From a proto-niche to a niche.

The case of Edible Cosmetics

Name: Maria Jose Montenegro Robayo
Student ID: 5853184
Supervisor: Koen Frenken
Second Reader: Christina Bidmon
Faculty: Geosciences
Master Program: Sustainable Business & Innovation
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"Today more than 90% of raw materials [...] are made from chemically processed, synthetic, petroleum derivatives [...] The processing of these raw materials causes the pollution of our water, earth, and air seriously threatening the future survival of all life forms" (Berger, 1993, p. 33).

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1. Introduction

Human activity has been proven to be responsible for environmental damage including climate change, loss of biodiversity, and destruction of habitats of many species among others (Sahota, 2013). As the world's inhabitants will reach 9 billion inhabitants by 2050, there is a general understanding within the scientific community of the two challenges that this brings: the planet's resources cannot cope for long with the exponential population growth, nor with the current consumption rate.

While consumption patterns have not changed dramatically over the past decades, consumers are becoming more aware of the environmental burden of products. As a result, some have become more critical, regarding the origin of the products, the production methods, the ingredients, and the ecological and human safety of them (Farjon, 2008). These new consumers are now called 'green consumers' (Fonseca-Santos, Chorrêa & Chorilli, 2015). A green consumer is one who claims that sustainability is her main drive when purchasing a product, thus no longer accepting to buy products that are harmful for the environment or biodiversity (Barros & Guilhen Barros, 2020).

The rise of green consumerism is having some major impacts across different industries. One sector in particular is under close inspection: the cosmetic industry (Sahota, 2013). In this industry, the demand for natural sustainable cosmetics has been increasing over the past decades (Barros & Bevenuto Barros, 2020; Farjon, 2008), especially within the European Union (Fonseca-Santos & Chorrêa & Chorilli, 2015). This can be observed in the low estimated growth prediction for the traditional synthetic market of 4.5%, compared to the natural cosmetic market's growth with an estimated between 8-25% (Fonseca-Santos & Chorrêa & Chorilli, 2015).

Nonetheless, sustainability is not the only requirement that the green consumers of natural cosmetics look for. Consumers, also seek for quality and safety, and sometimes even medicinal properties in their cosmetics (Faria-Silva et al, 2019). Many are concerned with preventing damage of the skin rather than fixing problems (Sahota, 2013; Yu Lim, 2013). On top of that, COVID-19 pandemic made people more health conscious and more preoccupied with their overall wellbeing (Aksoy, Kabadayi, & Alan, 2021; Dini & Laneri, 2021).

Food-derived home-cosmetics are being explored by consumers as a healthier sustainable cosmetic alternative, known as 'Edible Cosmetics'. This new movement of formulating inexpensive cosmetics at home is gaining traction based on the mantra of 'do not put anything in your skin that you would not eat' (Faria-Silva et. al., 2019). Furthermore, food ingredients are paving their way into cosmetics through formulators looking at the kitchen ingredients for inspiration (Utroske, 2018). Despite of this, "there are many cosmetic products containing natural or organic ingredients, but not many products are actually food-based or edible" (You Lim, 2020, p. 3). Consequently, it could be argued that Edible Cosmetics may grow to become a new trend

within the cosmetic market (Faria-Silva et, al, 2019) that is fulfilling the criteria from green consumer for cosmetics.

Nonetheless, there seems to be a lack of academic understanding of Edible Cosmetics (EC). There is some literature regarding concepts such as nutricosmetics, nutraceuticals and cosmeceuticals. Nutricosmetics are products that are consumed orally as a nutritional supplement to enhance one's appearance (Faria-Silva, 2019; Sharon, Quoquab, Mohammad & Jamil, 2020). Nutraceuticals are "any food or part of a food that provides medical or health benefits" (Faria-Silva, 2019, p. 21). Lastly, cosmeceuticals are a product that are made with ingredients that influence -in a beneficial way- the skin's biological function with the purpose of enhancing appearance (Dureja, Kaushik, Gupta, Kumar, Lather, 2005). However, the nature of Edible Cosmetics seems to fit and overlap these definitions. In fact, EC seem to also be overlapping with the food industry. EC focuses not only on food and health, but also on sustainability and natural ingredients. Therefore, the term EC is lacking a proper academic definition.

From a more innovation-theoretical point of view, EC can be understood as an emerging niche diverging from the mainstream regime products in cosmetics. Geels (2002), Schot and Geels (2007, 2008), and Smith and Raven (2012) have contributed to understanding of niche innovations. They have discussed as well the mechanisms by which a niche innovation establish itself within a regime and which are the key factors for niche development and regime transition. They also point to the supporting influence of wider 'landscape' development taking place at the very macro-level outside a sociotechnical regime such as cultural trends, technology trends, economic trends, and changes in generic regulations. While (the lack of) upscaling from niche to regime has been well researched, there been little attention to how these new sustainable niche markets emerge in the first place. Indeed, as will be argued below, EC development is at such an early stage that it may be better understood as a 'proto-niche' that may, or may not, develop into a proper niche as understood in the transition literature. Ergo, the guiding research question of this research is: *How does Edible Cosmetics develop from a proto-niche into a niche?*

The case of EC is a particularly interesting case of early niche development as it is neither a technological artefact, nor a service; rather it is derived from food products and is suitable, in principle, for home production. In this respect, it is rather different from the standard examples of niche innovations as artefacts (e.g. solar panels, electric vehicles, meat substitutes) or as services (e.g. various products-service systems).

In order to answer the research question, the following sub-questions will be:

- What are the differences between the of mainstream cosmetics and natural cosmetic companies?
- What are the processes and mechanisms that support the development of a porto-niche to become a niche?
- What is the role of the landscape developments such as Climate Crisis and COVID in the development of niche innovations?

The remaining of this research will be organised into the following order. In Chapter 2, a summary of the history of cosmetics, specifically natural cosmetics, will be presented addressing the sub-questions regarding the differences between mainstream cosmetics and natural cosmetics. Then, in Chapter 3, the Multi-Level-Perspective (MLP) theory will be explained with a specific focus on niche innovations. Third, the theoretical framework, based on the MLP theory, will be derived in Chapter 4. In the following chapter, the methodology used in this research is presented. Chapter 6, the results of the three research methods presented will be answering the other two sub-questions. Following the results chapter, Chapter 7, 8 and 9 present the discussion of the overall findings and answering the main research question, including practical recommendations for Edible Cosmetic companies.

2. Background

In 1962, the book *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson initiated a debate about the use of pesticides, the limit of technological progress, and the exposure of humans to toxic substances. Moreover, the book also led to a public environmental awakening, in which questioned how our society is dependent on chemicals and the chemical industry (Barros & Bevenuto Barros, 2020). Already at that time, it was observed that: "Today more than 90% of raw materials […] are made from chemically processed, synthetic, petroleum derivatives […] The processing of these raw materials causes the pollution of our water, earth, and air seriously threatening the future survival of all life forms" (As cited in Berger, 1993, p. 33).

The cosmetic industry is a typical example of an industry that raised environmental concern for decades. Moreover, it has been the target of various backlashes and boycott. For example, ingredient sourcing and its environmental damage are key points of criticism. "A number of studies have reported on the adverse effects of cosmetic ingredients on the environment" (Sahota, 2013, p. 4). This applies to natural and industrial sourced ingredients. For instance, since most of the mainstream cosmetic formulas consist primarily of chemicals, cosmetic firms are then being found responsible for the toxicity of such compounds. An example of this is in summer 2012, researchers by Arizona State University and federal authorities found common anti-microbial ingredients - such as Triclocarban and Triclosan commonly used in soap, disinfectants, and sanitisers - in waterways in Minnesota (Sahota, 2013). These contaminants were infiltrated into the "fresh waterways from waste treatment plants after entering sewers from consumer households." (Sahota, 2013, p. 4). Triclosan specifically inhibits photosynthesis in algae; which is responsible for producing a large part of oxygen on earth (Sahota, 2013). Furthermore, "cosmetics are also being analysed under a microscope for natural ingredients sourcing" (Sahota, 2013, p. 4). Lastly, "the safety of cosmetic ingredients is also the subject of much attention." (Sahota, 2013, p. 6). For instance, following the above example, Triclocarban and Triclosan act as endocrine-disrupting compounds for humans, as well as phthalates; commonly used in hair spays, nail polish and perfumes (Sahota, 2013). Parabens, use as preservative in thousands of cosmetics, has been link to breast cancer. Other cosmetic chemicals that have been found to be potentially linked to health problems are: aluminium salts, petrochemicals oils, formaldehyde, mercury and other heavy metals (Sahota, 2013).

On the production side, one main criticisms of cosmetics concerns the animal testing when developing certain products. "A survey by the American online retailer Vitacost.com in October 2012 found that 75% of women prefer to purchase cosmetic products with a 'cruelty-free' logo over products without" (Sahota, 2013, p. 4). Moreover, for the finished product, concerns regarding micro plastic making its way into the oceans and the packaging in itself are among the main concerns of consumers (Sahota, 2013). "For instance, about 23 000 tonnes of toothbrushes end up in landfill in the USA each year […] cosmetic packaging also contributes to marine

pollution. Plastic packaging in the sea has been linked to the injury and death of seagulls, fish and other marine life." (Sahota, 2014, p. 6). Consequently, it could be argue that the cosmetic's industry customers are being deter to buy its products due to its advance ingredients, compositions, and formulas (How are beauty products becoming more like food?, n.d).

For the reasons above-mentioned, the cosmetic industry has seen a prioritisation of sustainability by monitoring and improving energy and water efficiency (Vital, 2013). "The number of sustainability standards, labels, and product certifications has grown immensely" (Vital, 2013, p. 30). However, this seems to be not enough for the green consumer. In recent years, consumer demand for natural cosmetics has been increasing (Barros & Bevenuto Barros, 2020; Farjon, 2008). Natural cosmetics can be defined as:

> *"Products that take in account, during its manufacturing process and life cycle, some points as: use raw materials and methods of production considered more sustainable, work with smaller amounts of ingredients (minimalism) and preserve the safety of their use while becoming less harmful to the environment, in addition[sic] to have a recyclable packaging" (Barros & Bevenuto Barros, 2020, p. 2).*

Cosmetics have the misconception that they are a non-essential 'vanity product' that is used only to 'improve appearances' (Sahota, 2013, p.4). Nevertheless, cosmetics are in fact also used for health purposes and basic hygiene (Sahota, 2013) not only today, but throughout history. Cosmetics have been used along side since the beginning of human civilisation. Around 4000 BC, cosmetics were used to improve one's appearance and for religious proposes (Barros & Bevenuto Barros, 2020; Dureja, Kaushik, Gupta, Kumar, Lather, 2005). In ancient Egypt, ingredients such as honey, milk, beeswax and others were used to produce skin lotions. Later, the Romans and Greeks adopted this practice from the Egyptians, and around 400BC, they used herbs such as paper, rosemary, sage, peppermint, and lemon to produce cooling ointments. From here, cosmetics continued to develop throughout history. In India, around 3rd to 5th century AD, cosmetics were used for the hair and skin for beauty and medical purpose. (Barros & Bevenuto Barros, 2020). Therefore, consumers of natural cosmetics are in fact demanding a product that is not only for vanity, but also for health reasons.

However, there is a lack of regulations in place that defines what natural cosmetics are (Barros & Bevenuto Barros, 2020; Farjon, 2008), nor how they should be made (Fonseca-Santos & Chorrêa & Chorilli, 2015). Some products that use these words might contain only up to 1% of these ingredients (You Lim, 2020). This has led to different agents developing their own standards and certifications (Fonseca-Santos & Chorrêa & Chorilli, 2015), which can be confusing for the consumer. How to choose a product knowing that will satisfy your needs and desires, if there is not an standardised form of production? Therefore, innovation in the cosmetic market is being driven by consumers demanding the use of safe (Faria-Silva et al. 2019) and sustainable ingredients, production, and packaging (Sahota, 2013).

Consumers nowadays are looking for products that heals the skin, rather than damaging in the long term (You Lim, 2020), while discovering the intersection between beauty, nutrition, and wellness (Mangum, 2022). Reinforcing this idea is the new trend among consumers in which they believe that anything that comes in contact with the skin will be absorbed by the body (Utroske, 2018). “If you wouldn’t eat something, why would you put it on your skin or in your hair?” (As cited in Utroske, 2018, para. 2). The skin is the largest organ of the body, which also acts as a protective shield for our organs (National Geographic, 2017), and consumers are becoming aware that what might be nutritious on the inside might do the same on the outside. “Consumers take kitchen inspirations, making natural beauty treatments at home such as detox make with grapefruit juice and yogurt to remove dead skin cells and turmeric masks to exfoliate and unify skin pigmentation” (Culliney, 2019, para. 6). The EC market has seen an increase on investment of ‘green skin-friendly’ products that are produced using natural compounds as ingredients, including food ingredients (Faria-Silva et. al., 2019), blurring the boundaries between food and cosmetics (How are beauty products becoming more like food?, n.d). EC are therefore products that fulfil the following criteria:

1. If you would not eat it, do not put it on your skin.
2. Ingredients are 100% naturally sourced.
3. Ingredients are sustainably sourced and produced.
4. Products are topically applied.

3. Theory

Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) theory aims to conceptualise how technological transitions happen at macro, meso and micro level (Geels. 2002). Geels defined Technological Transitions (TT) as a "major technological transformations in the way societal functions such as transportation, communication, housing, feeding, are fulfilled" (Geels, 2002, p. 1257). Nonetheless, transitions are not necessarily limited to technological changes only. Transitions also refer to changes in the whole milieu, including changes in the market, regulations, networks, infrastructure and symbolism (Geels, 2002).

MLP theory is holistic in nature considering that its level of analysis is at the macro, meso and micro levels. Correspondingly, the theory introduces concepts for each of the level of analysis. At the macro level (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering 2010), the Socio-Technical Landscape (STL) is defined as "a set of deep structural trends" or "external structure or context for interactions of actors" that "refers to wider technology-external factors" (Geels, 2002, p. 1260). Examples of such factors are oil prices, cultural and normative values, environmental problems, economic growth and many more (Geels, 2002). STL "changes autonomously and is beyond actors' direct influence" (Bidmon & Knab, 2018, p. 905); while putting pressure bottom down, creating an opening for new technologies to develop (Geels, 2002).

At the meso level, the concept of Socio-Technical Regimes (STRs) is introduced (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering 2010). An STR is a complex network "of engineering practices, production process technologies, product characteristics, skills and procedures, ways of handling relevant artefacts and persons, ways of defining problems, […] governments structures, manufacturing processes, product characteristics, users, policy makers, societal groups, scientist, capital banks" (Geels, 2002, p. 1259-1260). Within this complex network, there are set rules and institutions that represent power, cultural structures, and that are the guiding force enabling or constraining regime actors' choices and behaviours (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering 2010). Therefore, STR are in nature resistant to change due to the complexity of networks (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering 2010).

Moreover, TT have difficulty breaking through the already established socio-institutions framework due to their reinforcing characteristics of the STR (Geels, 2002). Geels states that STR are routine based behaviour, which means that patterns of behaviour are re-enforced by precisely those individuals who perform these tasks everyday (2002). Nevertheless, regimes are stable but not static. Socio Technical Regimes in fact encourage incremental changes or innovations that could lead to future modifications in the whole regime (Bidmon & Knab, 2018; Geels, 2002). The changes happen slowly through a process of co-evolution (Geels, 2002) that happens at the micro level; niche innovations (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering 2010).

Niches are the spaces "innovations are developed and from where they can grow and replace regime practices" (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering 2010, p. 61). These innovations do

not come to be as a strategic activity by some actors. They are rather born as a parallel activity to the STR developed by a small team of developers (Kemp, Schot & Hoogma, 1998, p. 176). Niches have certain characteristics that distinguishes them from the STL and STR. One main characteristic is that niches are located in a special 'protective' space where they are isolated from the rules of the dominant regime (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering 2010). This protection "enables actors to develop and apply an innovation without immediate or direct pressure from existing regimes" (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering 2010, p. 61). The protection streams from two sources. First, a geographical protection meaning an innovation being developed in a specific region of the world that thus then protects the innovation from the STR. Second, through institutional protection, such as specific legal frameworks (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering 2010). Niches are then "a new and relatively *unstable* [sic] set of rules and institutions for innovative practices" that emerged through experimental projects created by niche actors that "deviates in the way social needs are fulfilled" (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering, 2010, p. 61). Niches are the place for visionary actors with innovative social or technological innovations (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering 2010).

Why niches important?

It is important to note that within MLP theory, TT are processes of simultaneous interactions between the macro, meso and micro levels (Bidmon & Knab, 2018, p. 905). Respectively, problems that might appear in the STRs and the STL are the motor for niche innovations (Geels, 2002). These niches may then eventually develop into a new STR (Schot & Geels, 2007; Kemp, Schot & Hoogma, 1998). Therefore, niches play a special role within the MLP framework. They provide the foundation for changes in the STRs (Geels, 2002). Hence, niches are important for TTs for the following reasons:

(1) They provide a protective space from the STR for learning processes, network building and experimentation (Geels, 2002; Kemp, Schot & Hoogma, 1998),

(2) They help demonstrate the viability of a new innovation and provide financial support for further development of such innovation (Kemp, Schot & Hoogma, 1998),

(3) They help building constituency for the innovation (Kemp, Schot & Hoogma, 1998)

(4) They are the product of actors trying to solve current problems in the STR (Geels, 2002)

Furthermore, Raven, Van den Bosch and Wetering (2010) have contributed to the transition literature by conceptualising niche innovations not only as technological but also as social. Social Innovations (SIs) can be defined as:

> "So in the context of transitions, social innovation refers to innovating the social (in co-evolution with the technical) and to innovating with social goals […] innovations that minimise negative social effects and improve issues like equity between social

groups, more democratic decision making and less stress on the natural environment." (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering, 2010, pp. 58-59)

Social innovations are a key part of TT due to the fact that often times such innovations originates within the civil society (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering 2010). Social innovations are often Grassroots Innovations (GIs). Seyfang and Longhurst defined them as (2013):

> *"Innovative networks of activists and organisations that lead bottom-up solutions for sustainable development; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved [...] grassroots initiatives tend to operate in civil society arenas and involve committed activists who experiment with social innovations as well as using greener technologies and techniques"* (Seyfang & Longhurst, 2013, p. 883)

Examples of grassroots innovations include: low-impact development projects and alternative food network (Seyfang & Longhurst, 2013).

How are niches created?

Niches materialise as the product of organised actions by a group of actors who aim to solve a problem with the current regime (Geels, 2002; Schot & Geels, 2007); "they do not pre-exist, waiting to be filled" (Raven & Geels, 2010, p. 89). Consequently, niche formation cannot be controlled given the fact that they are related to changes, shifts and structural problems of the current STR (Kemp, Schot & Hoogma, 1998). The very initial stages of how are niche created are not covered by MLP theory. However, there are few authors discussing the very early stages of innovation.

Kemp, Schot and Hoogma (1998) have identify three important factors in the niche development process: (1) Expectations and their articulation, (2) Network formation, and (3) Learning process (See Table 1). These factors build on top of each other creating a reinforcing mechanism. Expectations are pivotal for the building of the Network. Same goes for the role of Network in the building of Learning processes.

Factors	Purpose
1) Expectations	1) They provide direction to local projects and innovative ideas (Raven & Geels, 2010), 2) "They provide direction to learning processes, attract attention, and legitimate (continuing) protection and nurturing" (Schot & Geels, 2008, p. 540). 3) They are also key to attract attention and resources for further development of the innovation. 4) Articulating expectations at the niche level is key because it is the way to express how the innovation will function and how it will help to solve a problem at the regime level (Kemp, Schot & Hoogma, 1998). 5) Expectations then act as a mediator between global cognitive rules and local projects (Raven & Geels, 2010).
2) Network Formation	1) It "is important to create a constituency behind the new technology, facilitate interactions between relevant stakeholders, and provide the necessary resources (money, people, expertise)" (Kemp, Schot & Geels, 2008, p. 540).
3) Learning Process	1) An ongoing learning process is key in niche development because it allows to increase the chances of diffusion of the innovation by enabling adjustments of the innovation (Raven, Van den Bosch & Wetering 2010).

