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The influence of media image on brand perception in the digital space of small business

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Abstract. In the modern digital economy, the media image has become a critical factor in shaping brand perception, particularly for small businesses operating under budget constraints and high market competition. The growing influence of online platforms in consumer decision-making has led to increased reliance on media communication strategies that prioritize authenticity, emotional engagement, and aesthetic consistency. The relevance of this research lies in the rising need for small enterprises to adapt to these shifts and employ personal and visual media images as strategic tools for survival and growth in the digital marketplace. This **article aims** to explore the communication mechanism of the media image that shapes brand perception in the minds of digital audiences, focusing on the experiences and limitations of small businesses. **Methods:** literature analysis - for investigate the current state of research on the topic; generalization and systematization - for the structured, logical, and consistent presentation of research findings. **Results.** The study revealed that three key components influence the formation of a brand's media image in the digital space: the quality of visual content,



personal representation (particularly by founders or brand ambassadors), and the consistency of the brand narrative across various platforms. The research shows that even without large marketing budgets, small businesses can leverage individual media capital – such as personal presence on social media or collaboration with creative professionals – to create compelling and trustworthy brand images. The analysis of practical cases and interpretive observations confirms that the media image contributes not only to brand recognition and memorability but also to the psychological processes of trust and emotional connection. The results demonstrate that audiences are more likely to engage with and remain loyal to brands that present humanized, coherent, and visually consistent media representations. The research also emphasizes the strategic importance of incorporating video and photo content tailored to platform-specific dynamics, which enhances perceptions of professionalism and credibility. **Conclusions.** Thus, the media image serves as a cost-effective and highly impactful tool for influencing brand perception in the digital space. Small businesses that successfully integrate media aesthetics, authentic personas, and consistent narrative logic into their branding strategies gain a significant communicative advantage. The article provides both a conceptual and practical foundation for further exploration of media-based branding strategies tailored to resource-constrained market actors.

Keywords: personalized content, digital communication, small business, visual identity, emotional engagement, social media.

Вплив медійного образу на перцепцію бренду в цифровому просторі малого бізнесу

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Анотація. У сучасній цифровій економіці медіа-імідж став важливим фактором у формуванні сприйняття бренду, особливо для малого бізнесу, який працює в умовах обмеженого бюджету та високої конкуренції. Зростання значення онлайн-платформ у процесах прийняття рішень споживачами призвело до збільшення довіри до медіа-комунікаційних стратегій, які надають пріоритет автентичності, емоційній залученості та естетичній цілісності. Актуальність дослідження полягає у зростанні потреби малих підприємств адаптуватися до цих змін та використовувати особисті та візуальні медіа-образи як стратегічні інструменти для забезпечення виживання та зростання на цифровому ринку. **Мета статті** - дослідити, комунікаційний механізм медіа-образу, що формує сприйняття бренду у свідомості цифрової аудиторії, зосереджуючись на досвіді та обмеженнях малого бізнесу. **Методи:** аналізу наукової літератури – для дослідження поточного стану вивчення проблематики; узагальнення та систематизації – для структурованого, логічного та послідовного відображення результатів дослідження. **Результати.** Дослідження показало, що на формування медіа-іміджу бренду в цифровому просторі впливають три найважливіші складові: якість візуального контенту, особисте представництво (зокрема, засновники чи амбасадори бренду) та узгодженість історії бренду на різних платформах. Продемонстровано, що навіть за відсутності великих маркетингових бюджетів малий бізнес може використовувати індивідуальний медіа-капітал, зокрема, особисту присутність у соціальних мережах або співпрацю з креативними фахівцями, для створення переконливих бренд-образів, що викликають довіру. Аналіз практичних кейсів та інтерпретаційні спостереження підтверджують, що медіа-образ сприяє не лише впізнаваності та запам'ятовуваності, а й психологічним процесам формування довіри до бренду та емоційного зв'язку. Результати показують, що аудиторія з більшою ймовірністю взаємодіє і залишається лояльною до брендів, які відображають гуманізовані, цілісні та візуально узгоджені медіа-репрезентації. Наголошено на стратегічній



