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SOP AS A GROWTH TOOL: STANDARDIZATION IN THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY FOR SCALABLE OPERATIONS

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In modern business management, the concept of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) is defined as a documented set of instructions describing the exact steps necessary to perform a task or process in a consistent manner. While the origins of SOPs are rooted in manufacturing and military contexts - where the goal was to ensure uniformity and minimise error - over the past decades their use has expanded significantly into the service sector, including hospitality, healthcare, and the beauty industry.

The theoretical basis for SOPs lies in the principles of scientific management and quality assurance systems. Thinkers such as Frederick Winslow Taylor and later the advocates of Total Quality Management (TQM) emphasised that predictable, repeatable processes create the foundation for efficiency, safety, and client satisfaction. In manufacturing, standardisation meant identical products; in services, it means identical experiences. This distinction is vital for the beauty sector, where the “product” is intangible and relies heavily on the skill, style, and interaction of the service provider.

The beauty industry poses unique challenges for operational consistency. Services such as haircuts, skincare treatments, and nail design are highly personalised, and the outcome often depends on the individual approach of the professional. This creates a paradox: personalisation is the value clients seek, but excessive variation can undermine the perception of quality. The theoretical framework for SOP adoption in beauty businesses therefore balances customisation with process control. The SOP does not eliminate personal style; instead, it defines the non-negotiable standards - hygiene procedures, preparation steps, safety protocols, consultation guidelines - that serve as the backbone of every service.

Another important aspect of the theoretical foundation is knowledge management. In industries with high staff turnover, knowledge can be lost quickly if it is not recorded. SOPs function as a repository of institutional expertise, preserving not only technical skills but also the subtle service elements that shape client loyalty. This aligns with theories of organisational learning, where codified knowledge ensures stability while allowing gradual improvement [2].

The service quality model proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry - often referred to as the SERVQUAL model - also underpins SOP implementation. The model highlights dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, and assurance as critical to client satisfaction. SOPs directly support these dimensions: reliability is maintained through repeatable steps; responsiveness is enhanced because staff know exactly how to act; assurance is built through consistent delivery and visible professionalism.

In the beauty industry, where trends shift quickly and clients' expectations are shaped daily by social media, the value of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) becomes even clearer. A business with a solid procedural base can introduce new treatments, products, or technologies without disrupting its everyday rhythm. Clear structures make transitions smoother by reducing uncertainty, keeping staff aligned, and protecting the brand's identity during times of change.

One of the hardest goals for any salon is to deliver the same standard of service every time. Unlike products made on a production line, beauty services depend on direct, person-to-person work. Small changes - a different tone in a consultation, a slight variation in technique, or inconsistent hygiene - can completely alter how a client views the brand. Over time, these differences can make or break loyalty.

SOPs reduce this risk by setting out the exact steps for each service and fixing them into a sequence that can be repeated by any trained professional. These steps cover both the technical side and the client experience. In a facial treatment, for example, the procedure would include the order of cleansing, exfoliating, and mask application, but also the preparation of the treatment room, tool sterilisation, and how each stage is explained to the client. In hairdressing, it might detail the consultation process, sectioning techniques, and aftercare advice [5].

This level of structure means that no matter who is providing the service or which branch the client visits, the essentials remain unchanged. SOPs act as a stabilising force, giving clients the reassurance that they will receive the same quality every time. This predictability is often more valuable than occasional excellence, because trust grows through repeated, reliable experiences.

The benefits go beyond client satisfaction. SOPs make it faster to train new staff, reduce the likelihood of errors, and give managers a clear benchmark for reviewing performance. They make it easier to spot where standards are slipping and to share best practices across the team.

Hygiene and safety are another area where SOPs play a critical role. In beauty services, these standards are non-negotiable. Documented rules for disinfection, waste disposal, and equipment care ensure legal and health requirements are met without exception. By building these into everyday procedures, a salon protects both its clients and its reputation.

SOPs also help standardise the way clients are treated from the moment they walk in to the moment they leave. While personal warmth should never be lost, certain points of interaction - greeting clients by name, explaining treatments clearly, handling complaints consistently, and offering follow-up - can be made part of the formal process. This balance of professionalism and personal touch strengthens the brand image and leaves clients feeling valued.

Expanding a beauty business is more than adding chairs or opening another branch. Growth brings challenges that can quickly affect quality if not handled carefully. What is simple to control in one salon becomes more complex when spread across multiple locations with different teams and local conditions. In this environment, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are not just paperwork - they are a strategic tool for stable, sustainable expansion [4].

An SOP gives a ready-made framework for launching new outlets without reinventing processes. Hiring, staff training, service steps, workspace layout, and even the tone of client interaction can be set in advance. This allows new branches to start with a proven system, reducing reliance on individual managers' interpretations and protecting brand identity from day one.

The same logic applies to introducing new services. Whether it is advanced laser therapy or a new colouring method, SOPs define how the treatment area is prepared, what equipment is needed, which safety checks to follow, and how to guide the client. This ensures every branch delivers the service to the same standard, strengthening the brand rather than fragmenting it.

In beauty, a brand is shaped not only by treatment quality but also by atmosphere - the interior, staff presentation, and the welcome clients receive. When these details are consistent, customers instantly recognise the brand wherever they go. This recognition builds trust, and trust fosters loyalty.

Well-structured procedures also make adaptation easier. Regulatory changes, new hygiene rules, or emerging trends can be integrated into existing SOPs and reinforced through targeted training. This keeps all locations aligned, avoids confusion, and ensures the brand responds to change with clarity and confidence.

Lasting success in the beauty business comes from more than stylish marketing or technical know-how. Clients keep coming back because they trust they will get the same quality every visit. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) make that possible by ensuring service stays consistent, no matter who is working or which branch they choose.

For the team, clear procedures remove uncertainty. On busy days, when appointments run back-to-back or walk-ins appear unexpectedly, staff know exactly how to act. If a client reacts badly to a product or a booking is doubled by mistake, there is already a set response. This steadiness builds confidence, cuts hesitation, and lets staff feel supported by management. Over time, it lifts morale, because everyone knows their role and how to handle problems.

For clients, that structure turns into trust. Whether they visit a main city salon or a small local branch, the atmosphere, care, and professionalism feel the same. Instead of relying on one favourite stylist, loyalty shifts to the brand itself, because the experience is predictable and reassuring [1].

SOPs also make a business stronger in the face of change. New fashion trends, eco-friendly practices, or updated health regulations can be added to the system without breaking the daily routine. If stricter hygiene rules are introduced, all branches can follow them immediately simply by updating the relevant steps and training the team. This shows the brand can adapt without sacrificing standards.

Importantly, SOPs give structure without suffocating creativity. Beauty work depends on personal style, but without a common foundation, results can vary too much. Fixed standards for hygiene, preparation, consultation, and aftercare keep quality steady, while still allowing each professional to bring their own touch. Clients get both individuality and consistency.

In the end, SOPs are more than an internal checklist. They are a long-term investment in the brand's identity, in its staff, and in the loyalty of its clients. By embedding quality in everyday work and making change easier to manage, they allow a beauty business to grow without losing what made it trusted in the first place.

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APPROACHES TO THE FORMATION OF COMPETITION POLICY IN A DYNAMIC EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

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In modern conditions, competition policy is the main tool aimed at implementing the strategic goals of the enterprise.

Regarding the competition policy of the enterprise, it is worth noting that it is interpreted as a set of general or individual management actions.

In general, the entire set of the author's publications can be reduced to the following [1,2]: