna)	Editor-in-Chief	Media(Fashion Magazine)	Multinational	July 1 <sup>st</sup> 2015
I4 (Lisa)	CMO & Luxe General Manager	Beauty	Multinational	September 15 <sup>th</sup> 2015

Source: developed by the authors

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The consumer perspective

Under the perspective of the interviewed women, the following results shows how ads depicting mature models are perceived and received. We also explored these women's view about what beauty and aging are.

Most of the respondents representing consumers did not define beauty with physical attributes. Instead, they stated that it goes beyond physical appearance. All but one was categorical in stating that there is no ideal beauty, yet most recognized that in general women are trapped by beauty standards.

Respondents representing the consumer perspective were interesting, as defined by the German women in Goldenberg (2008)'s research: independent and self-confident. They surprisingly favored ads depicting mature models rather than the normative young models.

The impressions over the first group of images (young models) were stated objectively reflecting no empathy or identification with the models represented in the ads. In fact, some degree of discomfort was revealed.

"I don't identify myself with any of them." C6

"They are characters, stereotypes. They can't be what they are." C1

"Beautiful, but miserable. They last for a while. Their image is a product. They expire. They are not educated,

poor schooling. Just like a soccer player." C2

"They are all exploiting the sensuality, the erotic." C3

"I don't like them, not natural, a provocation...making woman a product. I don't want to be a product, bait." C5

"Artificial" C7

The second group of images stimulated intense comments by the interviewees. Their observations aroused with enthusiasm, admiration and greater eloquence.

"Wow! So beautiful! I want to look like this. Look at this, people! What is this?! Powerful. All good. Cool, very cool." C7

"More interesting. More intelligent, more authentic. They have class. The other group is vulgar." C5

"Much more realistic. I identify myself more with the second group, but not only because of age. The second group is stronger. They show confidence. The first are scared. The values from the second group are much more representative, they transmit strength, achievement and building." C3

"They lived a long life. They can afford to show how they look now. They don't hide themselves. They are warriors. The whole is beautiful in its true presentation." C2

“They are people with history. Strong women.” C1

It became clear that for this group of women, fashion ads always depicting young models no longer exert attraction or identification. In fact, they showed disdain and strong criticism to how young models are represented in the first group of images. The reaction to the second group of images was of excitement and strong compliment.

Analyzing the emotion, and its lack, and the discourse presented by this group of women after seeing both group of images, we understand that nowadays, there may be an exhaustion of images portraying models who are always thin, white, and young. For this group, a more authentic self is a more attractive representation than the young and perfect body.

The aging representation emerged in their discourses is much more elastic than the conventionally explored in marketing broadcast (Cordeiro *et al.*, 2017), including aspects beyond the physical appearance. Aging, for them, means losing muscles and getting wrinkles, but also means losing the need to (sensorially) impress and delight people by the means of physical attributes. They get

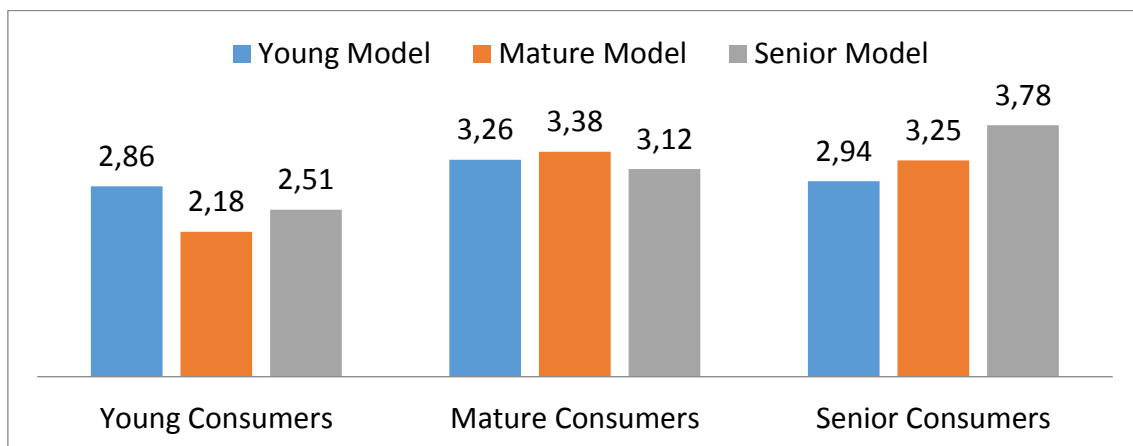
freedom, dignity, strength and amplitude in the individual representation. These qualities become great value, persuasive, when materialized in ads from the beauty industry. This perception came not only from their speech, but also from their reactions in front of the two sets of images.

We propose that women might be ready for different forms of representation and to further investigate this line of thought, we decided to test their acceptances of beauty deviation in advertisement. For this purpose, we ran a survey experiment.

Challenging the standard beauty pattern, our results support the idea that older women can be more appealing in advertising than young women. The three models were considered equally attractive ( $M_{\text{young}} = 4.04$ ,  $M_{\text{mature}} = 3.99$ ,  $M_{\text{young}} = 4.27$ ;  $F(2, 403) = 1.47$ ,  $p = .230$ ), which allows us to understand that any result we find is not due to have chosen one model who is clearly more beautiful than the others.

More interestingly, when we asked if the brand is for them, we found that each age group identified themselves more with their own age group (See Figure 1). All consumers (including the young ones), preferred the ads with older models.

**Figure 1** - Agreement level with the sentence “This brand is for me”



Source: developed by the authors

When female consumers did not have to compare pictures of women having different ages (which was allowed by our between-subjects design), they actually preferred mature and senior women (deviation beauty) in comparison with a young model (standard beauty). Interestingly, this result holds for women from different ages.

#### Market agents' perspective

We showed the discussions relative to the way beauty market agents understand the possibilities to amplify the female representations in ads from this industry, including mature models.

We seek to understand the logic that grounds the predominance of a young beauty standard in this industry. We also seek to understand their view about international fashion campaigns that chose to portrait older models.



Overall, the views expressed by the industry representatives contrasted with those of the consumers. They classified the use of older models in beauty advertising as part of a marketing ploy that would not last and did not anticipate a shift in current beauty standards, at least as far as age is concerned. In line with the literature, they agreed that aesthetic notions are constructed by culture, and that in Brazil there is an obsession with youth.

Laura, a successful businesswoman in the beachwear industry, with 20 stores located in upscale neighborhoods over major Brazilian cities, stated that she did not believe that her customers, most of them over 40 years old, would understand a campaign depicting mature models.

“You do not see “yourself” old. Maybe that is why advertisement works better with younger models.”

When asked what is to be a woman in Brazil, her answer was:

“It is desperateness to be young”.

She did not perceive the new advertisement campaigns (second group of images) as a shift in trend.

“It is a thing of the moment. It will not last. These women are icons, it would not work as well with unknown models.”

Even though the majority of her clients are mature women (over 40 years old), she does not deviate from a rigid beauty standard.

“The catwalk makes people fat and shorter. I don’t like it. My models can’t be shorter than 1.78 m.”

In line with her views, Donna, the Editor in Chief of a prominent international trendsetter fashion magazine, is certain that the fashion industry will not follow what she considered only a marketing ploy. She accepts the new ads (second group of images) as an inclusive movement but does not believe it reflects a change in the idealistic beauty standard.

When asked explicitly about the appearance of older women in fashion campaigns, Donna believes it reflects a concept embodied by intellectual brands, but that it will not last, and it will not work for more commercial brands. She believes that, for instance, that choosing mature models is “something radical” for a beachwear brand, because no brand finds it sexy. Donna also associates these

campaigns to some adherence in European countries, but never in Brazil. She believes that even abroad, it is a conceptual initiative, not commercial.

When exploring what sells and what does not, and for that matter what is considered persuasive to consumers, the industry representatives were less precise about which logics will govern their marketing actions. They seemed less encouraged to try new perspectives finding themselves prisoned to a mimicked formula. For instance, throughout the interview, Donna related certain beauty patterns from models in magazine covers with their commercial appeal. By her speech, it is possible to understand how this magazine, which exerts great influence in fashion, conceives what is persuasive to consumers. Practice is grounded in a deductive comparison, correlating sales results with specific contents from magazine covers. The model’s aesthetic standard would be a decisive factor in this correlation. It is a mechanism of trial and failure. Therefore, we did not see room for experimenting new aesthetic references. In general, these dynamics would import international beauty standards and make tinny variations to adapt them to the Brazilian market.

“We copy a pattern, although we make it more “solar”, it is an international pattern (...) at the end of the day, we keep working with an ideal that is far from the standard” (...) “Fashion is not after a normal standard, it seeks the “ideal”.

Even though Lisa, a CMO from a multinational beauty company, stated that beauty is linked with self-confidence, she also admitted that in Brazil there is still a “foreign” vision of beauty, which is young, blond, white and with straight hair.