Table 1. Factors influencing niche development.

Building on these factors, Lopolito, Morone and Sisto (2011) developed three mechanisms for niche development based on Strategic Niche Management (SNM): 1) Willingness, 2) Power and 3) Knowledge (See Figure 1). However, SNM is about the mechanisms or factors that impact the success or failure of a niche innovation, but it does not reveal the mechanisms through which niches are formatted in the first place.

Building upon this idea, Schot and Geels (2008) contributed with the importance of differentiating between local socio-technical projects and the niche level (See Figure 2) "which consists of an emerging community that shares cognitive, formal and normative rules" (Schot & Geels, 2008, p. 543). They then argue that niche development should be conceptualised as simultaneous two-level process (See figure 3), in which the local projects and the global niche level are in constant interaction.

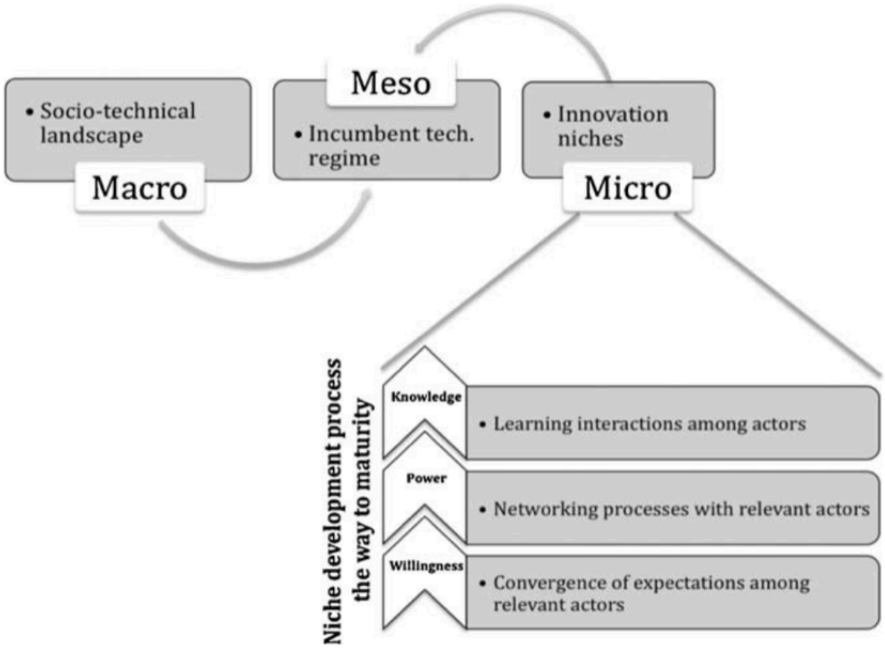
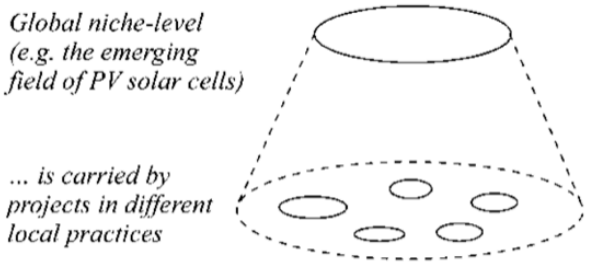


Figure 1. *Note.* Reprinted from "Strategic niche management and sustainable innovation journeys: theory, findings, research agenda, and policy" by Schot, J., & Geels, F. W, 2008, *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management,* 20(5), 537-554. Copyright 2022 Informa UK Limited.



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A good example of this is the research of Truffer (2003) about user-led innovations and the development of car sharing in Switzerland. His research depicts how early users play a pivotal role in the early development of a niche innovation. Such early consumers shape the quality characteristics of the products, the perception of costs and the overall product image of the

innovation (Truffer, 2003). Ultimately, Truffer's analysis still regards to the early developments of a niche and not how niches are created in the first place.

A complementing concept for this research is the notion of Institutional Entrepreneurship introduced by Battilana, Leca and Boxenbum (2009). Institutional Entrepreneurship as a framework puts the emphasis on the role of actors and their agency for institutional change. Institutions can be described as a set of informal and formal rules that provide the structure and coordination of patterns of behaviour (Pelzer, Frenken & Boon, 2019). An example of this is the institution in place for Edible Cosmetics. The criteria ruling the present institution is that cosmetics are nor made out of food, but rather made industrially. This is the institution that Edible Cosmetic is challenging. Consequently, institutional entrepreneurs can be defined as "agents who initiate, and actively participate in the implementation of, changes that diverge from existing institutions, independent of whether the initial intent was to change the institutional environment and whether the changes were successfully implemented" (Batillana, Leca & Boxenbaum, 2009, p. 72). Accordingly, in order for actors to be consider institutional entrepreneurs, they have to "(1) initiate divergent changes; and (2) actively participate in the implementation of these changes" (Battilana, Leca & Boxenbaum, 2009, p, 68). Therefore, Institutional Entrepreneurship acts as a complementing concept to niche theory, given the fact that it does not focus on the success nor the failure of the innovation, but in the process of changing institutions.

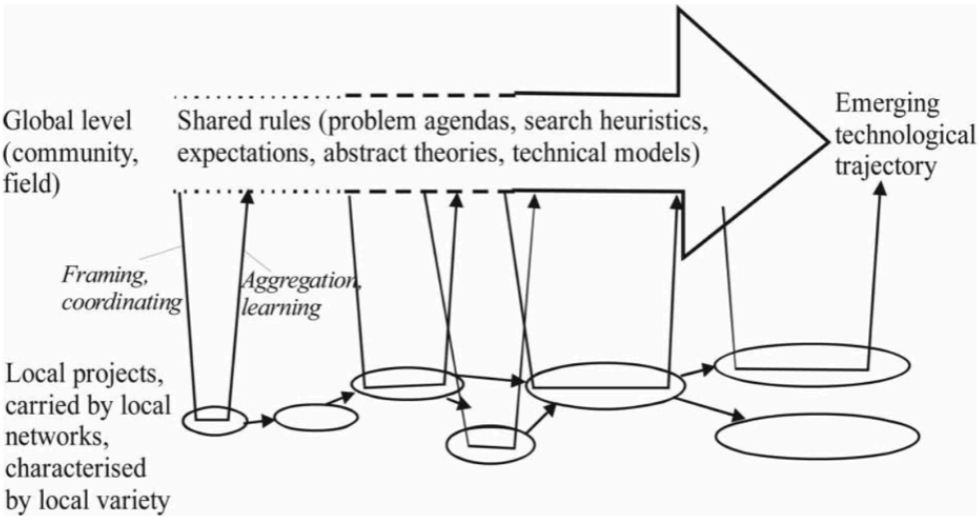

Figure 3. *Note.* Reprinted from "Strategic niche management and sustainable innovation journeys: theory, findings, research agenda, and policy" by Schot, J., & Geels, F. W, 2008, *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management,* 20(5), 537-554. Copyright 2022 Informa UK Limited.

Actors who can be regarded as Institutional Entrepreneurship, must actively seek to mobilise resource in order to be able to implement the desired change within the institution. Nonetheless, actors do not necessarily need to be aware of these efforts, nor constitute them as such. They in fact can unintentionally generate change without knowing that they are doing so.

Moreover, the concept of institutional entrepreneurship is in line with the traditional view of entrepreneurs as creators of new Business Models (Batillana, Leca & Boxenbaum, 2009). Entrepreneurs, as the actors of change (intentionally or unintentionally), most likely will use five main strategies for implementing institutional change, with are: framing, theorization, stimulation, collaboration, lobbying and negotiation (Pelzer, Frenken & Boon, 2019). Nonetheless, only the first two strategies (framing and theorization) are relevant for this research, due to the fact that framing and theorising occur in the early stages of innovation. Framing and theorization should be understood as strategies that go hand by hand. "Jointly, framing and theorization create a vision for divergent change" (Pelzer, Frenken & Boon, 2019, p. 3). Framing refers to the purposefully usage of frames to *generate meaning* for a phenomenon. There are three different types of framing: 1) Diagnostic which refers to an analysis of the problem at hand, 2) Prognostic which refers to a proposed solution, and 3) Motivational which refers to a collective call for action. Theorization complements framing by providing a model conceiving how the innovation could unfold in a specific milieu. The generation of visions by entrepreneurs is pivotal for an innovation because they not only give direction and mobilise allies, but as well because they generate pressure for those institutions maintaining the current STR (Pelzer, Frenken & Boon, 2019).

Despite the wide literature regarding niche innovations, niche development, and institutional entrepreneurship, there is a gap in the literature regarding niche formation. Niche innovations and niche development are mainly concerned with a successful penetration of the STR and strategies to do so, and institutional entrepreneurship deals specifically with institutional change. This research focuses on the peculiar phenomenon of niche formation of an innovation that is not technological, nor a service. Ergo, in the next chapter, this research will borrow some theoretical notions from above and will develop an analytical framework to help explore the specific process of niche formation (See figure 4).

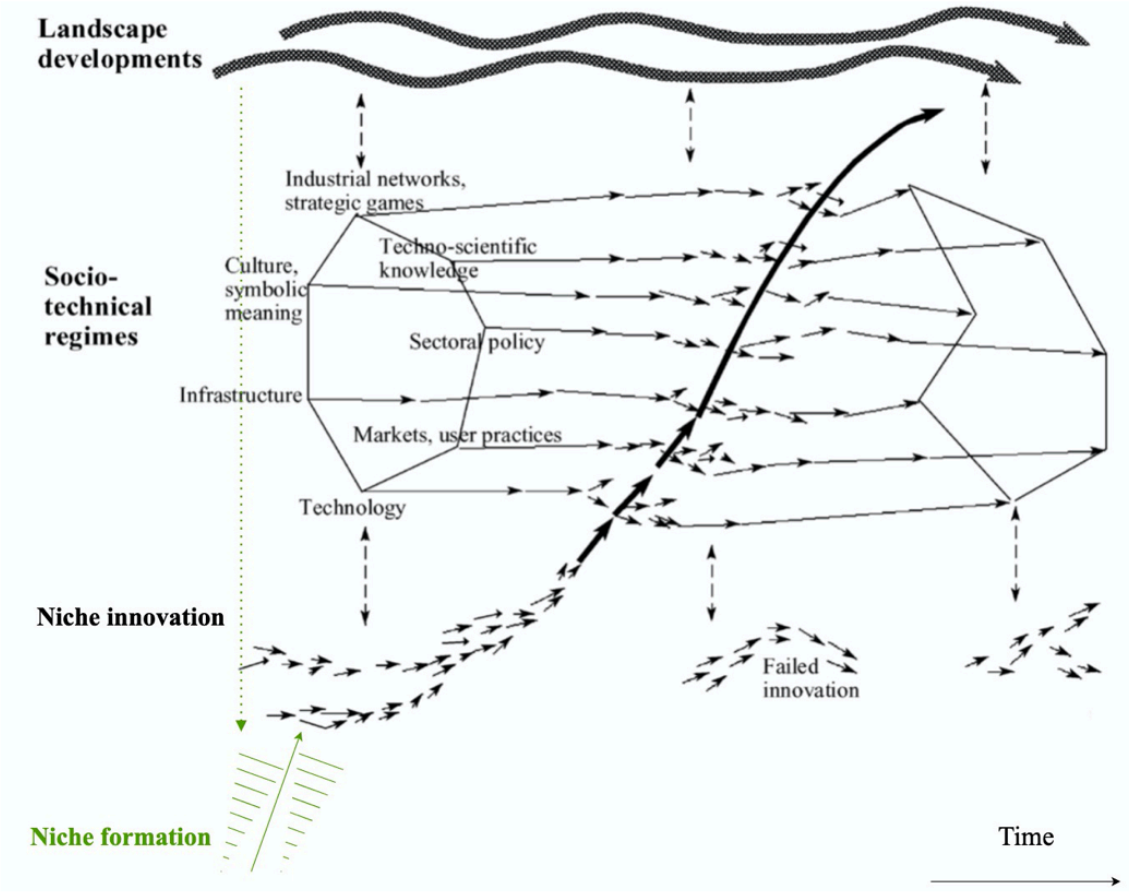

Figure 4. *Note.* Adapted from "Technological transitions as evolutionary reconfiguration processes: a multi-level perspective and a case-study" by Geels, F. W, 2002, *Research Policy,* 31(8-9), 1257-1274. Copyright 2022 Elservier.

4. Framework

As above mentioned, the developments of the MLP theory and SNM focus specifically on the mechanisms or factors that impact the success or failure of a niche innovation, not the mechanisms through which niches are formatted in the first place. Nevertheless, MLP and SNM literature provide a well-founded baseline for the intent of this research. By borrowing some concepts from MLP and SNM literature, an analytical framework was created in order to answer the research question and sub-questions.

This research will combine different theoretical notions above mentioned to develop a comprehensive analytical framework for the purpose of this research. Following Truffer's (2003) and Batillana, Leca & Boxenbaum (2009) research design, this research will focus on users; specifically Niche Entrepreneurs (NE). Moreover, the theoretical notions of framing and theorization as strategies for institutional entrepreneurship from Pelzer, Frenken, and Boon (2019) will be used as well. On top of that, Kemp, Schot and Hoogma's (1998) identified three reinforcing factors of the niche development process: (1) Expectations and their articulation, (2) Network formation, and (3) Learning Process. As seen in the literature, these concepts are the baseline for niche development and the best factors for success prediction. Furthermore, Lopolito, Morone and Sisto (2011) divided the niche development process into four stages and identified in which stage is present each of Kemp, Schot and Hoogma's factors.

Nonetheless, this research will add one factor to be consider in the niche formation process: The identification of a problem in the regime. As the MLP and SNM literature have shown, niche ideas are born from the identification of a problem in the current regime (Geels, 2002; Kemp, Schot and Hoogma, 1998). However, this very simple but relevant step seems to be understudied in the literature. When do actors consider a mismatch in the regime a problem? How does this influence the niche creation process? What drives actors to act upon the regime problems? What are the strategies in niche development? Therefore, the analytical framework that will be used to answer the research question will be exploring the importance of problem identification in the regime and how this factor affects or influence the already established factors of: expectations, network formation, and learning process (See Figure 5).

The starting point of the analytical framework is the factor of 'identification of a problem in the regime'. As Geels (2002) states, innovation begins with the identification of a problem in the current regime. Once the problem is identified, then the strategies of Framing and Theorization enter in place as combine strategies that are necessary to further develop the other three factors. Expectations is the first factor to be developed because it is key for the development of Network Formation. Likewise, Network Formation is key for the development of Learning Process. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the factors of Expectations, Network Formation and Learning Process are organised as a waterfall process, yet they are influencing each other constantly. On top of that, it is important to clarify the differences between the strategies of

Framing and Theorization, and the factor of Expectations as their similarities might blur their differences. Theorization as the strategy used to build expectations. In here is how entrepreneurs define things, such as how they conceptualise natural or nature, how they conceptualise sustainability, and how they conceptualise ethical. Framing regards to how their proposed solution differs from the current options of the STR and how and why they differ. Expectations are build upon both strategies and it regards about how are they going to communicate their conceptualisation, definitions, and differences with the consumer, investors, and market.

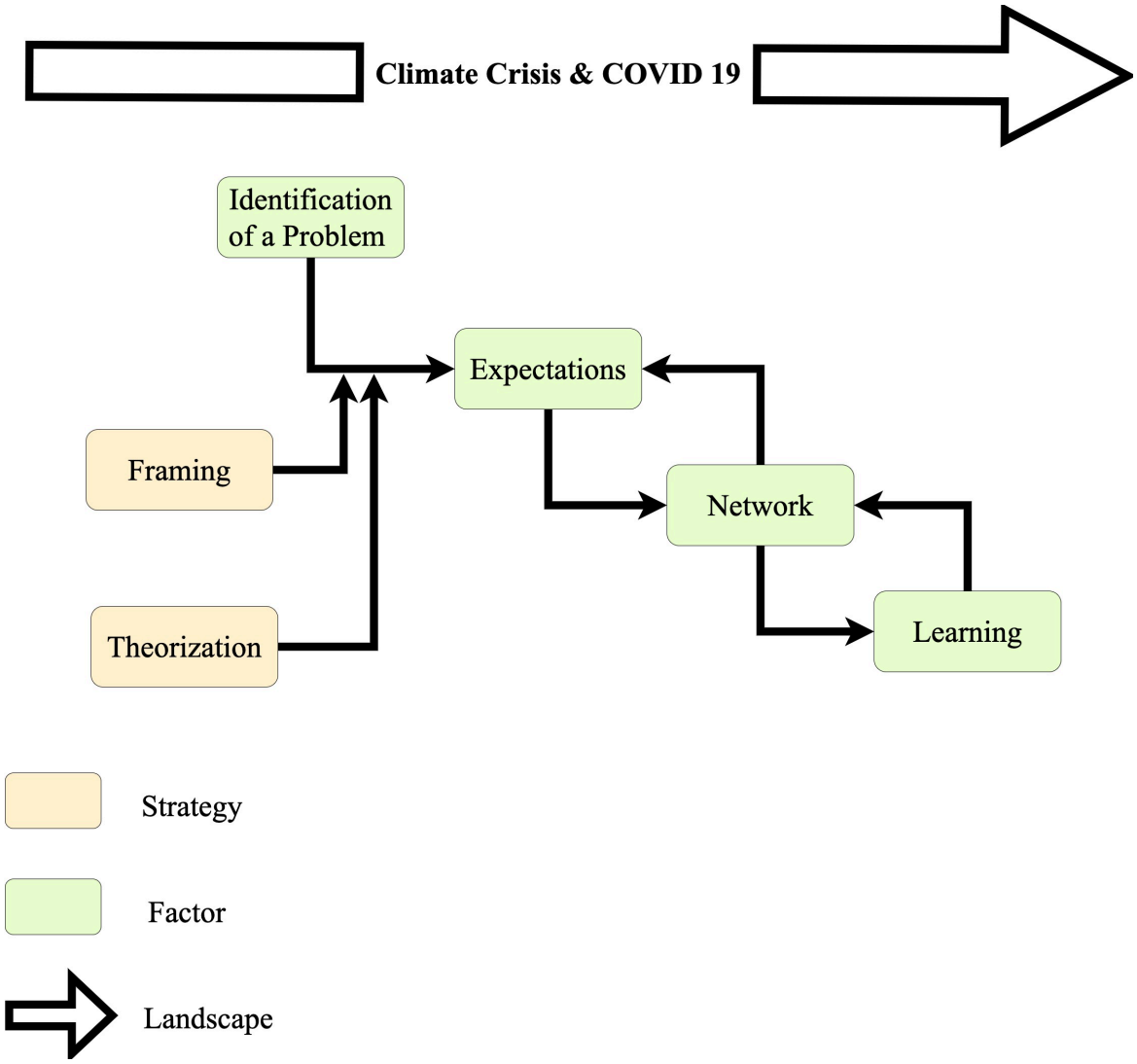

Figure 5. Analytical framework flow.

5. Methodology

The nature of this research is qualitative and exploratory. This research aims to contribute to the development of the MLP theory, by using pre-existing theory as guidance, yet performing research openly as we look at the development of a proto-niche rather than a niche. For this reason, it could be argued that the nature of this research is abductive. The abductive method seems the most suitable for this research given the fact that the "the practice of qualitative field studies involves an ongoing reflection on data and its positioning against different theories such that data can contribute to and develop further the chosen research questions" (As cited in Conaty, 2021, p. 2). As mentioned earlier, the early stages of niche formations seem to be understudied, with little or none literature addressing how is a niche created. Moreover, most papers that regard the topic of niche formation are in fact intended for public policy, when the focus of this research is about users and private investors. Consequently, this research is a discursive process - given the fact that at the early stage theorization and framework is needed to create joint understanding and expectations - that aims to filled a literature gap in the area of innovation sciences. Therefore, this research seeks to be agenda setting with the unit of analysis being the niche entrepreneur.

As exploratory in nature, the data collection method chosen is a mixed on, consisting of semi-structured interviews, desk research, and a netnography. The reason for the chosen methods is related to the novelty of the research and due to the fact that the focus is to investigate how people talk and reason about Edible Cosmetics. It is crucial for an understudied phenomenon to obtain a holistic picture of it in order to generate new knowledge; especially in regards to the added factor from the analytical framework of 'identification of problem in the regime'.

The first step of the research process was a desk research of companies that seem to fall under the category of Edible Cosmetics with the following sample criteria.

- That they follow the principle implicitly or explicitly of: 'If you would not eat it, do not put it on your skin'
- That their ingredients are 100% natural sourced.
- That the ingredients are sustainably sourced and produced.
- That their products are topically applied.

From the desk research and based on the sample criteria, 32 companies were found worldwide. The companies found were then analysed based on their official webpage, which were then divided according to the type of innovation and their main ideology. The type of innovation was based on the type of social innovations discussed in Chapter 3 and in order to see where the identification of the problem streams from. The ideology division was made based on the main concern that green consumers of cosmetics have in Chapter 2. The type of innovations found were spin-off innovation, process-innovation, and user-innovation. The type of ideologies were sustainability, ancient knowledge, and health and transparency (See Table 2).

Type of innovation Ideology	Spin-off Innovation	Process Innovation	User Innovation
Sustainability	1) 100%Pure (Susi Wang) 2) Blue Beautifly (Vida Karamooz) 3) Santo Remedio (Melissa) 4) Santaverde (Sabine Beer) 5) Witlof Skincare (Cis de Boer-Nijenhuis)	1) Anima Mundi (Adriana Ayales)	1) 100% Pure (Ric Kostick) 2) Maya Chia (Susanne Norwitz) 3) FŪHLICH (Sarah Möllney) 4) Niyok (Saskia de Velasco, Carlo Hanuszkiewicz & John Peitschner) 5) Natural Organic Edible Cosmetics (UNKNOWN)
Ancient Knowledge		1) Khadi Natural (Gaurav Singh) 2) Forest Essentials (Samrath Bedi) 3) Calia (UNKNOWN) 4) Ere Perez (Ere Perez) 5) Hanua (Kapua Browning) 6) Ranavat (Michell Ranavat)	
Health & Transparency	1) Juicy Chemistry (Pritesh Asher & Megha Asher) 2) Innersense Organic Beauty (Greg and Joanne Starkman)		1) Edible Beauty (Anna Mitsios) 2) Mamaearth (Varun and Ghazal Alagh) 3) LOLI Beauty (Tina Hedges) 4) Agent Nateur (Jena Covello) 5) Wildcrafted Organics (Nicole O'Sullivan) 6) Ao Organics Hawaii (Chelsa Davis) 7) Aquableu (UNKNOWN) 8) BAIOBAY (Margaux Tron Brossard) 9) Innersense Organic Beauty (Neerja Lakhani) 10) Under Luna (Carly Castillo) 11) Flow Cosmetics (Riitta Jänkälä) 12) Sara Rosalie (UNKNOWN) 13) Witlof Skincare (Caroline van Eeuwijk) 14) Touchland (Andrea Lisbona) 15) SO'BiO étic (Charles Kloboukoff) 16) Eccora (Ursula)

Table 2. Categorisation of companies from the desk research (green: America, blue: Europe, purple: Australia, orange: Asia).

The categorisation was used to sample contrasting types of firms for the interviews consisten with an exploratory research design. The aim was to obtain a diverse pool of interviews with minimum one representative of each of the boxes of Table 2. For this, the researcher initially aimed to obtain 10 interviews. Nonetheless, only five interviews were performed due to a lack of response from the contacted companies. The structure was semi-structured with open ended questions and the interviews were done online (See Appendix A for an interview guide). The

flexibility of this type of interviews allowed the interview to flow better, facilitating the emergence and further exploration of categories that could possibly be relevant for the analysis (Conaty, 2021). The interviews were then transcribed by the researcher using the method of verbatim. Moreover, four out of five interviews were done in English, while one interview was performed in Spanish. The coding of the interviews was also conducted by the researcher.

Furthermore, the next step in the research design was the netnography. This consisted on an analysis of online blogs, social media, disunion forums, and articles found online in which the discourse of EC is present. By doing so, it allowed the researcher to observed what is the discussion happening regarding EC. The netnography was limited to the previous five years, looking at posts from no older than 2017. Furthermore, the netnography was performed by searching for the terms Edible Cosmetics and the sentences of 'if you would not eat it, do not put it on your skin' and any verbatim from these two. The search was done limited to Google.

It is important to remind the reader that the three research methods and their consequently data outcome serve two purposes. One is to scan the discourse regarding EC and the second is to compare the results to triangulate the conclusions. By doing so, this researched aimed at having more realistic nuance of the discussion regarding EC. This complementation is key for the robustness of the results and it will help to create a complete picture of meaning creation within the EC community.

The operationalisation of the research was based on the developed analytical framework as presented in the previous chapter. The desk research, the interviews, and the netnography were all interpreted against the developed theoretical framework with six aspects:

1. Identification of a problem in the regime
2. Framing
3. Theorization
4. Expectations,
5. Network formation
6. Learning process

For the desk research, the information found one the webpages of the companies were codified into fitting either the one of the factors or one of the strategies (See Table 3 & 4). Moreover, the interviews were then coded by using high-order deductive coding (which came from the analytical framework or research question) and into inductive codes (which were emerging as the researched analysed the interviews. These the codes were then grouped into categories. Lastly, the netnography was also analysed under the analytical framework component by categories the nature of the blog, article, discussion into one of the Factors or Strategies (See Table 5). By categorising the themes in one of these categories, this research aim is to construct a clearer image of the discursive process of constructing a niche. As Lopolito, Morone and Sisto (2011) stated, the niche construction is an iterative process in which all factors are deeply connected and influence each other; remark that must be taken into consideration at all times of this research.

Basic Company Info	Theorization	Expectations	Network Formation
Year: **Place of founding:** **Entrepreneur(s):**	**Definitions:** **Certifications:**		**Social media channels:** **Memberships/ partnerships:**

Table 3. Operationalisation of de the desk research (part 1).

Type of Framing	Quotes
Diagnostic	
Prognostic	
Motivational	

Table 4. Operationalisation of de the desk research (part 2).

As common in abductive research, the data analysis is a continuous process that begins with a literature review on relevant background and contextual documentations (existing academic literature) and then moves onward to the desk research, interview's transcript and notes, and netnography.

Reliability can be defined as "being thorough, careful and honest in carrying out the research (Robson, 2002, p. 176). Given the novelty of the research, it is key to set the baseline for future research. The most important factor in regards to the reliability of this research is the proper coding and then further categorisation across the study. By using the notions explained in the theory chapter and then later integrated into the analytical framework, the research aims to strengthen the reliability of the present research. The reason why is because these notions have already reliability given the fact that they have been reproduced several times and they are part of a well-developed theory: MLP. Lastly, reliability from this research streams from how Factors and Strategies were coded and how they gave insight about the proto-niche level construction, which can act as a baseline for future research.

Factor **Source**	Identification of a Problem	Framing	Theorizing	Expectations	Network	Learning Process

Table 5. Operationalisation of netnography.

Moreover, the validity of this research stems from the diversity in sources of data collected. By combining desk research, semi-structure interviews, and a netnography, it allows the

research to cross-examine the results to obtain a more complete image of EC. The diversification in the sample strategy and the open-eded questions, provide the space to have a wider set of data. Additionally, given the fact that Edible Cosmetics is such a new phenomenon, it could be argued that the feasibility of making generalisation of the outcome comes easier than in an already established phenomena.

The ethical issues related to this research are regarding the data managing of the interviews and consent regarding the usage of personal information in them. The researcher asked for permission of the entrepreneurs to make use of their personal data and if necessary and Non-Disclosure-Agreement was facilitated to the interviewee. Moreover, the interviews will be transcribed and then send first to the interviewer for a review or a last modification opportunity. Lastly, while the duration of the research, the audio recordings, notes, interview transcription and any type of document that holds personal information will be stored in the researcher's computer and in the cloud, which both are protected by password and only the researcher has access to, for then later to be deleted once the research is completed.

6. Results

In this chapter, the results of the three used research methods will be explained. First, the results of the semi-structured interviews will be discussed through the categories found after the initial coding of them. Nine categories were distilled form from nineteen deductive codes (See Appendix B). Second, the results of the desk research of 32 companies will be presented. Third, a summary of the netnography will be following. Lastly, an analysis of the three methods combined will reveal the results of the present research and will be answering the research question with the sub-questions as well.

6.1 Interview Analysis

In the following section the main results from each of the categories drawn from the deductive codes of the interviews will be discussed. The companies that were interviewed were Eccora (Colombia), Santo Remedio (Colombia), Witlof Skincare (The Netherlands), Ere Perez (Australia), Company A (Germany). To see the full transcript of the five interviews, see Appendix C.

COVID

This category is composed by two deductive codes: Covid Company and Covid Consumer. During the interviews, it could be observed that the Covid pandemic was in fact beneficial for some companies from a business perspective for the companies; as they reported sales doubling or going up in the years of 2020 and 2021. Others reported not saying as much as they would have wished too, but still reported growth those years.

> *"One of my fastest growing years was 2020 and half of 2021, as for 2022 it was the other way around."* - Eccora

Moreover, all of the companies reported a changed in consumer behaviour during and because of the pandemic. The Covid lockdowns made the consumer more curious and critical about ingredients, as well as more focus on wellness and health companies reported. The reason why is because consumers had the time to do the due diligence when it comes to their desired products, sources, ingredients, health claims, and motivations.

"COVID pandemic affected consumer behaviour because it did this in people's mind that they wanted to know more about science. Consumers would read more. Everyone knew about vaccines and everyone became a biologist or a doctor. […] Individuals would become very evidence- oriented and very conscious as well. They would have the drive to read about why ingredients are toxic. I think it opened a lot the opportunity for green-based-eco-conscious consumers because consumers now they want to know what is in their products. They really want to know and they want to know scientifically." - Eccora

Edible Cosmetics

This category is composed by two deductive codes: Edible Cosmetic Definition and Edible Cosmetic Agreeability. Although the not all the entrepreneurs use the term EC for their products, there is a consensual definition of Edible Cosmetics. They all conceptualise it as a cosmetic product that is so natural that you could eat it. Following this idea, the definition for Edible Cosmetics would be: cosmetics made with ingredients that have food-grade quality.

"If you cannot eat it, don't put it on your skin" - Witlof Skincare

However, the term Edible Cosmetic seems problematic for two reasons. First, there is a division among the companies interviewed regarding the agreeability of the term and its usage. On one hand, the entrepreneurs that agreed with the term and would use it for their own products (if they are not already), have a more holistic comprehension of the it. They see it as a suitable slogan to send across the message to consumers about the quality of the ingredients and about the formulation process. By labelling their products as Edible Cosmetics, the entrepreneurs aim to send across three messages. First, that their products are made with high quality non-synthetic ingredients. Second, that their products are made with processes that maintain the nutrients of the natural ingredients and do not undermine or jeopardise the natural benefits of them. Third, that their products are safe or non-toxic.

Nevertheless, they all understand, and urge to consumers, that they should not take the slogan literally. Is a metaphoric tool of language, not an invitation to actually consume their cosmetics.

"Beauty that is good enough to eat is like saying 'do not be afraid! It is safe'. This is our pride. This is definitely something we take pride about. Is saying 'this product is natural, is safe, is good for you'. I call it food for the skin. I call it beauty made better […] That is what I am trying to do with the message of 'beauty almost good enough to eat' […] For me, the message that I give when I say 'is good enough to eat' is a statement" - Ere Perez

On the other hand, the entrepreneurs that do not agree with it find it problematic for two reasons. One is that is a misleading marketing tool that could lead to even more confusion for the consumer. Cosmetics are not formulated to be eaten but to be put on the skin. For these entrepreneurs, the biggest fear would be that someone actually consumes the cosmetics and gets sick jeopardising the whole reputation of natural cosmetic. Second, Edible Cosmetics, for them, is combining two different market and ingredients that are too different. They both put an emphasis on how the molecules of the ingredients are made to be absorb by the body. Santo Remedio provided the example of Vitamin E. There are two types of Vitamin E, the one that is design to be absorbed by the gastrointestinal track and the one to be absorbed by the skin. If an individual purchase Vitamin E supplements, that are meant to be taken orally and add it to their cream, it will not have any of the desired effects because those supplements were not made to be absorbed by the skin. Therefore, their main concerns regard to safety and actually efficacy of the the ingredients.

> *"Everything that you can eat cannot be put on the skin. That is a myth or a hoax. There are many things that you can eat, but if you put it on your skin it will irritate it. For example, when you make a face mask of just smashed papaya, it will do nothing to your skin because it does not have the excipients that make the papaya proteins be absorbed by the skin. This is why I do not agree with this term. The pH of your skin and of your stomach is very different too, therefore the form in which it the ingredients have to come have to be different"* - Santo Remedio

Therefore, Edible Cosmetic is a contested term among the interviewed natural cosmetic companies that lead to a division among them. They all do agree on the fact that it is a marketing strategy. Whether if it is a positive or negative strategy it depends on who you are speaking with.

Identification of a Problem

This category is composed by four deductive codes: Identification of a Personal Problem, Identification of a Problem in the Market, Natural vs. Mainstream Consumer and Natural vs. Mainstream Companies. From the companies interviewed, most of the entrepreneurs realised that they or someone they cared for had some kind of health issue that was triggered or accentuated by the usage of mainstream cosmetics or food. This leads to an inquisitive pattern of behaviour to investigate the triggers of such health problems, which in most cases it ended up being the ingredients of the products they were using.

> *"I became pregnant with my first born, and she when she was around 6 months old, I applied on her sunblock which generated an allergic reaction. Then, I started reading*

what could have been the allergen, and I really did not understand the ingredients" - Eccora

In the case of Santo Remedio, the founder came to the same conclusion of finding problematic ingredients in cosmetic while working for two mainstream cosmetic labs. She also realised that the problem not only extended to the ingredients, but also to the sustainability of the whole brands that she was working for.

"40 years ago, like every company at the time, the lab did not have any eco-conscious mentality. The eye shadows that they sold have some beautiful tones, but they all come in plastic packaging. […] I also identified several contaminating ingredients. They still worked with parabens and ingredients that even though the industry tells you that they are safe, they are proven to be related with breast cancer of those who use them." - Santo Remedio

This realisation lead to an overall disappointment and frustration regarding the toxicity of ingredients used in mainstream cosmetics. From all of the interviews performed, all of the five interviewed entrepreneurs expressed concern regarding the quality and safety of ingredients.

"When did beauty and cosmetics shifted towards needing toxic ingredients that are tested on animals?" - Ere Perez

Building on top of this, there is a point of concern about the fact that they all see a pattern of misinformation and purposeful marketing techniques that hint at natural cosmetics but their claims could be questioned. The industry is playing with the word *natural,* as in what it means and its definition.

"I get really bugged when I see brands that say 'we are 98% natural', because the 2% that is not natural, is the 2% that everybody uses preservatives and fragrances. You are not going to use these ingredients more than 2% of the formula because the formula just does not accept it. Is kind of like a word play and that is why I emphasise on a 100% natural" - Eccora

Moreover, there is not only a disagreement on the way natural cosmetics are presented to the public by the market, but also a profound preoccupation about the true *natural* qualities of their ingredients. This hints at the fact that even if the mainstream cosmetics are using natural ingredients, such ingredients are put through such extensive processes that they are ripped off all their natural nutrients. For example, the interview with the founder of Company A provided a perfect example of this:

> *"The aloe plants were already big when we started phoning our tentative clients. The first phone call was Unilever. We talked with the production area and we said to them 'we are growers and it our aloe product is really good'. I told him over the phone about my own experience with it and he said nothing. Then, he asked me 'are you from the cosmetic industry?' To which we answered 'no. we are farmers who own a finca'. Then, he said 'yes, that is nice to hear, but what I use for my aloe material is a white powder; a concentrate 200/1. I dilute it with water it when I need it into the right dilution'. This make that there is very little aloe for the products and rather a lot of water. He then continued telling me 'This is allowed and this is natural. This is the aloe in our product. It is perfectly white and it has no smell, because it was deodorised prior. It was bleached, so it had no colour. It gives me the possibility to make my formula consistent and always the same. Something this natural, like what you are offering me, I cannot control it. The colour could change. It would smell. I do not need it"*- Company A

Furthermore, one of the main differences found between mainstream cosmetics and natural cosmetics is that in natural cosmetics, the entrepreneurs try to have certain control over their supply chain. This could mean, having their own formulation lab as Eccora or cultivating and harvesting their own ingredients as Company A. This could also mean having a stricter filter for choosing suppliers as Witlof Skincare claimed to have. They do their due diligence when it comes to the sourcing of their ingredients as well and not only demand sustainability but also a social component to it. While, as expressed by the interviewed entrepreneurs, mainstream cosmetics they do not care and they do not ask a questions regarding the sourcing of their ingredients. Therefore, it could be said that a health problem is what sparked the curiosity and drive to do create the company, followed by a disappointment with the mainstream industry.

Diagnostic Framing

This category is composed by deductive code of Diagnostic Framing. As mentioned in the above subsection, the entrepreneurs identified a problem with the ingredients of their cosmetics first through a health problem or working with the industry. Then, they all realised that this problem

also reinforced by the lack of knowledge of consumers as well. Overall, consumers do not understand the ingredients from a cosmetic product, nor they know or lack the access the knowledge regarding the toxicity of those same ingredients they do not understand. The entrepreneurs agreed on the fact that this problem streams from lack of transparency and green washing coming from the mainstream cosmetic industry. The problem with transparency comes from the fact that companies do not disclose to their consumers how much ingredients are put trough processes that make them loose all nutritional value for the skin. Another problem with transparency, and that directly connects to green-washing, is the real percentage of natural ingredients in their formulas and what is advertise as natural.

> *"The tendency of the mainstream market is putting in the formula only 1% of natural extracts and calling that a natural cosmetic"* - Santo Remedio.

Once they realised that this was the case with most cosmetics, they all recognise a lack of standardisation of the definition of the word *natural* within the market and in legal frameworks; leading to a set of over-processed ingredients that hold little or nothing of the natural occurring nutrients. The lack of standardisation is a real problem for all of them because if there is not a common ground of what natural is, anybody can claim that a product is natural. In fact, some of the entrepreneurs mentioned how petroleum is also natural, because it comes from the earth, but that does not make it less problematic. This lack of standardisation is one of the main conclusions of the entrepreneurs when they analysed the problem at hand.

> *"It is a word that I think is overused. They inflate the meaning of it. Everything is natural because the word is not protected. […] However, we need to communicate with our clients that we are natural, that is the first thing. We belong to this big natural thing and we belong to the true ones! Not the fake ones"* - Company A

Furthermore, the entrepreneurs also realised that most products that are nowadays in the market are just palliative products for superficial problems, but not really preventative nor encouraging to embrace your skin as it is. The industry has a way to tell customers through products that there is something wrong with their skin. This does not promote self-love or self-acceptance, which for them this is also part of the problem. Therefore, with all this in mind, they all recognised a missing product in the market that hold a holistic and truly botanical-based view of skincare.

Prognostic Framing

This category is composed by the deductive code of Prognostic Framing. There is one commonality among all of the entrepreneurs which is connected to the mentality that if there is something missing for oneself, then is oneself that has to create it.

> *"Why not make it something like this brand FUBU? For us by us. An African American brand of clothing and it was created because they said 'well if nobody else is doing thing for us, well we will do it' so it was kind of that logic to start Eccora"*
>
> - Eccora

Moreover, all of the entrepreneurs that were interviewed did not only started with an idea of a missing products but as well an ideology. They all desired to follow certain values that they saw missing in the current market.

> *"I see myself as a visionary. Why? you might ask. I think is because of what I offer. My products are very simple, down to earth and is beauty with heart and consciousness. They are all about nutrients, real food, and products that are efficient and beautiful. […] They are also about caring for sustainability and good solutions. We, as a company, have been exploring these ideas for the last two decades."*
>
> - Ere Perez

On top of that, they all were seeking to create a company that generated value beyond profitability. They wanted to create a brand not only to offer the market something missing, but also to reach out to consumers and show them what they need and why they need it. Therefore, their proposed solution originated from a gap in the market (which they all saw as an opportunity) and from the desire to share their findings with a wider set of people based on an ideology and a set of values that hopefully one day could help change the market.

Lastly, there is also a commonality among some of the entrepreneurs around the fact that they want to build their product based on a specific ingredient or region where their ingredients come from. For example, Eccora, Santo Remedio, Company A, and Ere Perez all put an emphasis on creating their products based on one specific ingredient, or a specific region where the ingredients come from.

"It is noteworthy that our products are made with Colombian ingredientes because it is the dream of my brand that one day people will value the large biodiversity that we have in our country" - Santo Remedio

Motivational Framing

This category is composed by deductive code of Motivational Framing. Building upon the prognostic framing, the desired to bring to the market a brand that generates more than profitable value comes accompanied by a desire to also 'change the world' through education. They all believe that if consumers are better educated about ingredients, formulation, and processes, then the market could improve their practices in the future. They have a bottom down approach, in which they want to change consumers' knowledge and demands to put pressure to the mainstream market.

"So, the brand has been trying to do explain, educate and raise awareness about the value of our product" - Santo Remedio

There is also a desire to teach younger generations and generate opportunities for them to get involved with natural cosmetics. They all think about the younger generations and what their company could mean for them and the future of the planet. There is a shared view of the future of cosmetics and the beauty industry that goes beyond offering palliative solutions for the skin, but rather provide nutrition to the skin and whole body.

"I want to create legal labs around Bogota were the vulnerable economically and socially are. Also for young people to be able to be linked with cosmetic chemistry […] I think it would be so nice because sometimes chemistry, sciences and STEM related companies are not out there for people to have access to education […] Obviously, it cost money and security so, I have not gotten there yet. I wanted to be there by now. I will be there someday, just not now." - Eccora

Theorization

This category is composed by deductive code of Theorization. One of the main components of theorization for the entrepreneurs is how they define the concept of *natural*. There is a real focus on how *real natural* ingredients are not harmful or toxic to the environment, nor the human body. Natural, when speaking about cosmetics, is conceptualised as a product that is made with

ingredients that are non-synthetic based, with minimal or thought-through processes, and that does not hurt the environment nor the human body. For the entrepreneurs working in the field of natural cosmetics, the toxicity that synthetic ingredients can have is a well enough reason to refuse usage of them in their products.

> *"Well, something that comes from nature; to start with. If you look at it specifically from a perspective of cosmetics, I know that a lot of the natural products are altered. They are in a factory and they do stuff with them so you can use them for cosmetics. So in that sense, I know is not natural in the sense of for example having some aloe juice and I rubbing it on my face. That would be 100% natural. In our products we also claim we are 100% natural, and we are, because there are no synthetic ingredients in our products. They are all coming from nature and they have sometimes a tweak to be able to put it in cosmetics, but still has no synthetic compound."* - Witlof Skincare

Another important component of the conceptualisation of *natural* is that when the entrepreneurs speak about their products being natural is also about safety. They recognise that the definition of what are safe ingredients variate between the mainstream cosmetics and the natural cosmetics. On one hand, the mainstream market classifies ingredients as safe when they do not represent an immediate risk to the consumers' life and allow brands to create consistent formulas. On the other hand, the natural cosmetics market speaks about safe ingredients as *nutritious* non-synthetic ingredients for the consumer. There is an emphasis on nutrition for the ingredients because natural also has to mean brining benefits for the skin and not only palliative solutions. On top of the that, the problematic with synthetic compounds extends as well as to the way they are made.

The way that entrepreneurs conceptualise the concept of *natural* also means ethically made. Synthetic compounds are usually tested on animals or the process of making them contaminates the environment.

> *"Therefore, for me something natural is something that is nutritious, which is what I focus on. Another thing, is about the ethics behind the whole supply chain."* - Ere Perez

Consequently, transparency of ingredients, suppliers, and processes are also a very important part of these companies. In fact they all go hand by hand and one cannot go without the other. Furthermore, another important component of theorization is the conceptualisation of

sustainability. They all understand the complexity of sustainability, but that does not stop them to try their best to stay within the sustainable practices. They way they conceptualise sustainability is a product that not only take resources, but that also give back to the earth and to their communities. This definition suggests an idea of regenerative sustainability. Moreover, they also conceptualise sustainability as having a reduction in contaminants, such as plastic and petroleum based materials, and sustainable practices for the ingredients' cultivation and harvest.

> *"There is quote from a famous philosopher Emanuel Kant. He said 'when you make decision, you always have to think about the consequences. You cannot make a decision for one step. You are responsible to think about the second, third and so on'. This is for me the basic mindset of sustainability or to act sustainable. I produce something, but people do not think if they really need it! Because throwing thins away does not exist in nature! Nature only replace. This is sustainability for me, to think about the next steps and to take care of the other steps not only the first."*
>
> - Company A

Another important component of theorization is the desire of the entrepreneurs to share their story. They all come from a place of experience with natural cosmetics, holistic way of living, or health issues. Using these factors as one of the pillars to build their company and products is critical because it aims at showcase that their products go beyond than just another product in the market. It is a lifestyle. For example, the founders of Ere Perez and Santo Remedio both come from a family which natural way of living was the norm. They both speak about experiences with their mothers or grandmothers showing them how to use natural ingredients for cosmetic purposes. Their story is also one that inspires emotions related to family and old-ways of living. On top of that, the entrepreneurs themselves not only apply these principles to their brand, but also in their personal life. They all try to life a sustainable life and all are eco-conscious. Therefore, they all conceptualise their products as something more than just a cosmetic tool. Their products are a story, a set of values and principles, a promise of ethical practices and ingredients, a holistic product, and a conscious lifestyle. Moreover, all entrepreneurs theorize through the advocacy for self-love and self-acceptance. Their products are not about fixing skin problems but rather embracing the skin as it is. Their brand does not tell individuals what is wrong with their skin or what it needs to be fix about their appearance. They brand focus on accepting how people are and love themselves for it.

> *"So, I have been focusing my brand in self-acceptance and self-love as well. Take care of yourself and your skin because you love yourself, not because you are looking at yourself in the mirror and are being terribly harsh with your image"* - Santo Remedio

Lastly, from the companies interviews they all put an emphasis on how they validate their claims. They theorize validation through a path of science. In fact, the entrepreneurs who have a scientific background call it 'green chemistry' or 'botanical science'. They seek validation through science-based evidence of the efficacy of their products. For companies such as Eccora and Santo Remedio, it is paramount to always back their claims with science. They want to leave behind the times which the word *natural* and everything emanating from it had a magical connotation. They understand that not everything in nature is necessarily good for humans, and they want to make clear to the consumer that they are aware of this. Furthermore, the non-scientific entrepreneurs, they seek to obtain validation for their products through the fact that they use scientifically based formulas or that products are formulated by a chemical pharmacist. Thus, all of the entrepreneurs understand the value of science and scientific claims in the process of theorization.

> *"I am the creator of the brand, but I am also a pharmaceutical chemist. I think that is something that is very important because a lot of brands have someone creating the products based on trends but not scientifically driven. I really have like a focus on creating the products that I can claim I have a hashtag that says 'if you claim it, prove it'"* - Eccora

Expectations

This category is composed by the deductive codes of Personal Expectations & Collective Expectations. One of the main components observed in the building of expectations was how their practices differ from the mainstream cosmetics. A part of the building expectations is done through the ways they theorize the word *natural* and how they communicate this to their customers. They all make sure to stress properly in their marketing what makes them different than other cosmetics and what makes them 100% natural. For some companies, such as Eccora and Santo Remedio, this could mean the promise of only using natural ingredients or the promise of always having science-based evidence. Other companies, such as Ere Perez, communicate this message though using the EC as part of their marketing. While for some other companies is the promise of exchanging a particular ingredient. For example, Company A builds the expectations of their consumers on the fact that they do not use water in their formulations, but rather just the aloe juice from their in-house production.

> *"My idea was to change the water with the aloe so I have much more value in my product. […] This formula, this principle, it is the one thing that makes the brand. The next step was to grow this aloe juice in our own finca. We don't buy it in china or America, but we grow it ourself. In that way, we have the control that is fresh. You cannot buy this quality in the raw material market. It is not possible; you have to*

produce it by yourself I you want that. This is the DNA of the brand. This principle of the formula: growing the leading material by ourselves and having all the signs of true animal caring and two more certifications that we are looking for all the values that consumers are looking for and that we are striving for" - Company A

In all the cases, the entrepreneurs make sure to communicate to the public and the market what makes them *truly natural* and how they back up this claims through science and certifications. Moreover, they also make sure to stress their own principles of sustainability, regardless of the economic burden this can have on the company. As a matter of fact, the entrepreneurs all communicated not a strong emphasis on profitability or growth, but rather in selling products based on an ideology in an absent market for these. This is why they aim to create an image based on transparency, which give consumers the trust and confidence that they know what they are buying. Consumers do not have to question their products because *'They know what they are getting'*. Ergo, under no circumstance, none of the entrepreneurs would compromise these initial values and principles for the promise of scaling up fast and they want the public to know that.

"This means, when I am the leader of a company, I can make decisions. I can say 'for my products I can buy from producers that pay fair, that grow organically, that take care of the environment and employees or I can look only at the price and make a decision based on that'. I could not ask all of these questions. These are decisions that everybody has to take in the industry. You have both worlds. This responsibility for me is when I know and understand the importance of nature and sustainability for all of us and make decision accordingly. Once I know this, I cannot go back. I cannot go back to this 'I don't know' mentality of ignorance. For me personally, I said to myself 'when I make products, this will be my way'. Making the right choices. There is this very nice expression from the painter Salvador Dali 'when you learned things in life, you cannot back that naiveté to behave as you are without this experience'. That way is closed for me now! So I have to act like that. This is what I believe."
- Company A

Moreover, some of the interviewed companies not only offer their products but also some kind of holistic advise with it. Santo Remedio as well as Witlof Skincare both have a consultation factor that re-enforce the message to the consumer that they want to help, and that they are more than a product, they are a lifestyle. Additionally, they use their story, their own experiences, and their lifestyle as a way to share and build expectations of their brand. If it work for them it can also work for anyone.

"The holistic part is always in the advice because 9 out of 10 times when people call or mail us with skin problems, is food related. I know a lot of that from experience and I know a lot about it. So we have these online calls with clients, that you can register for, and we have a conversation and I give diet advice. For ppl who have have eczema, I tell them to stop having nuts […] I am not a doctor or anything, but I have seen it happening, so I am quite convince that I can help people with the experience that I have […] That is something that you can really pinpoint, and you cannot really sell or put it in a product, but it is the holistic view that keep us going."
- Witlof Skincare

An interesting factor of the building of expectations is that most of the companies did not have a proper business plan when they started the company. They all started their company by sharing their products with family and friends, who them helped them to build the company. Some companies had family and friends as their main investors, such as Eccora. Some others build their starting money organically by selling products month by month, like Ere Perez, or some had resources from other businesses or jobs such as Witlof Skincare and Company A. Regardless of the source, they all prioritised maintaining their values and principles even at the beginning of the company. Witlof Skincare in fact rejected the help of some investors given the fact that they did not wanted their tenets compromised, nor someone telling them what to do and how to follow market trends. Witlof Skincare only accepted sustainable investors with a mind-alike mindset. Likewise, all of the entrepreneurs built expectations around their brand by describing themselves as not trend-followers, but rather trend-setters. They wanted to tell the market what it needs and why it needs it.

"Sometimes is difficult, because I go with my gut. I never did any kind of research for my shop or SPA. I thought 'this is what we should be doing! And I am not gonna wait for customers to tell me what they want. I am going to tell them what they need to want!'" - Witlof Skincare

Moreover, they all also claimed to not have a fix marketing strategy. They all just approached the public in the best way they could think so. While Eccora chose to have a marketing strategy based on education and telling consumers important notes regarding cosmetics and ingredients, Company A just began talking to people until eventually landing on a four pages article in a magazine. Nonetheless, the educational component seems to stand out. Even though they did not necessarily have a marketing strategy, they all seem to focus their marketing at the education of consumers. It has been mentioned before in the above sections that companies aim at

educating their costumers regarding natural cosmetics, mainstream cosmetics, and toxicity of ingredients. This goes in line with the shared vision of their brand as more than a product.

> *"Also the educational part. I do workshops and masters classes. We are starting this year to give master classes to the school in Amsterdam for beautician and hair dressers. That is the MBO level and then you also have mass class for skin therapist; which is an education level higher. To make them aware of this and to tell them "you are going to be the professional in the industry, so it is very important that you know what you are doing and what type of products and ingredients you are using as well. Where are they from? What do they do to the skin?". That is also something that I think is holistic. The education and the making people aware of what they are doing, the consciousness, is a very big part of our daily motivation."* - Witlof Skincare

Lastly, it is important to mention that not all companies use the term Edible Cosmetics as a way to build expectations. In fact, from the companies' website, only Ere Perez uses the term. Nonetheless, during the interviews when entrepreneurs were asked if they would use it, Witlof Skincare, Company A, and Ere Perez said yes.

Network

This category is composed by the deductive codes of Client Network & Business Network. It seems that all of the companies that were interviewed perceived the building of the company as a communal effort. They all described a set of safety net network while building the company. Family and friends seem to be a common theme among them. These people were either their first clients or investors, or their first advisors. In the case of Ere Perez, she described the help of her husband as pivotal for the development of the company. These people invested on or purchased their products because they believed in the idea that their founders had.

> *"In my case, I didn't do this by myself. I had with my husband with me. Who had a different instinct than my, which is knowledge. He is an engineer so he was good in math, finance, and production. All these things were things that I was not good at. I was great at sales […] Just because you have the idea and the money does not mean you know how to do everything: sales, finances, marketing, social media, IT […] In the past, I just had to relay on friend, family and people who believed in me to do all the things I did not know how to do."* - Ere Perez

Moreover, guidance did not only come from family and friends but also from the government or actors from the current cosmetic mainstream market. For example, Santo Remedio was founded with the constant guidance of the Colombian government. Her founder, went to the chamber of commerce to take free courses on how to build a company. In these courses they taught participants everything they needed to know about businesses, from finance to production and there was always an advisor present. Other cases, such as Witlof Skincare, received helped from prominent successful figures from the cosmetic market.

> *"We have friends from university that work in different places, that are interested in the business view and through a friend, I got in touch with one of the founders of Rituals. The Dutch brand that is worldwide now. He was one of the first advisers that we had. We just went and asked 'hey! Can we have a coffee' and he said 'sure!'. We went there and talked to him and he gave us advice. He helped us to structure things. 'Have you thought about this? Have you thought about that?'. It was nice to have to have him. It was really good […] I do not know, but through meeting people and through this people you meet more people and we just talk to them! Just saying 'hey! Just have a coffee and tell me what you doing! Would you like to help us'"*- Witlof Skincare

Another example is Ere Perez who its founder is not a cosmetic formulator herself. She looked for the help of a pharmaceutical chemist that was already creating formulas. She had to contact those who were already working for the cosmetic market to see if someone could help her with her formulation process.

> *"Then, I found myself, looking at the yellow pages and I found a chemist. Well, in fact I found a few, but I tried to contact many about my idea and nobody cared. Until finally, I found someone who believed in me. He was curious about my questions."*
> - Ere Perez

However, they all did suggested at the fact that the help from the bigger players of the industry stopped once their company was viewed as a competitor. Entrepreneurs described that at the beginning people were more willing to help them because they saw their idea as a hobby or a small project. The entrepreneurs claim that another factor contributing to this is the fact that they were all women. Nonetheless, it could be said that entrepreneurs build a secure network for the building of their company by the fact that none of them were afraid to ask questions or ask for help; even from people that they did not know.

When it comes to building a network among natural cosmetic companies, the scenario paints slightly different. They are all willing to collaborate with other natural brands; however, they are still careful with what they share. They want to help other companies without ever compromising their own formulas. Nonetheless, they all see a duty as an entrepreneur to share information and help other entrepreneurs. In fact, Witlof Skincare reported a better exchanged of information among entrepreneurs that are align with their values but not in the same market.

Furthermore, all of the companies interviewed reported being part somehow of the knowledge network of mainstream cosmetics. They all participate in seminars, conferences, or webinars or at least they try, and they all have subscriptions to cosmetic magazines. Another source that they use to keep themselves up-to-date regarding ingredients, technologies, and processes is their suppliers. Santo Remedio, Eccora, and Witlof Skincare reported that their suppliers are a key source of information for them regarding innovation in the sector.

On top of that, when it comes to building a network of clients, entrepreneurs build a strong customers retention and loyalty due to its holistic element of clients being more than a client. They entrepreneurs like to talk to their clients and give advice to their clients. The brands go beyond the simple transaction of just selling a product for profit, but they take it a step further for their clients with advices regarding their lifestyle.

> *"Besides, I talk to my customers as if they were my friends. The community feeling and the personalisation factor is unique of my brand. I worry for my clients as if they were part of my family. Therefore, customers become loyal to the brand because of the product in itself, but also because of that advise-oriented human component that the brand has"* - Santo Remedio

Furthermore, in order to create a network map of the companies researched, the five companies that were interviewed were asked to signal from a list which companies they knew or have heard of before. From this, the Figure 6 was created. In it, it can be observed a relatively weak network with not as many connections. It is noteworthy to mention that all of the entrepreneurs whilst looking at the list, they mention that they have heard or seen this companies, but they are not in contact with them. While most entrepreneurs mentioned only knowing between 3 or 4 companies present in this research, Witlof Skincare would be an oddity by knowing 9 companies of the 32. This could be due to the fact that the founder of Witlof was the founder as well an online natural store of the Netherlands selling 100% natural cosmetics. Before founding Witlof, she procured different brands to bring them to The Netherlands for the first time. Thus, giving her a background and an advantage that none other entrepreneur has.

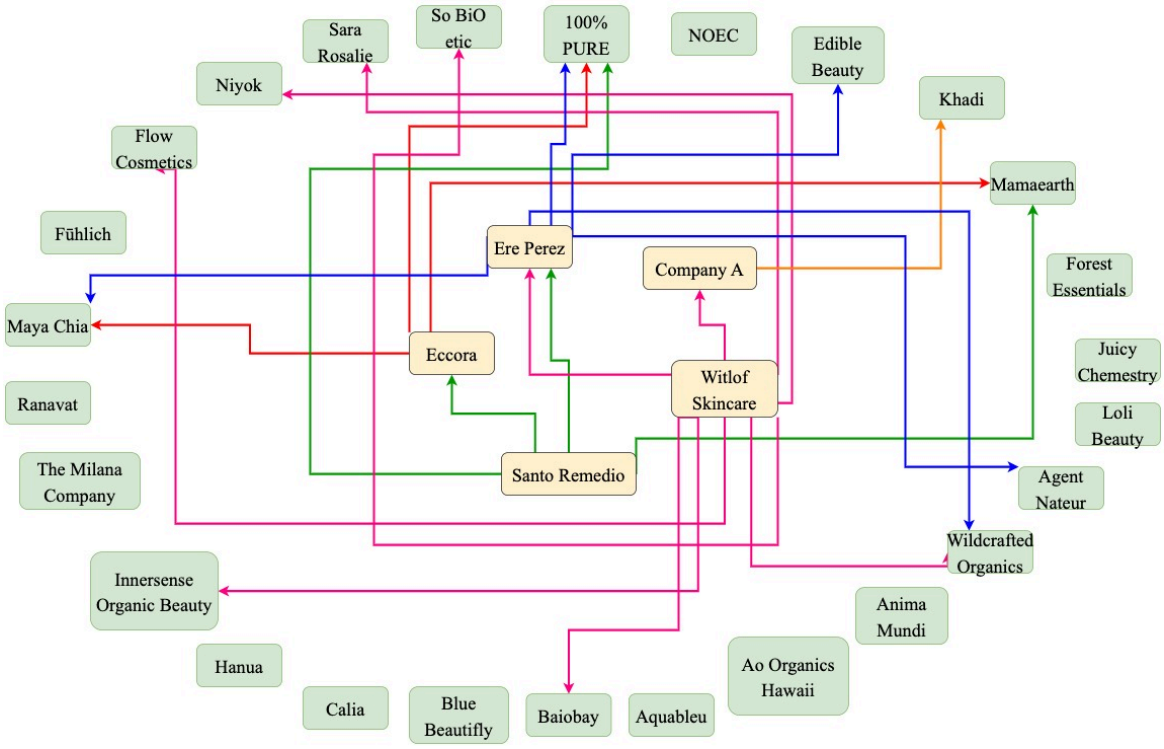

Figure 6. Network map.

Learning Process

This category is composed by deductive code of Customers Learning Process, Company's Learning Process & Formulation Learning Process. A learning process could be observed in every area and step of the construction of the companies. For example, as the section of network revealed, entrepreneurs started to build their customers network through friends and family. Thus, they all had to learn about their consumers and their desired target group. Some of them they also had to learn what were the main differences between their consumers and the mainstream consumers. What is more, they all had to learn that their consumers or the type of consumers that they attract are individuals who inherently look for something more in their products than just the functionality of it. Another learning from the consumer component is that consumers need to be able to afford these type of products. A specific learning they had was that consumers are very fragrance driven; especially those coming from the mainstream market. Which when working with natural ingredients is problematic.

> *"We started with ppl who had skin problems because they were the ones that had a different understanding. They wanted to solve a problem. They were not this beauty client that just wanted to have something agains wrinkles or people who believed in*

magical cosmetics. The people with skin problems are absolutely different. They were the 100% of our first clients. Then, it changed because our formulation were getting better […] The nicer, the more elegant, the nicer and the closer they were to mainstream cosmetics, the more clients I got." - Company A

Another building block of the learning process is regarding the flaws of the market. The experiences that all of the entrepreneur had in the identification of the problem, helped them unlocked a curiosity to learn and study something about cosmetics, ingredients, and processes. They all had to learn in the process what are the problematic ingredients and processes within the mainstream cosmetic. There was a constant learning process on the deeper problems of the mainstream market. So, first they identified a small problem, a gap in the market, and then when they try to solve it, they realise how many other complex and wicked systemic problems there are. For example, they had to learn how controlled and standardised was the cosmetic market.

"For example, let's say with vitamin A. People do not understand that vitamin A is only synthetic, because if not, its not is vitamin A. Why? Because it is process inside mammals. You cannot have vitamin A from a vegetable. You process it inside a mammal and then it becomes vitamin A" - Eccora

The identification of a problem not only triggered the founding of the company but also a desire to learn the mechanisms behind the cosmetic industry. They all have a deep curiosity for knowledge and learning. That is why mostly all started creating products in their kitchen or during their studies. The ones that started in their kitchen, they all started with emulsions, which are in fact not the simplest formulation to make as a first timer, this is why they all had to learn before doing it. It is important to note that founders all have different backgrounds, from the business or pharmaceutical chemistry field to nutrition, so the learning process for each other them was different. For example, those who were not a business degree, they all said they struggled the most with the business part. Those who were coming from a business perspective or a completely different background, they said they struggled the most with the formulation part. One commonality that they all struggle with is marketing, and not only struggle in fact really disliked that part.

"The first time I created a product was around 2011. I did a shampoo at my house in my kitchen. It was a very funny shampoo because of course I had no knowledge about emulsification systems, nor how the preservation system had to be created but it worked. Well, it worked in so far of making my hair healthier." - Eccora

A separate learning process that happened for all of them is the way they want to execute their mission of educating customers. None of them come from a pedagogic background, yet is what they really want to do with their brand. How to educate the public about why they need natural products and what the mainstream cosmetic industry is doing is one of their main struggles and ongoing learning process.

They all claim that they are in a constant learning process. However, the learning process is kept within the boundaries of the company in most cases. Due to the lack of knowledge exchange and network, the learning process of these companies is bound to be what they can learn alone. Although they do participate on the wider network of the cosmetic industry, they do not have a wider set of network of companies alike. The only exception here would be Company A. It seems that in the German market there is an established network among German natural cosmetic companies. In fact, during the interview, the founder of Company A said that there is a conglomeration of five big natural cosmetic brands that have are align with Company A's values and principles. These five companies, created a certification called NATRUE. This certification is based on the principles followed by Company A and it ensures certain quality of ingredients and sustainable and fair formulation practices.

> *"There are 5 founders! Together we put some money to the side and created an office in Brussels where the laws are made. Because we have the fear that the conventional industry, with their power and the EU parliament, they would reach their goal of turning natural cosmetics a brand and then you can do whatever you want. We want to keep our strong rules of formulation. So NATRUE sign is for that. I have contact with all of these companies and my closes contact is Dr. Hauschka. Everybody that works for Company A [sic] in Hamburg, they love Dr. Hauschka and they love us. So we help each other. Is a bit of friendship. We are fighting against each other when it comes to clients, but we like each other because we have the same understanding of quality"* - Company A

6.2 Website Analysis

Identification of a Problem

From the 32 companies analysed from the desk research (See Appendix D), four different themes regarding the factor Identification of a Problem could be observed. First, the first theme relates to a concern regarding ingredients and product safety of mainstream cosmetics. A total of 13 companies out of the 32 (See Table 6) reported in their section 'About Us' or on their main page

the problem with toxic ingredients used in most cosmetics. They outline how and why this is problematic for consumers.

> *"We were shocked to see how most baby products, be it lotion or shampoo contained toxins which have proven to be harmful to the little ones. We were worried sick and it wasn't just our baby we were worried about but also for all the little ones we knew in our friend circle. That's when we decided to do something about it & create products which were completely safe & certified toxin free"* - (Mamaearth, 2022, p. 2)

Second, the other identified theme was an identification of a problem due to health concerns or issues of the entrepreneur or someone they cared for. As illustrated in Table 6, from the 32 companies studied, nine communicate their identification of a problem due to mainly an allergic reaction to some cosmetic product or food related allergen.

> *"When Jena Covello was diagnosed with endometriosis and adenomyosis at age 23, she set out on a path that would dramatically change the course of her life. After years of pain, five surgeries, and countless differing opinions from Western doctors, Jena put her trust in a holistic practitioner and began educating herself on natural medicine and healing remedies. Upon learning that heavy metals are known to adversely impact the endocrine system, Jena chose to cut aluminum-based deodorant from her beauty regimen, a decision that would ultimately lead to Agent Nateur's flagship product: the holi(stick) deodorant."* - (Agent Nateur, n.d, p. 4)

Third, only 2 companies exemplified an Identification of a Problem based on the lack of ancient techniques in modern cosmetics. This themes relates to the disconnection with traditions and modern science and how this presents a problem for our society. Lastly, there were only four companies that did not exhibit an identification of a problem on their webpage.

Theme / Factor	Concern regarding ingredients and product safety	Health problem of the entrepreneur or someone they cared for	Following traditional ancient techniques	Sustainability	None
Identification of a problem	• 100% Pure • NOEC • LOLI Beauty • Ao Organics • Aquableu • Baiobay • Blue Beautifly • Calia • Under Luna • Maya Chia • Flow Cosmetics • Sobio Etic • Santo Remedio	• Edible Beauty • Mamaearth • Juicy Chemistry • Agent Nateurr • Wildcrafted Organics • Ere Perez • Hanua • Innersense Organic Beauty • FŪHLICH • Sara Rosalie • Santaverde • Witlof Skincare • Eccora	• Anima Mundi • Ranavat	• Niyok	• Khadi • Forrest Essentials

Table 6. Identification of a Problem outcome from the desk research.

Framing

When analysing the strategy of Framing, it could be observed four different themes. This strategy is focused on transmitting in their website what-they-are-not (in regards with ingredients and formulation processes) and what-they-are (in terms of values and principles) First, when it comes to what-are-they-not, it could be observed a common narrative of how their ingredients were not toxic by telling consumers what ingredients their products do not have. From the 32 companies, 30 use this strategy on their webpage. As an example:

> *"Showcasing Australia's Unique Wild harvested Botanicals in potent nutritionally rich formulas that contain no nasty chemicals, mineral oils, phthalates, parabens or synthetic fragrances."* - (Wildcrafted Organics, n.d, p. 3)

Second, there is another commonality in the framing strategy of also communicating the consumer that they are cruelty free, meaning that they do not text on animals, nor use any animal derived ingredient. For example, Ao Organics Hawaii has the following sentence on their webpage:

> *"Cruelty-Free: We don't test any of our products on animals"* (Ao Organics Hawaii, 2022, p. 9)

This strategy theme is used by relatively most of the companies with 18 making usage of it. Third, when it comes to what-they-are, another found theme for the strategy of framing is that they communicate on their website the importance of sustainability. As can be observed in the Table 7, 26 out of the 32 companies expressed the importance of sustainability across their supply chain and practices.

> *"We are kids of the 90's. This means that we have been confronted with the threat of climate change to our planet since childhood. This thought won't let you go. But everywhere you look, large corporations are showing that they simply don't care about this global emergency. We care. We want to go a different way. We want to leave the practices of the big corporations behind and think holistically about you, nature and our social environment. That's why we created Niyok."* - (Niyok, n.d, p. 1)

What is more, some companies also frame their product by mentioning their social projects as well or how they have in mind the social aspect of a company. This could be by mentioning how they support fair trade practices across their supply chain, such as Anima Mundi, but as well by having social programs that their company supports like SO'BiO étic with their program of Fair for life (So'BiO étic, n.d).

> *"Our project educates and supports true fair trade practices, beyond organic farming, education, and small farmers to create remedies that benefit people from all walks of life."* - (Anima Mundi, n.d, p. 2)

Lastly, there are fourteen companies that frame their proposed solution by using specific ingredients or a region where the ingredients come from. For example, Flow Cosmetics aims to use the power of nordic nature only as well as Ao Organics Hawaii claim to use only Hawaiian ingredients.

Theme / Strategy	Toxic ingredients	Free of animal cruelty	Environmental sustainability (cultivation/ formulation/ packaging)	Social sustainability (Fair trade/Social programs)	Use of specific ingredients
Framing	• 100% Pure • NOEC • Edible Beauty • Khadi • Mammaearth • Forest Essential • Juicy Chemistry • Loli Beauty • Agent Nageur • Wildcrafted Organics • Anima Mundi • Ao Organics Hawaii • Aquableu • Baiobay • Blue Beautifly • Calia • Ere Perez • Innersense Organic Beauty • Under Luna • Ranavat • Maya Chia • Fūhlich • Flow Cosmetics • Niyok • Sara Rosalie • Santaverde • Witlof Skincare • Eccora • SO'BiO étic • Santo Remedio	• 100% Pure • NOEC • Edible Beauty • Khadi • Mammaearth • Forest Essential • Loli Beauty • Ao Organics Hawaii • Baiobay • Blue Beautifly • Ere Perez • Innersense Organic Beauty • Ranavat • Fūhlich • Santaverde • Witlof Skincare • Eccora • SO'BiO étic	• 100% Pure • Edible Beauty • Khadi • Mammaearth • Forest Essential • Juicy Chemistry • Juicy Chemistry • Loli Beauty • Agent Nageur • Ao Organics Hawaii • Baiobay • Blue Beautifly • Ere Perez • Hanua • Innersense Organic Beauty • Ranavat • Maya Chia • Fūhlich • Flow Cosmetics • Niyok • Sara Rosalie • Santaverde • Witlof Skincare • Eccora • SO'BiO étic • Santo Remedio	• Edible Beauty • Forest Essential • Juicy Chemistry • Loli Beauty • Agent Nageur • Anima Mundi • Ere Perez • Niyok • Santaverde • SO'BiO étic	• Edible Beauty • Khadi • Forest Essential • Juicy Chemistry • Wildcrafted Organics • Ao Organics Hawaii • Baiobay • Ere Perez • Maya Chia • Flow Cosmetics • Niyok • Santaverde • Eccora • Santo Remedio

Table 7. Framing outcome from the desk research.

Theorization

Among the strategy of theorization it could be observed five emerging themes across the companies. The first one and perhaps the most relevant is the conceptualisation of *natural.* As illustrated in this research, one of the main problematics with mainstream cosmetics is the green washing and misuse of the word *natural*. Thus, the main strategy of these type of companies is to conceptualise what natural means to them. This can be reflected on the fact that 27 out of the 32 companies define and explain what natural means to their brand on their webpages.

> *"How We Define Natural: An ingredient or formula composed of plant, mineral, and/ or marine vegetation that undergoes chemical changes due to biological processes such as fermentation, distillation, and cold processing"* (100%Pure, 2022a, p. 1)

Moreover, another strategy theme among companies is also theorizing their brand as a product of science-based evidence. There are fourteen brands using this strategy method as showcase in the Table 8. This could mean either the founder of the company studied some kind of formulation science, which variates from herbalism to chemical pharmacy, or that they are formulas are formulated by a certified formulator. This is an important part of their theorization because it provides rational validation to their product and brand as a whole.

> *"Our Founder, Anna Mitsios, launched Australia's first edible skincare range in 2014. An expert in the field, she has pursued herbal medicine, naturopathy and nutrition for more than 15 years."* (Edible Beauty, 2021, p. 8)

Furthermore, 13 companies also theorize their brand and products as a vehicle for self-love. This goes in line with the notion of entrepreneurs theorizing their products as one that goes beyond its functionality. These fourteen companies express in their webpages how their products are gonna contribute or help with the notion of falling in-love again with yourself.

> *"At Ao Organics Hawaii, we carefully formulate affordable skincare products for all skin types - with only a handful of organic ingredients. We know when your skin feels nourished, healthy, and hydrated, you'll fall in love with your skin again."* (Ao Organics Hawaii, 2022)

There is another emerging strategy theme that streams from the conceptualisation of natural, but still maintains a separate ground-base for it. The conceptualisation of *safe* seems paramount for two out of the 32 companies. An example of this is the company Mamaearth. They prioritise the fact that their products are ingredients are safe for new moms and children. Perhaps with this message they want to communicate with their consumers that they understand that not everything that is natural is safe. Thus, prioritising the conceptualisation of safe as ingredients approved by certain institutions and certifications.

> *"Asia's 1st Brand with MADE SAFE™ Certified Products (Oh Yeah!!). We make sure, our products go through all the required tests and meet the safety standards that you as parent expect. We have a stringent set of super safe standards which you can read about in detail here. If it is unsafe, it is not meant for our baby's world and it's not from mamaearth."* - (Mamaearth, 2022, p. 4)

Theme / Strategy	Conceptualising what natural is	Science based (formulas or formulators)	Conceptualising self-love	Conceptualising what safe is	Sharing their story
Theoratization	• 100% Pure • NOEC • Edible Beauty • Khadi • Forest Essential • Juicy Chemistry • Loli Beauty • Agent Nageur • Wildcrafted Organics • Anima Mundi • Ao Organics Hawaii • Baiobay • Bluebeautifly • Calia • Ere Perez • Hanua • Innersense Organic Beauty • Under Luna • Fühlich • Flow Cosmetics • Niyok • Sara Rosalie • Santaverde • Witlof Skincare • Eccora • SO'BiO étic • Santo Remedio	• 100% Pure • Edible Beauty • Khadi • Juicy Chemistry • Agent Nageur • Wildcrafted Organics • Anima Mundi • Ao Organics Hawaii • Aquableu • Bluebeautifly • Ere Perez • Hanua • Innersense Organic Beauty • Under Luna • Ranavat • Maya Chia • Fühlich • Niyok • Santaverde • Eccora • Santo Remedio	• 100% Pure • Edible Beauty • Khadi • Mamaearth • Loli Beauty • Ao Organics Hawaii • Aquableu • Ere Perez • Innersense Organic Beauty • Innersense Organic Beauty • Ranavat • Witlof Skincare • Santo Remedio	• Mamaearth • Ao Organics Hawaii	

Table 8. Theorization outcome from the desk research.

Expectations

When it comes to the factor of Expectations six themes were observed on the companies webpage. The first theme relates to how their products differ from other natural and non-natural cosmetics. As exemplified on Table 9, from the 32 analysed companies 29 mention on their webpage what makes their product different. They do this explaining that their products are with certain ingredients or certain specific processes.

> *"Maya Chia skin care products use the highest quality natural, organic and wildcrafted ingredients from conscious growers across the world. Our products are never formulated with parabens, phthalates, synthetic fragrances, PEGs, or SLSs. All of our products are made in the USA from domestic and imported components. Maya Chia uses a patented process to extract the oil called supercritical extraction. The gentle oxygen-free, solvent-free process results in oil with a total absence of chemical residues and impurities, and one that most closely mirrors the chemical profile of the plant. What that means for our customer is that they get the best, purest, most stable, effective, and potent chia oil in the market with up to an 18 month shelf life."* - (Maya Chia, 2022, pp. 7-8)

Second, almost all of the companies analysed also exhibit a strong component of emphasis on their values and principles. A total of 29 out of 32 companies list on their webpages their guiding principles and values, as well as the reason why they chose those.

> *"FŪHLICH natural cosmetics combines pure and modern ingredients with the highest quality standards, naturalness and ecology. At the same time, sustainability and environmental awareness are the key point in our production. All our products are 100% vegan and of organic source."* - (Fūhlich, n.d, p. 2)

Third, 21 companies also create expectations through selling not only a product but also a lifestyle. These companies have an underlying narrative that when you buy their products, you are also buying a product that is align with certain specific lifestyle; either eco-conscious or health-conscious.

> *"We believe that balance in body, mind and soul make a person happy and whole. The secret of khadi consists of these three elements that combine in the khadi elixir for a magical effect.*" (Khadi, 2022, p. 2)

Fourth, twenty-five companies build expectations through scientific validation. By scientific validation is meant either the entrepreneurs themselves are trained somehow in formulation of cosmetic or the company hires a chemical pharmaceutical to formulate their products, or through certifications, such as Made Safe or Fair Trade.

> *"Aside from the beautiful packaging, we hold ingredients quality to a very high standard. Each product in the line is certified by either USDA or Made Safe to ensure it is non-toxic and organic where mentioned. All products are leaping bunny certified and made here in the USA"* (Utroske, 2017, p. 18)

The fifth theme found is regarding an educational component. From the 32 companies, 9 were found to create expectations through also expressing a mission to educate consumers about ingredients and practices. Their main goal is to help consumers become aware of what they are putting on theirs skin and how this can impact their health in the long term and short term. Therefore, they build the expectation for consumer of actually deepening their knowledge through their brand.

Finally, the last theme found was whether or not the companies used the term Edible Cosmetics as a way to generate expectations. From the 32 companies, only 5 were found to use the term EC explicitly or any form suggestive form of it.

> *"If You Cannot Eat It, Do Not Use It On Your Skin"* (Forest Essential, n.d, p. 2)

Theme / Factor	How their products differ from other cosmetics	Emphasis on their values and principles	Selling a lifestyle	Scientific validation (science based formulas or certifications)	Education of consumers	Usage of the term Edible Cosmetics
Expectations	• 100% Pure • NOEC • Edible Beauty • Khadi • Mammaearth • Forest Essentials • Juicy Chemistry • Agent Nateur • Wildcrafted Organics • Anima Mundi • Ao Organics Hawaii • Aquableu • Baiobay • Blue Beautifly • Calia • Ere Perez • Innersense Organic Beauty • Under Luna • Ranavat • Maya Chia • FŪHLICH • Flow Cosmetics • Niyok • Sara Rosalie • Santaverde • Witlof Skincare • Eccora • SO'BiO étic • Santo Remedio	• 100% Pure • NOEC • Edible Beauty • Khadi • Mammaearth • Forest Essentials • Juicy Chemistry • Loli Beauty • Agent Nateur • Wildcrafted Organics • Anima Mundi • Ao Organics Hawaii • Baiobay • Blue Beautifly • Calia • Ere Perez • Hanua • Innersense Organic Beauty • Under Luna • Ranavat • FŪHLICH • Flow Cosmetics • Niyok • Sara Rosalie • Santaverde • Witlof Skincare • Eccora • SO'BiO étic • Santo Remedio	• 100% Pure • NOEC • Khadi • Forest Essentials • Juicy Chemistry • Loli Beauty • Agent Nateur • Anima Mundi • Ao Organics Hawaii • Blue Beautifly • Ere Perez • Hanua • Innersense Organic Beauty • Ranavat • Flow Cosmetics • Sara Rosalie • Santaverde • Witlof Skincare • Eccora • SO'BiO étic • Santo Remedio	• 100% Pure • NOEC • Edible Beauty • Khadi • Mammaearth • Forest Essentials • Juicy Chemistry • Loli Beauty • Wildcrafted Organics • Anima Mundi • Baiobay • Blue Beautifly • Calia • Ere Perez • Innersense Organic Beauty • Ranavat • Maya Chia • FŪHLICH • Flow Cosmetics • Sara Rosalie • Santaverde • Witlof Skincare • Eccora • SO'BiO étic • Santo Remedio	• 100% Pure • Edible Beauty • Agent Nateur • Anima Mundi • Ao Organics Hawaii • Santaverde • Witlof Skincare • Eccora • Santo Remedio	• NOEC • Edible Beauty • Forest Essentials • Loli Beauty • Ere Perez

Table 9. Factor Expectations outcome from the desk research.