важливості включення відео- та фотоконтенту, адаптованого до динаміки конкретної платформи, що підвищує сприйняття професіоналізму та достовірності. **Висновки.** Таким чином, медіа-образ виступає як бюджетний, високоефективний інструмент впливу на сприйняття бренду в цифровому просторі. Малий бізнес, який успішно інтегрує медіа-естетику, автентичні образи та послідовну сюжетну логіку у свої брендингові стратегії, отримує значну комунікаційну перевагу. Стаття забезпечує концептуальну та практичну основу для подальшого вивчення стратегій брендингу на основі медіа, пристосованих до ринкових суб'єктів з обмеженими ресурсами.

Ключові слова: персоналізований контент, цифрова комунікація, мале підприємництво, візуальна ідентичність, емоційне залучення, соціальні мережі.

Problem statement. In the context of rapid digitalization and the increasing saturation of online communication channels, small businesses face an urgent need to establish a transparent and credible presence in the digital space. Traditional marketing strategies, which typically rely on large budgets and access to professional production resources, are largely inaccessible to small businesses, placing them at a disadvantage in competing for the attention and trust of their audience. At the same time, the transformation of consumer behavior under the influence of social networks, mobile content consumption and algorithmic visibility has changed the mechanisms of brand perception. In this context, the media image becomes an essential tool for influencing perception, forming an emotional response and building communication capital, which is considered a constructed visual and narrative representation of the brand or its representative [1].

The relevance of this issue stems from the strategic importance of brand perception as a key determinant of consumer choice, loyalty, and long-term market sustainability. For small businesses, creating a media image is not only an affordable alternative to traditional advertising but also a way to personalize communication,



emphasize brand values, and connect with the audience on a more emotional level [2]. Despite its growing importance, the phenomenon of media image formation and its impact on perception in the digital space remains understudied in the context of small businesses. It creates a need for a systematic theoretical understanding and empirical analysis of how visual aesthetics, personal representation, and content dynamics contribute to the creation of a brand identity that resonates with digitally active consumers.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Modern scientific research indicates an increasing focus on the role of media image, digital communications, and brand management in the development of small businesses. Thus, in the work of L. V. Tiesheva [3], the structural components of a company's activities that influence the formation of a brand are revealed, where the importance of its visual identity and emotional content in the context of market competition is emphasized. Ya. V. Salo [4] in his study considers marketing strategies as a tool for adapting small and medium-sized businesses to modern economic challenges, emphasizing the need to rethink digital communications in brand policy. O. Arefieva, S. Piletska and M. Listrova [5] analyze the construction of a competitive strategy as part of anti-crisis management, emphasizing the importance of the reputational component of a brand for its survival in an unstable environment.

T. Yu. Melnyk [6] focuses on issues of state support for businesses under martial law, emphasizing the need to establish a recognizable brand as a prerequisite for attracting customers and partners. A similar position is held by T. O. Murovana [7], who, in her analysis of domestic entrepreneurship trends, highlights the role of digital communication tools in supporting business viability. The study by Ye. V. Redziuk [8] identifies the main barriers to the development of entrepreneurial activity in Ukraine, among which the communication weakness of small business brands is one of the key ones. An interesting approach is offered by A. Isgandarov [9], who considers social media as a means of business communication and building



trust through personalized content, which is conceptually close to the topic under study.