However, Donna comments that models who are “excessive” white, thin, and blond, characterizing a “Germanic” body, would not be sufficient persuasive to Brazilian consumers. In her view, Brazilians prefer models whose beauty resembles the beach, who are thin, but have some curves. She says that for this reason, the Brazilian subsidiary uses older models, who are around 30 years old. In her view, old in fashion is a model in her 30’s looking great and “perfect” like the Angels in the Victoria’s Secret campaigns.

“I do not have 40 years old models. They retire.”

She acknowledges that they retire because there are no jobs available in the fashion industry once they get older. Yet she had difficulties explaining why that happens.

The consumers and industry leaders interviewed presented different ideas about what is attractive and appealing in the current advertising image map. Generally, it was observed that women empowered by their intellect and high self-confidence expressed a freer discourse and a broader notion of what defines an attractive woman. Essentially, their definition of beauty went far beyond mere physical appearance. Figure 8 summarizes schematically the main interpretations suggested by these empirical findings.

### **The beauty industry field**

Throughout the interview, Donna mentioned many market actors who participated in the beauty industry, such as fashion groups, cosmetic companies, models, agents, fashion designers, photographers, editors. Within the professional categories, some people, who have varying levels of prestige and reputation, were mentioned. These market actors, throughout the years, have built their specific power positions, as agents who not only participate in this market, but also build this market. Therefore, to a great extent, marketing practice and advertising content in the fashion industry need to be understood as a result of their relations and interactions.

Using Donna's speech as a base, it is referred the unequal relation among the different branches in a media multinational company. Media groups' position should be considered and, within them, the privileged position that editors have to choose their "favorite" models, using criteria far from following a rational market logic, which includes personal taste, sociability, personal relations, among others.

There are other examples, such as, the interactional subordination among the media group in which Donna participates, and the luxury brands and cosmetics. Although having historical leadership in this group – it is considered the main media reference about fashion – Donna affirms:

“We depend of the aesthetics that the fashion industry dictates.”

Fashion industry, in turn, depends on the aesthetics proposition of fashion designers, working as a chain reaction, approaching the consumer, ultimately:

“Why does Lagerfeld chose Giselle [Bündchen] to be bare foot? Because this is what he wanted to show, a regular girl, who wears Chanel with bare foot.”.

## **5 GENERAL DISCUSSION**

This paper explores the problematic of Marketing practical actions before some contemporary sociocultural transformations. The phenomenon of aging and the new social identities associated with that create space for a debate about reformulations in the feminine beauty representations that circulate in the beauty market, especially in fashion and cosmetic brands.

This research aimed to explore the possibilities of enlargement in the representations of the feminine by the contemporary beauty industry, in Communications and Marketing actions that exhibit models of older age. Qualitative interviews were conducted with women over 40 years of age and with high-level professionals from multinational companies in the beauty and media industries. An experiment testing the persuasion of a fashion ad was also applied.

The results indicated that in the consumer perspective aging representations are much more elastic than those conventionally explored in marketing mediums and it includes aspects beyond physical appearance. Aging for them is about gaining freedom, dignity, strength and breadth; qualities that become a "value" with persuasive power when materialized in image ads for the beauty and fashion industries. In addition, the results of the applied experiment revealed that, in a given population, women are actually persuaded by ads displaying mature women.

Representatives from the beauty industry believe that more mature models can bring good results in predominantly conceptual campaigns, but are skeptical of the commercial appeal of such images. In a predominant way, it is perceived that Communication and Marketing practices of this industry are anchored in assumptions of the aspirational behavior (Dimofte, et al. 2015) and the construction of idealized images, which is based on the notion that consumers would be persuaded by what they aim to be. Especially in the fashion media business, there appeared to be no openness to an a priori understanding of the consumer perspective, nor the use of experiments capable of testing new aesthetic references (Hernandez et al. 2014). The aesthetic content displayed in magazine covers, for example, is produced based on the success or failure of past practices. These observations seem to indicate that the Communication and Marketing actions of the beauty industry are not based on the logic of the value co-creation (Lusch & Vargo, 2011), nor are they predominantly oriented to the client / consumer, as historically advocates the field of Marketing.

Beauty standards and content displayed in Communication and Marketing actions should be

understood within a social and political configuration in the organizational field of the beauty industry. However, business action in the beauty industry are guided by relations of power and prestige established among business groups, professional categories and personalities with reputation, as well as values, norms and prerogatives proper to this field. Consequently, the beauty standards and content displayed in communication and marketing actions today may be in dissonance with consumer wants. This study suggests that the beauty standards currently exploited in marketing ads can be enlarged and therefore this theme deserves more detailed exploration by media agents and industry players.

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