Network

The network analysis was done through researching the types of online and off-line networks that the companies built. The online-network construction was analysed through the lens of online presence in different social media platforms. By analysis this, it is posible to observed the type and size of costumer network the company is trying to build. It could be said that the more social media platforms used, the larger the range of possibility to reach new consumers. The seven most commonly used social media platforms were considered, those being Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, Twiter, and Youtube. As shown in Table 10, Facebook and Instagram seems to be the most popular among the companies analysed with 30 companies using both of these platforms. The next in line would be Pinterest with sixteen companies using it. Youtube and Twiter are next in line with eleven companies using the former one and ten companies using the latter one. Surprisingly, only nine companies are using LinkedIn and only four companies are using TikTok. The off-line network construction was based on if the companies also had some kind of social or environmental program that they support, or a business program for consumers to join. It can be observed in Table 10 that eleven companies have some kind of program. This could range from planting trees for every product they sell, or providing educational support in vulnerable communities, to an affiliate program for consumers to start selling their products independently. For example, Edible Beauty from Australia has a program that helps communities in need who are victims of environmental disasters, such as the Australian bush fires (Thompson, 2022). Another example is Baiobay that is part of the organisation 1% For The Planet (Baiobay, 2022). Lastly, 100% Pure has an Affiliate Program in which they allow individuals to sell their products on social media (100%Pure, 2022b).

Theme Factor	Facebook	LinkedIn	Instagram	TikTok	Pinterest	Twiter	Youtube	Social/ Environmental/Business Program
Network	• 100% Pure • NOEC • Edible Beauty • Khadi • Mammaearth • Forest Essentials • Juicy Chemistry • Loli Beauty • Agent Nateur • Wildcrafted Organics • Anima Mundi • Ao Organics Hawaii • Aquableu • Baiobay • Blue Beautifly • Calia • Ere Perez • Hanua • Innersense Organic Beauty • Ranavat • Maya Chia • FŪHLICH • Flow Cosmetics • Niyok • Sara Rosalie • Santaverde • Witlof Skincare • Eccora • SO'BiO étic • Santo Remedio	• 100% Pure • Khadi • Forest Essentials • Juicy Chemistry • Blue Beautifly • Hanua • Innersense Organic Beauty • Maya Chia • SO'BiO étic	• 100% Pure • Edible Beauty • Khadi • Mammaearth • Forest Essentials • Juicy Chemistry • Loli Beauty • Agent Nateur • Wildcrafted Organics • Anima Mundi • Ao Organics Hawaii • Aquableu • Baiobay • Blue Beautifly • Calia • Ere Perez • Hanua • Innersense Organic Beauty • Under Luna • Ranavat • Maya Chia • FŪHLICH • Flow Cosmetics • Niyok • Sara Rosalie • Santaverde • Witlof Skincare • Eccora • SO'BiO étic • Santo Remedio	• 100% Pure • Khadi • Ere Perez • Maya Chia	• Edible Beauty • Khadi • Mammaearth • Loli Beauty • Agent Nateur • Wildcrafted Organics • Anima Mundi • Ao Organics Hawaii • Blue Beautifly • Ere Perez • Hanua • FŪHLICH • Flow Cosmetics • Sara Rosalie • Santaverde	• Edible Beauty • Khadi • Mammaearth • Forest Essentials • Juicy Chemistry • Loli Beauty • Anima Mundi • Aquableu • Blue Beautifly	• Edible Beauty • Khadi • Mammaearth • Forest Essentials • Juicy Chemistry • Agent Nateur • Blue Beautifly • Ere Perez • Innersense Organic Beauty • Santaverde	• 100% Pure • NOEC • Edible Beauty • Juicy Chemistry • Loli Beauty • Agent Nateur • Anima Mundi • Baiobay • Maya Chia • Witlof Skincare • SO'BiO étic

Table 10. Network factor outcome from the desk research.

Learning

As mentioned it earlier, only 9 companies from the 32 had an explicit education component on their webpage. Unfortunately, the factor of learning process is limited to research and evaluate based on only desk research. This is why for this factor only the theme of educational component was looked at. This leaves spaces for further research on the factor of the learning process of these companies.

Nonetheless, the fact that there are companies that include the educational component as an important part of their company is a peculiar behaviour that not all cosmetic brands have (See table 11).

Theme	Educational Component
Factor	
Leaning Process	• 100% Pure • Edible Beauty • Agent Nateur • Anima Mundi • Ao Organics Hawaii • Santaverde • Witlof Skincare • Eccora • Santo Remedio

Table 11. Learning Factor outcome from the desk research.

6.3 Netnography

As a supportive tool for the semi-structured interviews and the desk research on the selected companies, a netnography was implemented as well. In it, the research focused on the online discussion regarding Edible Cosmetics and any form of verbatim found on forums, blogs, and online discussions.

The first step of the netnography was to look on Google Trend the term Edible Cosmetics for the past five years. The search was set for all categories, with a worldwide search. Interestingly, the term Edible Cosmetics is not a popular search. Some days there are some Google searches for it and some other days that there are zero searches. It could be argued that that there is not necessarily an upwards or downward tendency, but rather stable and sporadic searches (See Figure 7).

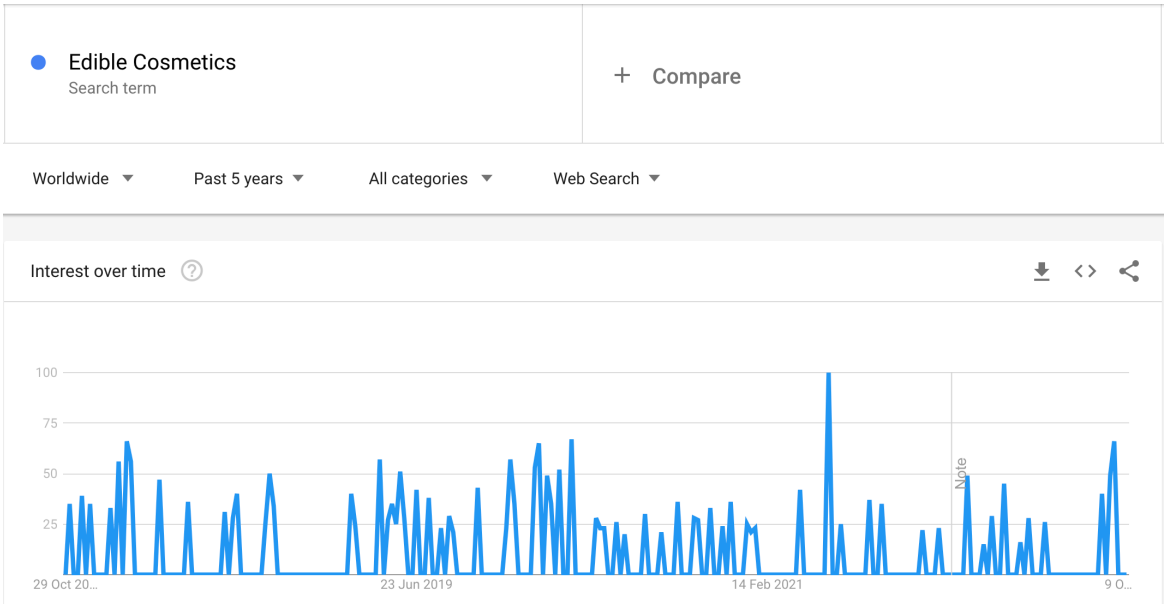

Figure 7. *Note.* [Screenshot by Montenegro, M.J]. Google Trends. (2022a). Edible Cosmetics. Retrieved October 31st. https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&q=Edible%20Cosmetics.

The next step of the netnography was to search for discussion forums. The two main discussion networks used were Reddit and Quora. On one hand, Reddit is described as a conglomerations of forums of discussion where people can share content, news, and comment on other individual's posts. In 2021, Reddit was the 19th most popular site worldwide (digitaltrends, 2022 https://www.digitaltrends.com/computing/what-is-reddit/). Thus, Reddit represents a large online network where discussions of all type happen. On the other hand, Quora is not as highly ranked as Reddit when it comes to internet traffic occupying only the position number 323th globally. Nonetheless, according to Google Trends (n.d) the usage volume of Quora has been increasing in the last five years as shown in the image below (See Figure 8). Therefore, the low online presence and its popularity rise, attributes Quora a good contrast to the search perform in Reddit as it gives this research access to smaller online group discussions.

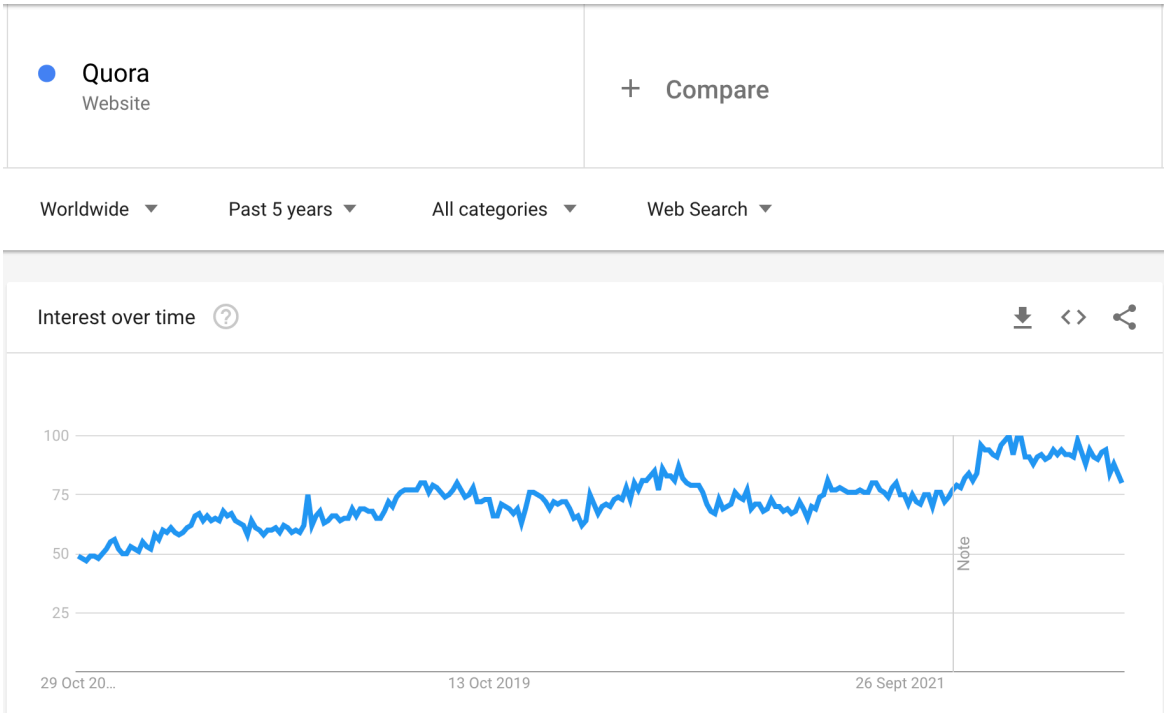

Figure 8. *Note.* [Screenshot by Montenegro, M.J]. Google Trends. (2022b). Quora. Retrieved October 31st. https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&q=%2Fm%2F0bm8t1r.

In both, Reddit and Quora, a search for the terms Edible Cosmetics and the sentence 'If you would not eat it, do not put it on your skin' was done. On Reddit, there was only one found active threat of discussion regarding Edible Cosmetics. This was a threat of an individual asking what it meant that there are Edible Beauty products. This threat had only two responses only. In contrast, in Quora there is one threat of a discussion asking what Edible Cosmetics are. There are also three threats discussing how to formulate Edible Cosmetics and the differences between food-grade and cosmetic-grade ingredients. In Quora, the former discussion does not have any respondes. Nonetheless, the three threats asking question regarding formulation process has several comments and people seem to engage in such discussions.

Analysing the discussion threats under the present analytical framework, it could be said that the two threats found in Reddit and Quora regarding what EC are, fall under the strategy of Theorization. This is why because it conceptualises what Edible Cosmetics are. Moreover, the three threats from Quora regarding formulation process and ingredients, could be argue to fall under the factor of Learning Process. This is because it feeds into the learning process of amateur formulators of EC, which could in the future could tentative become entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, a Google search was also done on the terms Edible Cosmetics and the sentences 'If you would not eat it, do not put it on your skin'. This search shed more results regarding EC. There were six results of articles discussing the term EC. Analysing these articles through the analytical framework of this research, it is possible to identify two articles regarding Identification of a Problem. On one hand, one blog post is discussing why ingredients of mainstream cosmetics are toxic and why EC are the answer for this problem. An example of this is on one of the articles in which it states:

> *"Everything we consume into our bodies and all of the environmental factors we encounter on a daily basis filter through our blood […] What better way to heal the body than with pure, raw, unrefined, organic, whole plants from Mother Nature? After all, we as humans in this day are picky about what foods we eat, so why shouldn't we be with our skin care products?"* (Bluffton, 2015, p 2)

On the other hand, there is an article discussing how hard is to get *truly* 100% natural cosmetics, so the author of the article mentions that now the sentence 'if you would not eat, do not put it on your skin' is her new rule for buying cosmetics.

> *"It's not easy to buy 100% natural cosmetic products on the high-street […] I have a new and very simple regime underway…. 'If you can't eat it don't put it on your skin!'"* (Seastainability, n.d, p. 4)

Furthermore, there is one articles found that fall under the factor of Expectations. This article is from the platform Buzzfeed in which two women were actually eating EC and providing people a review of EC's taste (See Images 1 & 2). This article fall under the factor of building because it helps to create expectations for consumers regarding EC and if they are actually edible. It also helps sending the message that EC products are *truly natural* and safe, regardless of their taste. An example of this is the following review of this product

Image 1. *Note.* [Screenshoot by Montenegro, M.J]. Chirico, K. & Nygaard, S. (2016, April 3). We tried “edible" cosmetics and there were some suprises. In *Buzzfeed*. https://www.buzzfeed.com/safiyanygaard/we-ate-some-beauty-products-and-had-a-really-bad-day?utm_term=.vwgxD75gPq#.uuWEaRPQLp.

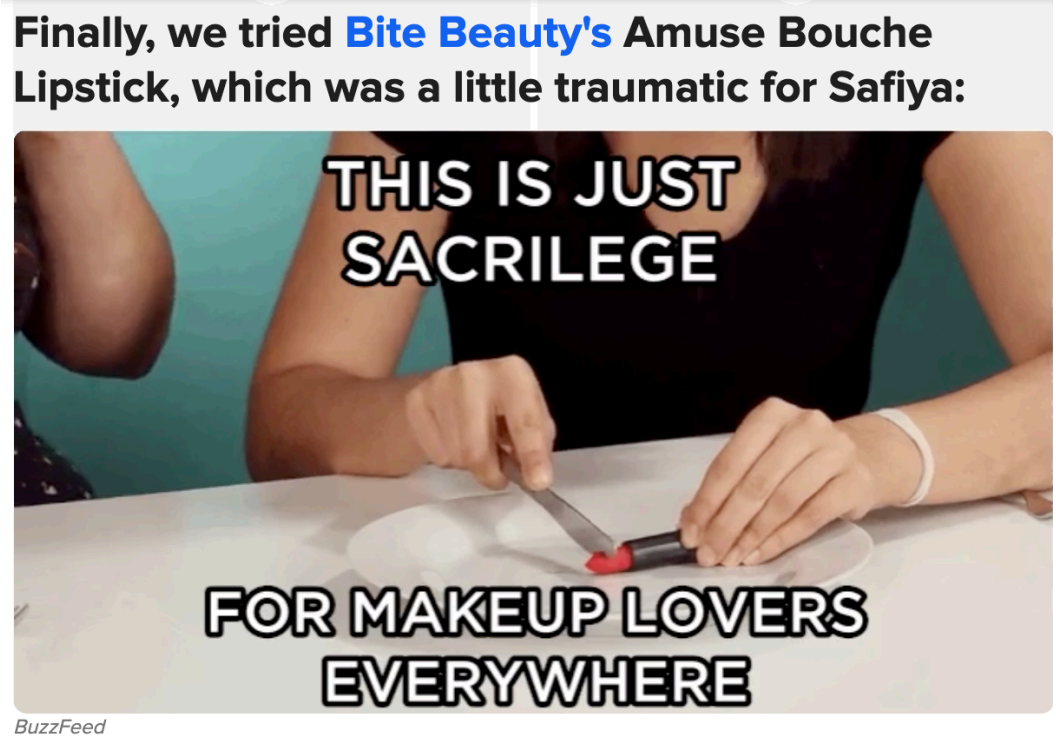

Image 2. *Note.* [Screenshoot by Montenegro, M.J]. Chirico, K. & Nygaard, S. (2016, April 3). We tried “edible" cosmetics and there were some suprises. In *Buzzfeed*. https://www.buzzfeed.com/safiyanygaard/we-ate-some-beauty-products-and-had-a-really-bad-day?utm_term=.vwgxD75gPq#.uuWEaRPQLp.

Regarding the Network factor it was found one article talking about EC and in this there were several brands recommended. This falls under the network category due to the fact that it helps these mentioned brands to widen their customer network through being mentioned in these type of public articles. Moreover, there were no results for any kind of association, institution, online group for specifically EC companies or entrepreneurs. This show a lack of an organised community of Edible Cosmetic companies.

Lastly, regarding the factor of Learning Process, there were three articles found on how to do your own EC at home. The title of some were "HOW TO MAKE NATURAL EDIBLE COSMETICS WITH PULPS?" (VeganMileker, n.d) and "IF YOU CAN'T EAT IT – DON'T PUT IT ON YOUR SKIN - RAW BODYCARE COSMETICS" (seastainability, 2017, p. 1). Moreover, there was one article explaining what were the most common toxic ingredients in cosmetics and why are they bad for human health.

> *"They are most commonly found in products that have a high percentage of water, for example: shampoos, but can also be found in a variety of other items. Most common types of parabens: Methylparaben, Ethylparaben, Propylparaben, Byutlparaben, Isopropylparaben, and Isobutylparaben"* (Bathbox, 2022, p. 19)

In order to see the links to the articles, blogs, and threats that were studied, see Appendix E.

Factor **Platform**	Identification of a Problem	Framing	Theorizing	Expectations	Network	Learning Process
Reddit	No results for neither of the 2 searches.	No results for neither of the 2 searches.	1 threat regarding one what they are:	No results for neither of the 2 searches.	No results for neither of the 2 searches	No results for neither of the 3 searches.
Quora	No results for neither of the 2 searches.	No results for neither of the 2 searches.	1 threat that has no answer regarding what are they	No results for neither of the 2 searches.	No results for neither of the 2 searches	3 threats all with answers regarding formulation processes.
Google Search	1 article post on why ingredients of mainstream cosmetics are toxic 1 article post talking about how hard is to get 100% natural cosmetics	No results for neither of the 2 searches.	No results for neither of the 2 searches.	1 article of people trying eating edible cosmetics	1 articles post recommending brands of food-grade cosmetics	3 articles post of how to make DIY food-grade cosmetics made at home 1 article post on what are the most common toxic mainstream ingredients and why are they toxic

Table 12. Netnography outcome.

