

In The Context of the Rise of Digital-Native Brands: A Case Study of SKIMS' Digital Marketing Strategy

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Abstract:

As global consumer behavior accelerates its shift online, digital-native brands are reshaping the competitive landscape of the fashion industry. This paper takes the American phenomenon-level underwear and lifestyle brand SKIMS as the research object and uses the case analysis method to systematically explore its core strategies and success logic in the field of digital marketing. The research finds that SKIMS' growth does not rely on a single channel, but rather builds a highly coordinated digital marketing ecosystem through the founder's influence, user-generated content (UGC)-driven social proof, data-enabled personalized experiences, and a brand narrative centered on "inclusiveness". This paper further analyzes how it establishes deep user connections through value resonance based on the theory of purpose-driven marketing and provides optimization suggestions for its future international expansion, sustainable development, and technological experience upgrades. This study not only enriches the theoretical framework of digital-native brand marketing but also provides practical implications for the digital transformation of traditional brands. For instance, expanding the international market and more comprehensively shaping the brand image.

Keywords: SKIM; Digital marketing; Social Media Marketing; Brand Storytelling.

1. Introduction

In the era of digital transformation, the global industry has experienced a pattern shift. Digital marketing evolving from a supplemental strategy to the core driver of a brand. Nowadays, there are increasing number of consumers purchasing product online.

So the majority of firms have to use agile and data-driven digital marketing strategy to maintain their competitiveness. Just as mentioned in Alish Mane and Bharati Vidypeeths College of engineering la-vale pune's paper, with the widespread use of smartphones, mobile marketing has become an important part of digital marketing [1]. Social media platforms

have completely changed digital marketing, providing enterprises with powerful tools to attract audiences [1].

Besides, the social media for example Instagram and TikTok become the main engine for gen Z to explore and discover. These kind of platform rely on user-generated content (UGC), evaluations and interactive demonstrations by popular influencers. Research shows that Generation Z has significantly higher trust in social media influencers compared to traditional advertising, especially on platforms like TikTok where user-generated content is more authentic and persuasive [2]. In this context, the analysis of leading cosmetic and fashion brands' digital marketing strategy not only has academic value, but also has practical value for understanding how brands utilize digital ecosystems to build customer loyalty and drive revenue growth.

The existing research related to fashion industry digital marketing has focused primarily on two main business model frameworks. First is the influencer collaboration model has been widely studied and it reveal how influencers and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) reinforce brand authenticity and trust, particularly important in skincare part. In the field of skincare, efficacy and safety are the top priority. Second, the data-driven personalization model. Firms utilize AI algorithm and data from consumers (skin type, purchase history and browsing behavior) to provide customized content, personalized product recommendations and targeted advertising, which increase click and purchase rate. However, most research only focus on single digital marketing strategy (influencer marketing events and certain personalized tool). There is a lack of research that related to how distinct marketing strategy work together to drive brand's equity growth. However, Skims was founded by Kim Kardashian. It developed a wide range of sectors, including skincare and fitness wear, and it is popular among many age groups. Skims is suitable for this case study because it offers unique advantages. First, Skims built its entire brand position and customer base through digital channels. Besides, the digital marketing model of Skims is comprehensive. That means the analysis can be done with many aspects.

In this article, the comprehensive analysis related to Skims' digital marketing model will be explored. This article aims to analyze the key success factors of digital-driven skincare and fashion brands by examining their strategies, methods and outcomes.

2. SKIM's Background, Growth Process and Challenges

2.1 Background of Skims

Skims was founded by Kim Kardashian and others such

as Jens Grede. The aim of Skims is to solve the problem of shapewear and convey the concept of aesthetic inclusiveness.

2.2 The Development of SKIM

In the earlier stage the demand for home wear increase dramatically because of COVID-19. Skims caught the opportunity of the comfortable home wear market and successfully accumulated initial popularity. After that, Skims began to collaborate with some luxury brands for example Fendi to release high-end designed product. Skims' position switch from a niche home brand to the center of fashion trends.

In the mid-stage, Skim moved away from rely on the internet celebrity label. First, Skims focus on the narrative of body inclusivity-- Skim use models with different body shape and skin tone to reduce user's anxiety. Second, Skims share the dressing scenarios and the cutting-edge technology of the products (Skin-friendly fabric and seamless tailoring). Skim improve interaction with customers through community management and membership system. Through these measures, Skim successfully transformed one-time customers into loyal customers.

In the later stage, the Skim's aim is to target the global market. Skim expanded online and offline channels in distinct regions to adapt to different cultures' demand for comfortable fashion. Meanwhile, Skim expanded their product categories for example lounge wear and shape wear. Besides, it officially announced plans to enter the beauty market. Transitioning from a body-focused clothing brand to a lifestyle brand. Continuously expand the business territory.