O. S. Zakharchenkov [10] substantiates the advantages of cooperation with micro-influencers for small brands, emphasizing the role of personal media image in forming emotional contact with the target audience. The work of T. Ustik and M. Shmatok [11] provides an overview of innovative technologies in brand management for small businesses, including practices for creating visual content and its strategic use in the online space. H. O. Androshchuk [12] emphasizes the importance of technological brands as drivers of digital transformation, where the brand philosophy is implemented through a digital image. The article by D. Smolych [13] considers brand management of an innovative product, demonstrating the dependence of brand perception on its communication representation. O. Chervona, and L. Hopka [14] explores brand management in the strategic management system, highlighting digital channels as the primary tool for broadcasting brand values. P. Izhevskiy, T. Samaricheva and V. Kudelskiy [15] analyze digital innovations in the development of small businesses, noting the importance of a creative approach to promotion in the digital environment. The publication by N. Karpenko, M. Ivannikova, T. Bilousko, N. Yalovega and A. Zakharenko-Selezneva [16] substantiates the feasibility of using innovative marketing technologies for small businesses, including personalized visual content as an element of brand building. The work by O. A. Kovalchuk [17] highlights the importance of brand management as a systemic process, where brand representation in the media plays a crucial role.

Identification of previously unresolved parts of the general problem.

Despite the growing attention to media image as a tool of brand communication, aspects of its influence in the context of small businesses are still insufficiently studied in the scientific discourse. In particular, it has not been sufficiently studied how a personalized media image shapes the emotional perception of a brand in the context of digital interaction and resource scarcity. There is also a lack of analytical models that consider the experience of small businesses in creating visually



appealing and trustworthy content without relying on professional agencies. This article addresses the issue, which combines practical challenges with the communication features of the digital age.

Formulation of the objectives of the article (statement of the task). This article aims to examine the communication mechanism that forms a media image, ensuring the brand's perception in the minds of the digital audience of small businesses.

By the goal, we were set the following tasks: to analyze theoretical approaches to understanding media image as a tool for brand communication, to identify key factors influencing the formation of brand perception in the digital environment, to investigate the features of the use of media image by small businesses in conditions of limited resources, and to assess the effectiveness of personalized media strategies in strengthening brand trust and awareness.

Presentation of the main research material. In the modern digital environment, the concept of a media image has become a key component of a brand's communication strategy. In an environment where businesses are increasingly transferring their interaction with the audience to the online space, creating and managing a convincing media image is a key tool for increasing brand awareness, differentiation, and trust. Especially for small businesses, which often do not have large budgets for traditional advertising, an effectively created media image can be an economically beneficial and at the same time effective means of attracting consumers, communicating values and stimulating brand loyalty [18, p. 35-36].

In the modern context, the theoretical foundations of the concept of "media image" are based on the interdisciplinary intersection of media research, communication theory and marketing. A media image is usually understood as a symbolic, emotionally charged construct that is formed in the public consciousness through the interpretation of visual, verbal, and behavioral elements presented on various media platforms. It is not identical to brand identity or brand reputation, although it coincides with both concepts. Suppose the brand itself forms identity,



and reputation is the result of long-term feedback from the audience. In that case, the media image occupies an intermediate place between the two: it is a managed projection, influenced by targeted communication strategies, but which depends on public perception and the dynamics of digital interaction [19].

The mechanisms for forming this image in the digital space include consistent content production, cross-platform identity coordination, and algorithmic visibility strategies that increase audience engagement. Audience feedback, including likes, comments, shares, and reviews, becomes an integral part of the dynamic co-creation of the brand's media image, reinforcing or refuting the planned communication.

The process of creating a media image for small businesses has its characteristics and challenges. Limited financial resources make it difficult to access large-scale marketing campaigns or premium production studios, necessitating a strategic focus on authenticity, creativity, and strategic partnerships. Many small brands succeed by leveraging the personal media capital of individuals associated with the brand, such as entrepreneurs, creatives, or public figures, whose presence and authority can be effectively transferred to the brand image. This personalization of the media image allows the brand to appear more accessible, close to people, and to evoke trust, which resonates with a digital audience that often seeks connection, not perfection.