2.3 Challenge

2.3.1 The limitations of brand image and positioning

Since Skim was established, it has been closely associated with Kim Kardashian. Although this enable Skim spreading their product rapidly, this has led to the brand image being limited by Kim Kardashian's own public image. Besides, Skim's release product that highlight woman's body curve, which conflicts with the current concept of pursuing diverse body aesthetics and body freedom.

2.3.2 Consumer fatigue and brand sustainability

In today's fast-changing consumer market, consumers' preference and demand change rapidly. However, the appearance of Skim's products is relatively plain. Most of their products are in solid colors. Research has found that although Generation Z trusts social media influencers, they tend to become weary of repetitive and overly commercialized brand content [2]. Skim have to keep innovating and maintaining freshness to avoid consumer fatigue. Besides, Skim should formulate a strategy that maintain

Skim's core value and uniqueness, which can help Skim achieve long-term sustainable development.

2.3.3 Difficulties in international market expansion

Although Skim have a relatively good reputation in the world, its current expansion in international market is still limited. This is because people from different areas have distinct aesthetic and notion. So in some regions, the acceptance of SKIM's products is relatively low. Skim needs to use distinct strategy in different areas.

3. Analysis of Marketing Strategy

The success of Skim are not by chance. Rather, it is the result of Skim's marketing strategy combinations. The main strategy of Skim is to efficient integrate the influence of social media interactions, celebrities, cross-boarder collaboration, technological empowerment, and the narrative of brand values.

3.1 The Celebrity Effect

The influence of celebrities initially helped SKIM gain a great deal of popularity. It starts UGC and challenges. Kim Kardashian's fame laid a solid base for her subsequent fashion challenge in the internet. Research shows that the credibility of the influencer and the value of the information are key factors influencing consumers' trust in brand content [3]. Moreover, as the founder and influencer, Kim Kardashian's highly consistent personal image and brand positioning have strengthened this trust. Kim Kardashian helped the brand establish a bold and confident brand image. These fashion challenges attract a massive number of people to generate UGC, which further promote her brand and products. This shows the strong founder effect, where a leader's social media power becomes a key advantage for the brand [4]. But this connection also brings risks.

It makes collaborations valuable. Kim Kardashian's fame dramatically increase the chance of other luxury brand collaborating with Skim, and collaborate with luxury brands has played an important role in promoting Skim. This ensures a huge first wave of views and gets regular users to join.

Celebrity power provides trust and a starting pool of audience. It makes sure all other strategies begin from a high point, avoiding a slow and difficult start.

3.2 Social Media and UGC

Skim encourage public to produce consumer generate content (UGC). Successfully transformed brand promotion into a user-driven social event. This not only dramatically increase brand exposure, but also construct a solid foundation of user trust and community identification. The main function of UGC is to verify. It proves the celebrity effect: People might think Kim looks good because she is a star.

But when thousands of distinct people post photos that they wear Skim and it looks nice, it creates social proof, which generates trends and turns celebrity attention into sales. As mentioned by Casalo et al., when user-generated content (UGC) aligns with the brand image, it can significantly increase customer engagement and strengthen the purchasing intention through the social proof mechanism [5]. Besides, it can bring vitality to collaboration events. After the release of collaboration product, the true dissemination comes from how users creatively combine and show these products. Skim provides unique brand service through digital tools, which solve the issues after UGC generation.

Technology tools improve experience and create barriers to competitors. UGC makes people willing to buy. But consumers may have concerns about whether the size or color suits them. The AI shade finder of Skim can efficiently help consumers to find the proper type by analysis the photo consumers upload and the question consumer ask, which increase the purchase rate. Moreover, these tools do not only serve users. It collect valuable data for example skin tone, preference, and body type. This helps Skim better understand the user group, and it provide support for more precise product development and digital marketing in the future. As Kannan and Li pointed out, AI-driven personalized tools not only improve the user experience, but also optimize product development and marketing strategies through a data feedback loop, therefore gaining a competitive advantage [6]. Also, Skim has their own membership system, which ensure their long-term value. SKIMS' membership system aims to enhance customer loyalty through points, levels, exclusive discounts and value-added services. The membership system turns interested users into repeat customers. It maximizes the lifetime value of each customer, no matter how they found the brand (celebrity, UGC, or collaboration).

3.3 Storytelling and Values

The brand's values are the base logic for all strategies. The storytelling of Skim build up brand identity and differentiation. The clothes of SKIM have a wide range of size from xxs to 5xl. In their advertisement, Skim uses transgender people, pregnant women, or other marginalized groups as models. In the context where traditional lingerie brands have faced criticism for their lack of diversity in aesthetics, SKIM quickly established a distinct and progressive brand image through inclusive storytelling. Just as Tariq, Nguyen, and Syed have stated in 2023, inclusive brand building has been proven that this can effectively enhance brand recognition and emotional connection with customers [7]. Also, on social media (Instagram and TikTok), their promotional content quickly became a topic of discussion because of the impact of their diverse models. Besides, storytelling and values provide a reason for

UGC and collaborations. The inclusiveness of the brand provides vitality for UGC. It encourage customers with distinct body shape to post their feelings and experience. Kim Kardashian and her family have a very close alignment with the brand's concept story. Their experience is about self-reconstruct, which increase brand credibility and adaptability.

3.4 Advice for SKIM

SKIM still needs to further optimize and explore on its strategy. SKIM needs to deepen their brand concept, enhance customers' experience through advanced technology, and expand their international market. First, SKIM can improve brand concept by changing their story telling from Body Positivity to Body Liberation. This means not only show diverse body types, but also actively participating in discussions on social issues such as bodily autonomy, de-stigmatization, and mental health. The inclusive narrative of SKIM merely remains at the surface level. However, in recent years, consumers, especially young generation (Generation Z), pay more attention to the social responsibilities undertake by brands. According to the purpose-driven marketing theory, consumers are more likely to support brands that have a sense of social responsibility [8]. SKIM can achieve this by launching #BodyLiberation topic and releasing short videos or articles related to the content. Or make donations to some institutions that provide psychological therapy or other related services. It is noteworthy that SKIM should avoid suspicion of Activism Washing, and the narrative should be supported by genuine cooperation to ensure that the actions are consistent with the publicity.

Second, SKIM's solution for customers to choose product is less interactive and visualized. So SKIMS should increase its investment in the fields of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) to develop more advanced virtual try-on tools and immersive brand experience spaces. In order to address the issue of inability to try products in e-commerce and attract consumers who like high technology. SKIM can develop the AR function in an app, allowing users to virtually try on different styles of underwear through the camera, view the fitting effect, and reduce the return rate. Papagiannidis, S, Li, F, & Alcaraz, L.M pointed out that virtual try-on and immersive brand spaces can effectively enhance consumer engagement and purchase confidence, and are particularly suitable for clothing and beauty product categories [9]. This change this brand into a positioning that combines fashion and technology.

Last, SKIM should expand international market. SKIMS should develop highly localized digital marketing strategies for different international markets (such as Europe, Asia, and the Middle East), including language, cultural symbols, aesthetic preferences, selection of social media

platforms, and collaborations with key opinion leaders (KOL). This is because the demand for the function and aesthetic of shapewear is different in distinct region. As Hollensen et al. pointed out, successful global brands need to strike a balance between 'global consistency' and 'local responsiveness', especially in terms of aesthetics, symbols, and social media usage habits [10]. SKIM can achieve this by Adjusting the visual style of the advertisement and setting an exclusive product line and packaging on the local e-commerce platform. This can increased the brand's affinity in the local market.

4. Conclusion

This study uses the digital-native brand SKIMS as a case to deeply explore its marketing strategy composition and future development in the digital context. The research shows that SKIMS' success does not rely on a single strategy or short-term profits, but through the systematic integration of the founder's influence, user-generated content (UGC), data-driven personalized technology, and values-oriented brand narrative, it has constructed a highly collaborative and self-reinforcing digital marketing ecosystem. The brand optimized user experience through digital tools such as AI color number recommenders and membership systems, resulting that almost all those who are interested in the product will become their customers. What is particularly important is that SKIMS' brand narrative concentrated on inclusiveness broke the traditional lingerie brand's single aesthetic standard of body shape and skin color, successfully established emotional resonance with Generation Z consumers. However, this study also identified three major challenges faced by SKIMS: Firstly, the brand overly relies on the public image of its founder, posing a risk of identity binding; Secondly, product designs tend to be simple, which may lead to consumer fatigue in terms of aesthetics over the long term and affect the brand's sustainable development; Finally, during the process of global expansion, it lacks localized strategies for different cultural markets, making it difficult to fully meet the differentiated needs of regional consumers. Therefore, this paper proposes three optimization suggestions: Promote the brand narrative to upgrade from "body mindfulness" to "body liberation", and enhance social responsibility practices to avoid "greenwashing for purpose"; Increase investment in immersive technologies such as AR virtual try-on to enhance the online shopping experience; Develop refined regional digital marketing strategies, combining local KOLs and platform characteristics to achieve cultural adaptation.

This study not only provides theoretical support for understanding the growth mechanism of digital-native brands, but also offers practical insights for traditional brands on how to build user relationships and tell brand stories

during the digital transformation. However, this study is based on a single-case analysis, and the external validity of the conclusions is limited. Future research can be expanded to include more digital-native brands for comparative analysis, or adopt quantitative methods to verify the causal relationship between UGC participation, brand value consistency and consumer purchase intention, in order to further deepen the theoretical construction in the field of digital marketing.

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