The process of creating a media image for small businesses has its characteristics and challenges. Limited financial resources make it difficult to access large-scale marketing campaigns or premium production studios, which necessitate a strategic priority on authenticity, creativity, and strategic partnerships. Many small brands achieve success because their media image is more flexible and adaptable than that of large corporations, allowing them to quickly adjust it in response to audience feedback and digital trends. At the same time, such flexibility requires constant monitoring and a deep understanding of consumer behavior and expectations inherent in a particular platform. Tools such as internal content, storytelling based on real experiences, and participation in specialized communities



help create emotional resonance that enhances the perception of authenticity. These strategies not only contribute to the creation of a holistic media image but also build brand loyalty among consumers who value transparency and involvement [20].

Overall, media image in the digital environment is a powerful tool for brand communication, especially for small businesses that strive to compete in attention-grabbing online ecosystems. Built on theory and through the deliberate selection of visual and narrative tools, media image encapsulates the essence of a brand in an expressive and effective strategic way. By relying on authenticity, individual presence, and a content-driven narrative, small businesses can effectively use media image building as a scalable and sustainable approach to connecting with their audience and differentiating themselves in the marketplace.

Brand perception in the context of digital audience engagement has evolved into a multidimensional construct, shaped by complex psychological, technological, and communication factors. Unlike traditional brand perception, which relied heavily on controlled advertising channels and linear consumer needs, digital perception emerges at the intersection of real-time interactions, multimedia content, and participatory mass culture. Brand perception can be defined as the combined interpretation, emotional response, and cognitive evaluation formed by consumers based on their exposure to stimuli, behaviors, and brand presence on digital platforms. In the digital environment, perception is influenced by several interrelated factors. First, user-generated content and peer feedback play a key role as audiences increasingly rely on the experiences and opinions of other consumers to evaluate brands. Second, platform algorithms shape visibility and influence the frequency and context in which a brand is encountered, subtly influencing consumer experiences through exposure effects. Third, the consistency of a brand's digital image, reflected in tone of voice, visual identity, and responsiveness, influences perceptions of brand integrity and trust. Emotional resonance, brand storytelling, and alignment with consumer values further enhance brand perception, often overriding purely functional attributes such as product quality or price [21].



Digital content is a key vector through which brand perceptions are shaped and changed. For example, video allows for immersion and emotional connection, creating a sensory-rich environment that captures attention and conveys authenticity. Short-form video content, particularly on platforms like Instagram Reels, TikTok, or YouTube Shorts, can significantly enhance brand recall and emotional engagement. Photographic content, especially when it combines high aesthetic value with candor, reinforces brand identity and appeals to visually oriented consumers. Social media serves as the primary ecosystem where these media forms converge, enabling two-way communication, social proof, and virality. The strategic use of digital content not only increases visibility but also anchors perceptions in culturally and emotionally relevant contexts.

An important but often underappreciated dimension of brand perception in the digital age is the psychological basis of trust. Consumers no longer interact solely with abstract logos or corporate entities; they form impressions based on personalized media representations – the images, voices, and individual stories associated with a brand. Personal media figures, such as founders, influencers, or brand spokespersons, act as intermediaries through which audiences humanize a brand. Psychological theories of parasocial interaction suggest that audiences can form pseudo-relationships with these figures, feeling empathy, identification, and emotional closeness even without direct contact. It is perceived that closeness leads to higher levels of trust because consumers interpret personal media presence as a sign of transparency, vulnerability, and ethical orientation. When a recognizable and relatable person represents a brand, trust is based not on institutional reputation but on perceptions of authenticity, emotional intelligence, and communicative openness. Table 1 presents the relationship between key components of digital interaction and their psychological impact on brand perception (table 1).



Table 1

Key components of digital interaction and their psychological impact on brand perception

Digital interaction component	Influence mechanism	Psychological impact on perception
Short video	Story immersion, visual storytelling	Increased emotional engagement, memory encoding
High-quality photography	Aesthetic coherence, identity reinforcement	Visual recognition, perception of professionalism
Activity in social networks	Real-time interaction, algorithmic amplification	Feeling of involvement, relevance and sensitivity
Personal media image	Humanization, parasocial relationships	Emotional trust, relevance, and perception of sincerity
User-generated content	Social proof, expert assessment	Trust, community influence

Source: formed by the author based on [20-22]

Digital engagement ultimately shapes brand perception, blurring the lines between corporate messaging and individual experience. Audiences become active co-creators of brand meaning, and perception becomes a fluid, participatory process. Trust in this environment is built not through declarations, but through tangible personal connections, emotional resonance, and strategic use of media content that reflects not only the product the brand sells but also the ideals it stands for.

The applied model of PR strategy through personal media capital proves to be a flexible and highly effective tool for small businesses operating in a competitive digital environment. This approach leverages a person's multifaceted media presence to create highly effective brand stories without relying on traditional, resource-intensive production infrastructures. This model is based on the strategic use of personal media capital, including professional identity, creative skills, and industry networks, to bridge the gap between small businesses and high-quality content production. The media image, developed over the years in various creative



fields, is not only a source of trust and inspiration but also a functional channel through which brand stories are visualized and disseminated [23, p. 178–180; 24].

Practical cases confirm the effectiveness of this approach. One striking example is a New York-based skincare brand that, lacking the budget for large-scale filming, collaborated with a small team of freelancers to create a visually rich campaign for social networks. The resulting content, with cinematic lighting, authentic imagery, and a location-specific aesthetic, led to significant increases in brand engagement and was subsequently repurposed by online distributors. In another case, an independent jewellery manufacturer utilized stylists and models to create a series of portrait visuals that enabled the brand to position its products within an engaging lifestyle context, bypassing traditional advertising. In both cases, the presence of a recognizable media persona provided the content with aesthetic integrity and emotional resonance [25]. The comparative advantages of the PR strategy model are summarized in table 2.

Table 2

Comparison of the traditional PR/Agency Model and the personal media capital
PR model

Component	Traditional PR/agency model	Personal media capital PR model
Cost	High (staff, equipment, location fees)	Low to moderate (freelance or collaborative)
Content direction	Often generic, brand-centric	Personalized, emotional, audience-centric
Speed of production	Weeks to months	Days to weeks
Access to creative talent	Contractual, budget-constrained	Based on trust, networks, and mutual interest
Audience engagement	Formal, sometimes remote	Intimate, trust-based, community-oriented
Narrative flexibility	Limited to brand guidelines	Adaptive, multi-voiced, often experimental

Source: formed by the author based on [23–25]



This model not only democratizes access to professional content production but also allows small businesses to articulate their identity through culturally and emotionally resonant media. The presence of a trusted individual with creative and social capital as the central node of this model contributes to a unique brand intimacy and flexibility. It directly responds to the realities of small business marketing in the digital age – budget constraints, the need for authenticity, and the need to stand out in a saturated stream of content – while offering a replicable foundation for sustainable PR strategies based on personal presence and creative collaboration.

Conclusions. The study found that media image plays a key role in shaping brand perception in the digital environment, especially in the context of small businesses that are limited in financial and resource capabilities. It was found that personalized media strategies based on authentic visual content, a consistent narrative, and emotional engagement contribute to increasing brand trust, recognition, and the ability to maintain the audience's attention for a long time. Practical cases confirmed that even without involving large production teams, small brands can achieve high efficiency if they manage to integrate a personal media image or use the potential of cooperation with creative specialists.

The study also showed that it is the psychological interaction between the audience and the personalized media image that is crucial for the perception of the brand as open, accessible and authentic. In the digital space, where trust is becoming a determining factor in consumer behavior, the creation of a media image should be built not only on visual appeal but also on the consistency of communication and emotional connection. Given the limited number of scientific works in the field of combining personal media capital and small business promotion strategies, a promising direction for further research is the development of a typology of effective media images taking into account industry specifics, cultural context, and the characteristics of the target audience.



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