6.4 Combined Analysis

In the following section the research question and following sub-questions will be answered based on the above results combined. The guiding question of the present research is *How does Edible Cosmetics develop from a proto-niche into a niche?* In order to be able to answer this question, it is important to remind the reader about the analytical framework of the present research. The framework used explored the importance of Problem Identification, how are the strategies of Theorization and Framing used, and how these strategies influenced the factors of Expectations, Network Formation, and Learning Process in the process of niche creation (See Figure 5).

As the MLP theory states, the early development of new niches start with the identification of a problem in the current STR (Geels, 2002; Schot & Geels, 2007). One of the main results of this research is the fact that the factor Identification of a Problem seem to stream from a health concern of the entrepreneurs themselves or someone they care for. On top of that, frustration and disappointment regarding the toxicity of the ingredients in mainstream cosmetics and the misinformation regarding what natural cosmetics are plays an important part as well as the misuse of marketing techniques regarding the use of the word *natural* and the lack of transparency and sustainability in the supply chain of cosmetics. This is the initial mismatch between the regime and the entrepreneurs' needs. This conclusion can be drawn from the interviews, the desk research, and the netnography. Therefore, it could be said that the commonalities found in the three research methods triangulates the conclusion that the factor Identification of a Problem revolves around the toxicity of ingredients in cosmetics and how these are harmful to humans and to the environment.

Regarding Framing, two types can be observed. The first one is observed in the interviews. Through an in-depth analysis of the problem at hand (Diagnostic Framing), a description of a proposed solution (Prognostic Framing) and a motivational speech regarding change in the regime (Motivational Framing). From the interviewed, it can be observed that diagnostic framing is related to consumers' ignorance regarding cosmetics ingredients due to the lack of transparency and green washing from the mainstream cosmetic companies. It also has to do with the lack of standardisation of the word natural and with mainstream cosmetics being just palliative solutions to skin problems. This leads to all of them expressing a proposed solution (Prognostic Framing) that comes from the mentality of '*if nobody is doing it for us we can do it'*. As well as a proposed solution that is based on an ideology and goes beyond profitability. Lastly, Motivational Framing was expressed through a motivation to educate consumers and people about those identified problems in the Diagnostic Framing: natural cosmetics, toxic ingredients, and health and transparency.

The second type of Framing is observed in the desk research. As exemplified in the results, companies use the strategy of Framing in two manners: by communicating what-they-are-not (regarding ingredients and formulation processes) and by communicating what-they-are (in terms of values and principles). On the one hand, by communicating what-they-are-not they are

differentiating, or even separating, themselves from the current SDT. On the other hand, by expressing what-they-are, companies ensure consumers that their brand and their products are guided by certain principles and not only profitability. Unfortunately, there is no data found regarding the strategy of Framing in the netnography. However, it can be observed already a difference in the way the strategy of Framing unfolds for EC. Once more, perhaps these differences are due to the fact that the interviews allowed a space to explored deeper the strategy of framing, yet these differences are relatively drastic for them to be discarded.

Nevertheless, there is one common component of framing that was found in the desk research as well as in the interviews. The fact that companies frame through the promise of using specific ingredients or regions where the ingredients come from. This promise of sourcing local is the only commonality among the different research methods.

Contrary to Framing, it seems that there is an underlining commonality among companies and the way they use the strategy of Theorizing. First, conceptualising the word *natural* and what a natural cosmetic is, constitute the ground base of this strategy for entrepreneurs and companies. Supporting this is the fact that twenty-eight and two companies from the 32 from the desk research that also theorize through offering an explicit or implicit definition of what *natural* is or what *safe* is. Therefore, the agreed upon definition of a truly *natural cosmetics* is:

> *A product that is made with non-synthetic based ingredients, but rather with nutritious ingredients for the skin, with minimal or thought-through processes that are safe for the environment and the human body, and that are ethically made.*

Although companies from the desk research did not conceptualised natural as ethical (as it was in the in the interviews), there is also a strong focus on how their products are ethically made through certifications. It is worth to mention that the netnography did not shed any results regarding the strategy of Theorizing. Nevertheless, this strategy could be said to be a direct result of the frustration experienced by entrepreneurs with the current STR.

The conceptualisation of *natural* is the first step for the conceptualisation of Edible Cosmetics. The slogan of '*if you would not eat it, do not put it on your skin*' intents to send the message of 'it is so natural that you can eat it'. Thus, is important to first conceptualise what *natural* means in this scenario in order to claim that something is so natural that could be eaten; as petroleum is also natural. Ergo, companies ought to define natural due to the lack of lack of legal definition and protection this concept. Furthermore, another shared component of theorization is to stress the fact that their natural formulation is in fact science-based; some even referring to it as botanical science or green chemistry. All of the entrepreneurs interviewed and fourteen companies from the desk research communicate to the public that their products are rational-based in order to gain validation in the market. This is done though the same three ways across the companies. Either the entrepreneurs being a formulator themselves, or the entrepreneurs finding someone who

is a formulator to do make their formulas, or through obtaining some kind of certification, such as Made Safe.

What is more, another commonality in the way they approach the strategy of Theorization is by expressing that their products are more than just a brand, but rather a holistic-conscious product that also serve as a vehicle for self-love and self-acceptance. Based on the interviews, a conscious life can be defined as:

> *One that the individual is aware of the impact of their actions with regards to the environment, but also their mind and body's health.*

Therefore, conceptualising their products as conscious with their body, mind, and environment, seems to be a specific strategy among EC companies.

Lastly, there is also a commonality found in the interviews and the desk research that EC companies theorize as well through sharing the entrepreneurs' story. This is an important factor of theorization because it adds a human factor to the product and also sends the message of 'if it works for me, it can work for you too'. Consequently, it could be argued that the strategy of Theorization is used more or less in the same manner by entrepreneurs and EC companies across the present research.

Building Expectations is the next factor that cascades from the strategies. In this factor there were some commonalities found across the research methods, but some disparities as well. The components that were found to be in common were five. First, they all construct expectations based on how their formulation practices differ from the mainstream cosmetics. This is a paramount component for this factor. This was observed during the interviews, but as well in the desk research. During the interviews, entrepreneurs make sure to stress what makes then different from other natural and non-natural cosmetics. Further, as mentioned earlier 32 companies from the 30 analysed make an emphasis on their webpage about what makes them different than other cosmetic companies. They do this through exemplifying their unique ingredients, formulation processes, or values. On top of this, in the netnography it was found another unique way to build expectations. The article found in the Google Search helps to build the expectation that these type of cosmetics have safe ingredients by the testimony of two women ingesting the cosmetics for the purpose of the article. It also helps to exacerbate the message that EC should not be eaten given the fact that most of the cosmetic that were eaten did not had a fantastic taste (Chirico & Nygaard, 2016).

Another component found in common is a heavy emphasis on their values and principles. While in the interviews values and principles were an important topic of discussion, in the desk research 30 out of the 32 companies made sure to stress what are they values and principles. Perhaps, this mechanism of building Expectations due to the fact that their products go beyond their functionality, reinforcing the idea of a conscious lifestyle. On top of that, companies and entrepreneurs make sure to also communicate why they chose those values and principles. These

promises of always prioritising their principles is key especially for the building of expectations for consumers. They create the promise of maintaining the same quality and standards.

What is more, there is also a commonality regarding a human component that these companies offer. In the interviews it could be seen that most companies offered some kind of personalised holistic advise as seen with Witlof Skincare, Santo Remedio, and Eccora. This component could be seen as well in the desk research. This could be observed through the fact that some companies not only have their online store, but also some kind of blog or article section in their webpage discussing ingredients, health, and tips to follow recommended by them.

Furthermore, all entrepreneurs and companies from the desk research share as well that they all seek validation and credibility for their products through the fact that all of their formulas are science based. Through this approach they assured not only consumers, but also tentative investors that their idea is supported by rational and science. Due to the different backgrounds of the entrepreneurs, some of them obtained this validation through having a pharmaceutical chemist making the formulas for them or becoming one themselves.

Another commonality regarding Expectations is the fact that companies use their entrepreneurs' story to build them. Sharing the story of how the company came to be, what were the problems entrepreneurs faced, and how natural cosmetic helped them fixing them is a preponderant component of building Expectations. It helps to transmit a message of hope and efficacy of their cosmetics.

Moreover, entrepreneur from the interviews and the desk research share a promise of educating consumers. This factor was also key in the building of this factor given the fact that is a promise of providing agency to the consumer. This could be draw back from the component found in Diagnostic Framing that entrepreneurs found a problem in the lack of consumers' knowledge regarding ingredients.

Lastly, it was found that some of the interviewed companies as well of the companies researched in the desk research would use or use already the term Edible Cosmetic to create expectations. From the interviews, those who would use say that it is a way to send the message to consumer that their products are safe and natural. It could be assumed from the desk research, that the ten companies using the term use it for the same purposes; as a marketing technique.

As mentioned earlier, there were some disparities found as well. For example it was found in the interviews that companies have or had a lack of business plan, investors, and marketing strategy. This could be due to the fact that these kind of information would not be really accessible to the public on the companies' website. Therefore, these components found in only the interviews but not in the desk research should be focus of further research. Nonetheless, it is relevant that these components were found as a commonality across different companies from the interviews.

Some main conclusions can be drawn. First, it seems to be that there is a strong customer network due to customer acquisition and retention and a philanthropic network due to affiliated programs. This is shown in he interviews and in the desk research. For example, most companies have minimum two social media platforms for which the reach consumers and tentative

consumers as well. With Facebook and Instagram being the most popular, other social media platforms are also used such as Twitter, Pinterest, and Youtube. Each platform represents a different way of communicating with consumers. The more platforms they have, the wider the online presences and thus larger reach of the company. Some companies, such as 100% Pure and NOEC, even have also a costumer program in which consumers can sign up to be independent sellers of the brand. What is more, companies seem to also to construct a philanthropic or environmental network through being affiliated to some social program or environmental program as shown by the desk research and in the interviews. For example, Eccora has a program in collaboration with an NGO that is in charge of collecting Eccora's packaging and ensuring they are properly recycled.

Moreover, from the interviews, another component of the Network factor is the fact that the building of the companies was a communal effort from friends, family and acquaintances of the entrepreneurs. In other cases, such as Santo Remedio or Witlof Skincare, they also received help from the government or from actors of the current regime. This showcases a strong supportive network surrounding the building of the companies.

However, as the interviews showcased, there seems to be a lack of a network among Edible Cosmetic companies. First, as the network map illustrated from the five companies interviewed, the entrepreneurs only knew very few companies from the overall sample pool of the present research. This could be argued to exemplify a weak world network of EC companies. Supporting this idea is the lack of associations, institutions, or groups online regarding specifically EC as shown by the netnography. One reason for this could be that as mentioned in the interviews, the market of natural cosmetic is highly competitive. Thus, individuals are really vigilant with the information they share. Due to this, there is little knowledge transfer among EC. Nevertheless, entrepreneurs mentioned that there is knowledge transfer among companies from other markets that share their same values.

Moving forward, from the Network factor it streams the Learning Process factor. This factor was better and deeper analysed through the interviews and the netnography. Given the fact that there is not an established EC network, the learning process seems to be stagnant. From the interviews, it was possible to observed that there was an initial fast learning process regarding consumer profile and target groups, the flaws and complications of the current market and supply chain. As well as regarding cosmetic formulation and on how to execute their mission of education. However, the process seemed to stopped there. Every learning process described above is one that has a ceiling of what you can learn by oneself. There are several benefits of learning from a community, especially for niche development (Kemp, Schot & Hoogma, 1998). Moreover, from the desk research it could be obtain little knowledge regarding the learning processes of the companies at hand regarding the topics above mentioned.

Nonetheless, there is one component of the learning process that could be observed in both the interview and the desk research. This is the educational component that companies aim to have for consumers. However, this is a learning process for the consumer and not the companies.

Furthermore, the netnography shed some light on the fact that there are blogs and articles out there teaching people how to do their own cosmetics. These cosmetic recipes are intended for consumers and amateur formulators, not for companies. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the target audience of these articles could be potential EC entrepreneurs in the future. Although there is a limited Learning Process happening outside the companies, the netnography shed some hope on the fact that there is information online to feed the learning process of future entrepreneurs.

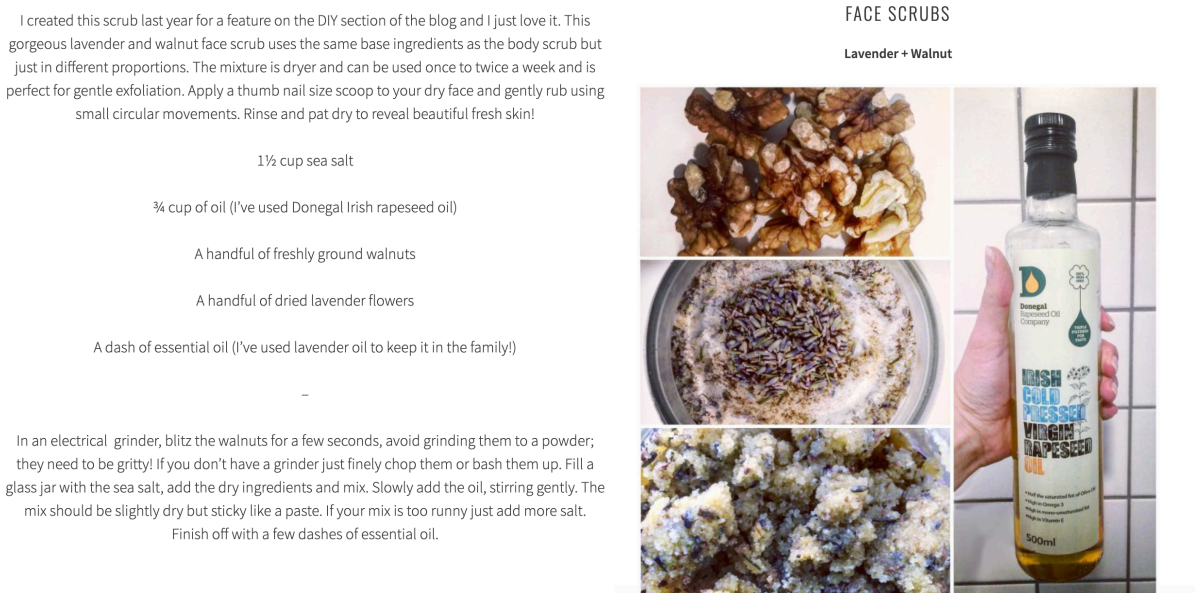

Image 3. *Note.* [Screenshoot by Montenegro, M.J]. Seastainability. (n.d). IF YOU CAN'T EAT IT – DON'T PUT IT ON YOUR SKIN. https://seastainability.com/2017/12/27/rawbodycarecosmetics/

In the figure 9 below it can be found a summarised visual representation of all the components from the analytical framework found in the three research methods used.

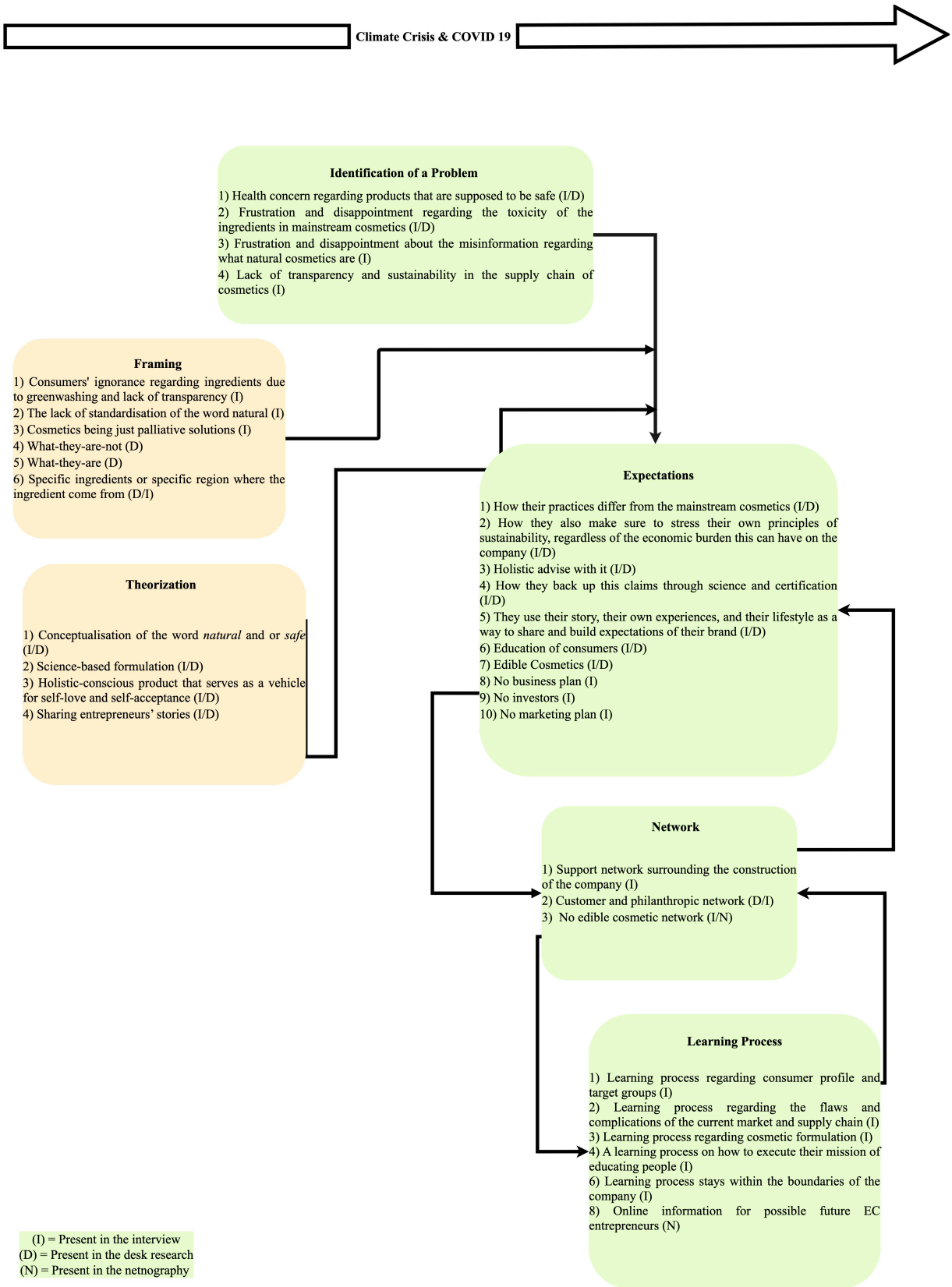

Figure 9. Summary of the components found for each of the strategies and factors across the three research methods.

7. Discussion

The figure above with the results of the analysis of the research methods through the lens of analytical framework illustrates the commonalities and differences among EC companies in their process of company creation. We can conclude that, despite commonalities in problem identification, framing and theorization, Edible Cosmetics maintains in a proto-niche state due to a lack of converging expectations, lack of networking among companies and little learning rate.

The proto-niche state of EC is further exemplified by the concept in itself: *'if you would not eat it, do not put it on your skin'*. This is a simple and powerful guiding principle. As explained before, Edible Cosmetics are more than just cosmetics that you *could* eat. Emphasis on the *could* given the fact that categorising a product as 'Edible Cosmetic' is not an invitation or encouragement to consumers to take the message literally; as it happened in the Buzzfeed article. It is important that this research stress the fact that individuals should not be eating their cosmetics. Nonetheless, as explained in the result section of the interviews, it is a message for consumers that products are safe, fairly made, 100% natural, and non-toxic for humans and the environment. It is therefore a marketing strategy. It is a powerful way to describe and transmit the message that these entrepreneurs are trying to send, yet it can be confusing. There is however disagreement among entrepreneurs regarding this slogan. Companies that are founded by a science-based entrepreneur, such as Eccora and Santo Remedio, find this term problematic as it can be confusing for the consumer, as well as dangerous as they claimed. This could also be supported by the fact that from the 32 companies only ten use the term EC. Despite being a marketing strategy carrying an important message, it is not one chosen by many companies.

Moreover, there is not a significant amount of online information regarding the term EC. As shown by the netnography, there are even threats of discussion of people asking what they are and if they are really edible. Entrepreneurs also argued that it is mixing two different types of ingredients; food-grade ingredients and cosmetic-grade ingredients that are ruled by different principles, rules, and legislation. This can be supported by the fact that there are some threats online on Reddit and Quora asking the difference between food-grade and cosmetic-grade ingredients. Consequently, it can be argued that there is not an agreement among companies that could be classified or classify themselves as EC companies. The term is even contested by many some who could fall under this category, yet they all share the principle of 100% natural safe ingredients.

Further confusion stems from the notion of sustainability. Most of the companies that were researched put a heavy emphasis on sustainability. However, companies do not interpret and enforce sustainability in the same manner. As mentioned by founder entrepreneur of company A, sustainability is a complex concept that is far from having a simple enforcing formula. For example, while a founder aims at having maximal control over her supply chain through having in-house cultivation of the main ingredient as Company A, Eccora strives to have maximal control of their supply chain by owing a lab of her own where she herself can make the formulas.

Founders do ‘what it feels right’ and ‘they follow their gut’ for when it comes to taking decision regarding the brand.

> *“Sometimes is difficult, because I go with my gut. I never did any kind of research for my shop or SPA”*- Witlof Cosmetics

From the desk research this could also be observed. Some companies put their emphasis of sustainability on the packaging, such as Nyiok, while some other put their sustainability emphasis on formulation practices like Edible Beauty. Some other companies put an emphasis on the social aspect of sustainability by making an emphasis on how their products are ethically made such as Anima Mundi. This makes the principle the same, yet the focus and enforcement of this ruling principle different.

Adding to the lack of agreement regarding the concept of EC and its sustainability, is the fact that from the five companies that were interviewed, some claimed to not have had a consistent business plan or business model, let alone a scaling-up strategy. For the companies researched online it was hard to find this type of information. For example, Ere Perez’s founder claims that she did not have a business plan when she started and she does not have one today yet. This information could be used to argue that there is not a common Business Model for EC companies.

> *I always think ‘I am probably not going to come across as what everybody has tell you at school what an entrepreneur is or has to be’. I actually do not have a plan; never had. In fact, I still do not have a business plan. Ere Perez began with what I like to call ‘the power of intention’ or just doing something. Just have to have the will to start* - Ere Perez

Furthermore, companies from the interviews also claimed to not have had a marketing strategy. They all claimed to just began to share their stories with friends, families, and anybody who would listen. For example, Company A claimed to just through her already established networked began to talk to people until one day she landed on a four pages magazine article. Same with the founder of Eccora which she claimed she did not have one at the beginning of the company, nor she has one today necessarily. From the desk research is also possible to observe how across the 32 companies their marketing strategy variates. Some companies put an emphasis on their health component, or on their sourcing, or on their practices. Moreover, the way the companies from the interviews and from the desk research frame also variates. While in the interviews entrepreneurs frame in a way of what is wrong with the current market, the desk research focus more on differentiating themselves by communicating what-they-are and what-they-are-not. This variation regarding marketing techniques could also be related to the fact that they share some principles, such as sustainability, yet they enforce them differently.

Another factor keeping EC in a proto-niche state is that there is not a consistent product category. They are all unique and special to the brands. The companies all have specific product categories that they specialised on and the ingredients they work as well differs. For example, Company A's product category is based on only Aloe Vera juice, while Santo Remedio and Eccora are based on only Colombian ingredients. Ere Perez works with only Australian ingredients and Khadi with Indian ingredients. This variation of leads to a non-standardised product category for each of the companies. Moreover, although all of their consumers are eco-conscious and looking for a product that goes beyond its functionality, their consumers are not necessarily coming from a specific consumer profile, but rather from different markets. All of the companies interviewed claimed to attract consumers from the mainstream market as well. Companies such as Eccora even claim that their biggest competitor is in fact not a natural cosmetic brand, but rather one that is part of the mainstream cosmetic market. This customer profile was not possible to observed in the desk research, leaving space for further research on this topic.

> *"There is a brand that is called Loto del Sur. They started very small. They are not a 100% natural and that is not what they try to sell, but they have a very natural aesthetic. Sometimes, I see that my consumers they buy from me some products and they complement with Loto del Sur products. However, they use fragrance. I do not."*
> - Eccora

The lack of homogeneous set of ruling principles and institution could be attributed in part to low entry barriers for when it comes to EC. As mentioned in the previous interview results section, some of the entrepreneurs started doing cosmetic formulas in their kitchen. From the desk research is also possible to observe a diversity on the background of some founders. This means that there are all types of different people from different ares of expertise entering into the EC market. Illustrating this is the contrast between the entrepreneurs that were interviewed. While Ere Perez' founder did an undergraduate program in nutrition, Witlof Skincare's entrepreneur did hers in law. Additionally, and related to this low entry bar, is the different type of innovation that these companies represent. On one hand, companies such as Santo Remedio and Juicy Chemistry can be categorised as a spin-off innovation given the fact that their founders worked previously with the main cosmetic industry. The flaws that the founder of Santo Remedio witnessed while working for the industry, is partially why she started her own company as well.

"Well, the first laboratory that I worked for was more focused on makeup. There, I learned a lot about suppliers and they showed me ingredients, properties, and extracts. This was very interesting to me […] yet I identified a lot of contaminants in their ingredients" - Santo Remedio

On the other hand, companies such as Ere Perez, Company A, Witlof Cosmetics, Eccora, Hanua, and Baiobay can be categorise as a user innovation, given the fact that their motivation to

start a company came from them identifying a gap in the market and then doing the solution themselves.

> "*This is something I invented in my kitchen. It was very easy. When you make your own cream, the formula has a lot of water, a bit of oil, and a little bit of extras."*
> - Company A

Adding to the flow of the above arguments, it could be observed that there is not a clear network established among them either. This is another factor indicating the proto-niche state of EC. Most of the companies have no heard about each other when they were asked. They also claimed that although there is a certain community feeling among natural cosmetic companies, it is still a very reserved and competitive market. They are all willing to share knowledge as long as it does not jeopardise their own formulas or brand. Even though all of them do participate in conferences, webinars, and are subscribed to cosmetic magazines, their main source of information regarding ingredients, technologies, and techniques are their suppliers or wider cosmetic conferences. Netnography results confirm this lack of network. There are no established associations, institutions, or online groups regarding only EC. There is also not an active discussion online regarding EC, besides the articles providing recipes for individuals to do EC at home. What the interviews and the desk research showcased was a strong philanthropic and customer network. However, these two types of networks does not directly help to build a strong community of EC, nor it helps with the knowledge exchange that is necessary for the development of the Learning Process.

> "*Competition is the worst among the beauty market. Is up there and very strong. This makes the messages very confusing for the consumer."* - Ere Perez

Despite the many differences mentioned above, the are some ruling principle shared by many of the companies. One is the focus on health and non-toxic ingredients that most companies have. The fact that this is one of their shared ruling principle perhaps is corollary to the share Identification of a Problem. Another shared commonality is the way companies use the strategy of Framing. Figure 7 showcase how all of the companies studied in this research theorize the same manner. Moreover, there is also a commonality when it comes to customer and philanthropic network. Most companies seem to have a strong construction of them both.

It is important to note the differences on the factor of Learning Process, yet these differences could stream from the many difference found on the previous factos and Framing strategy. As mentioned by the literature, the factor of Learning Process is constructed based on the development of the preceding factors of Network and Expectations (Kemp, Schot & Hoogma, 1998). It could be argued that due the lack of Network of EC companies and the differences found

in Expectations and the strategy of Framing, the development of the Learning Process factor is doomed to stay stagnant.

Moreover, according to Raven, Van den Bosch and Wetering (2010) niches are located under a special 'protective' space where they are isolated from the rules of the STR. In this protective space they can develop the Expectations, Network building and Learning Process needed for a niche (Geels, 2002; Kemp, Schot & Hoogma, 1998). It could be argued that EC is not located under a protective space in which it can develop freely. First, it is not protected geographically given the fact that many small projects of it are emerging all over the world. This can be confirmed by the desk research and the location of all of the 32 companies studied (See Appendix D). Second, it does not enjoy of institutional protection. This relates back to the fact that there is not a legal framework defining what natural cosmetic are, nor a set of requirements for a product to be called natural. In fact, EC companies are currently competing with mainstream cosmetics and the already established niche of the natural cosmetic market. It is easy to find some of this brands next to the big cosmetic brands at a pharmacy. For example, in Germany, it is easy to find Santaverde at DM, Budni, and Müller; all of these are chains of cosmetic stores.

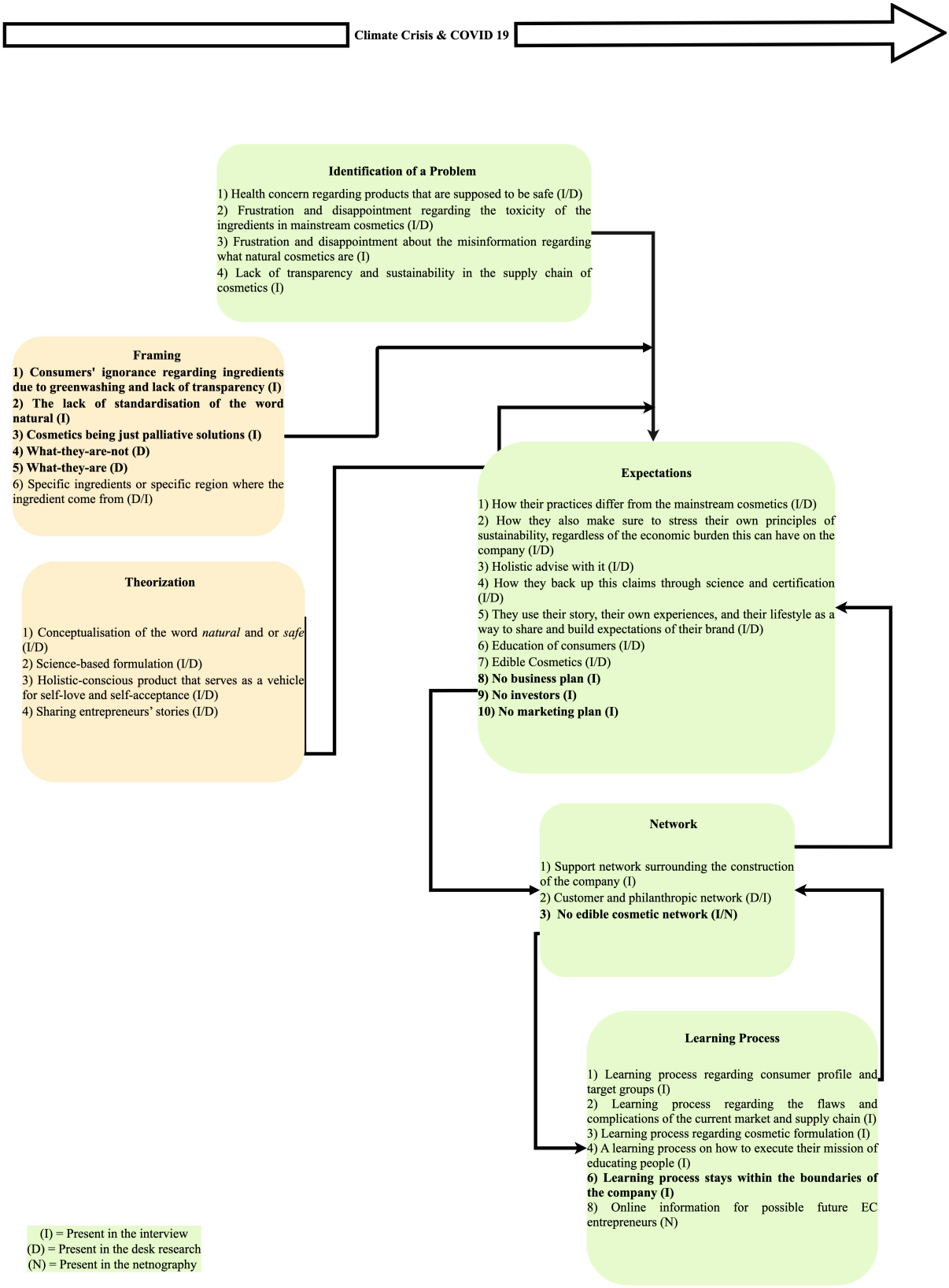

Figure 10. Summary of the components found to maintain Edible Cosmetics in a proto-niche state.

What is more, from the interviews the research could also gain some insights on the role of landscape developments of COVID and the Climate Crisis. As mentioned in the previous section, Entrepreneurs claimed that the COVID pandemic had two main impacts in regards to their companies. First, for most companies they all reported an increase in sales. Second, that consumer behaviour changed as well. Perhaps the former one could be also an indirect casual effect from the later one. As consumers had more time to research about their products and question their ingredients, they also had the time to look for companies that align with their new obtain knowledge. This lead to an increase not only in sales for the already established EC companies, but also the creation of new ones.

> "*One of my fastest years was 2020 and half of 2021, as for 2022 it was the other way around. I also saw an increase in cosmetics brands, but I saw less customers"*
> - Eccora.

This surge in new EC companies could also be attributed to the fact that consumers had more time as well to experiment in their own kitchen. Due to the fact that during the lock downs there were no shops or commerce opened, people had to find creative ways to do SPAs at home with what they had there already: food. Not everyone who experimented in their kitchen during COVID opened a EC company, yet those individuals were the ones looking then for products align to what they were doing in their own kitchens.

Moreover, the landscape of the Climate Crisis also takes an important role in the development of niche innovations such as EC. One of the main principles from all of the interviewed companies is sustainability. They all recognise the importance and the responsibility to take care of our environment. They understand that come from nature and thus we need to take care of it as it would be ourselves. However, they also recognise that the climate crisis as a guiding force of the market nowadays, can also lead to false promises of sustainability or green washing. This is a problem in the current regime, thus this is why EC companies feel the need to express, inform, and educate the consumer that they are part of the *truly natural* market.

> *"You know in Mexico there is a lot of green washing, like chemical green washing. There is also a lot of 'magic' treatments that are not real"* - Ere Perez

To conclude, even though EC fulfils some of the characteristics of a niche and it supported by multiple landscape developments, it is still in a state of a proto-niche. Although companies do share the principle of health, non-toxic ingredients, and an ideology over profit, there are more differences than commonalities. This is reflected on the differences found in Expectations, Networking and Learning. What is more, the main guiding principle is even contested and in disagreement among EC entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the are other guiding principles such as sustainability, but they are enforced differently. Thus, they share the absence of

certain components such as a consistent business plan, customer profile, a product category, and marketing strategy. The lack of these consistencies make it hard for the factors of expectations, network, and learning process to fully developed. On top of that, as mentioned earlier, a protective space is key for these factors to develop. The absence of a protective space only reinforces the missing components under the factors of Expectations, Network, and Learning Process. In Figure 8 below the factors that maintain EC as a proto-niche are highlighted with a bold font.

To answer the research question of *How does Edible Cosmetics develop from a proto-niche into a niche?*: in order to Edible Cosmetics to develop from a proto-niche into a niche it is required first, that there is an agreement regarding the term among companies. It seems that the term in itself is problematic, therefore an agreement should be reach regarding the main term. Second, it would be important to create common guiding rules such as product category, business plan, and marketing strategy. Although they all shared the principle of sustainability, it would be important to bring coherence on how this is enforced across companies. On top of that, a protective space is required for the companies to be able to develop the relevant factors. Once there is a protective space, the surge of an EC network could be facilitated or even encouraged. Lastly, the learning process should also be reinforced by expanding the learning source beyond the companies themselves.

8. Recommendations

We concluded that EC is still in a stage of proto-niche due to a lack of convergence in expectations, networking and learning as well as the meaning of EC itself. Reasoning from niche theory, one of the main components blocking the innovation of EC is the lack of a protective space for the niche of EC. This is reflected on the lack of standardisation of the word natural. As long as there is not a legal framework that defines what can be called natural cosmetics, it will be very hard for such innovations to break into the current STR. Consequently, one of the main recommendations that this research can provide is to seek for ways to define and protect what natural cosmetics are. One perfect example of this, that does not fall under the government's responsibility, is what Company A illustrated in Germany. Five companies created the certificate NATRUE that represents their values as natural formulators and is legally binding. This is an example of how the much needed definition can slowly become more or less coherent across market; as it happened in the German market. This approach would require several companies unifying and could serve as a protective space empowering companies of one specific region, such as The EU.

Nonetheless, in order to be able to create the unifying front of natural cosmetic companies, is required also to establish a strong network across Edible Cosmetics companies, which is currently lacking. One possibility could be creating a platform through a university or an NGO that acts as a gathering institution across the proto-niche. Another possibility could be just an initiative of some companies to create an association of like-minded companies. This would strengthen learning processes as well. Thus, it is necessary to build a strong network among these companies in order to also increase the amount of knowledge exchange among these companies. Building a network could also lead to an easier creation of the protective space that is needed for truly natural companies.

A second important consideration is to consider changing the labelling of Edible Cosmetics. As shown by this research, the term EC is contested among companies that are or could be classified as edible cosmetics. This dissonance across the proto-niche is also one of the main components blocking the development from a proto-niche into a niche. Edible Cosmetics is a perfect example of a hybrid category, which is a cosmetic product with food-like characteristics (Hoogstraaten, Frenken, Vaskelainen, & Boon, 2022). However, this hybrid category has been proven to not be very successful. As scholars have found, hybrid categories are not very effective for bringing innovations into the market given the fact that it could confuse the consumer and create future regulatory complexities (Hoogstraaten, Frenken, Vaskelainen, & Boon, 2022). Companies such as Santo Remedio and Eccora explicitly mention how this can be confusing and even dangerous to the consumer. Consumers should not start eating their cosmetics and labelling natural cosmetics as edible cosmetics can lead the consumer to judge their cosmetics the same way they would judge their food.Therefore, this research recommends changing the label of

Edible Cosmetics and its paring slogan of ‘if you would not eat it, do not put it on your skin’. Another terminology could be found that fits better, but still sends the same message intended as EC, while avoiding a hybridisation of two categories

Summarising, the main recommendations of this research are the following:

1. Establish a network of like-minded companies that share the same values, principles, formulation practices, and ingredient.
2. Unify these companies into an organised institution (such as a certification), that creates an standardised definition of what can be called natural cosmetics. Thus creating the protection space needed for this companies.
3. Ask third parties, such as NGOs or Universities, to create a space to facilitate the gathering of like-minded companies.
4. Increase the knowledge exchange across these companies.
5. Change the label of Edible Cosmetics to one that does not make reference to a hybrid categorisation.

9. Conclusion

This research has explored the mechanisms that makes a proto-niche into a niche through the case study of Edible Cosmetics. There is a plethora of literature regarding niches, their importance in processes of transitions, and the mechanisms to successfully establish a niche as a true alternative to a prevailing socio-technical regime. However, there is a gap in the academic literature regarding the very early processes through which niches created in the first place. This research aimed to add to the already existing theory of MLP by creating an analytical framework based on the theoretical notions of the theory. Edible Cosmetics seem to be a niche in development for reasons such as a changed on consumer behaviour, the global pandemic of COVID-19, and the ongoing criticism that the cosmetic industry regime has been under in the recent years. With the COVID pandemic, individuals suddenly had more time to research about their products, where they came from, ingredients, and how are they made. This lead to a wave of people trying to do cosmetics at home leading to an increase on the public's interest on having clean cosmetics at home.

It could be concluded that the proto-niche of Edible Cosmetics is in fact a proto-niche, yet it is not on its way to becoming a niche. The reasons why vary between not having a strong established network among companies alike, which hinders the learning process required for a niche. Nonetheless, one of the main reasons could be attribute to the fact that it lacks a protective space for the proto-niche to develop. The lack of definition or legal conceptualisation of the word *natural* and what can be called a natural cosmetic is problematic for this proto-niche. Without the standardisation of the two notions just mentioned, it ~~is~~ becomes hard to differentiate which companies claim to be natural and which other are *truly natural.* Another important factor hampering Edible Cosmetics to become a niche is the lack of agreeability among companies regarding the term in itself. Edible Cosmetics is an hybridisation of two different categories: food and cosmetics. The main reason for this is to send a message of products being safe and natural. However, entrepreneurs seem to disagree on how correct this terminology is given the fact that can be confusing for the consumer and could potentially be dangerous; for the consumer and for the industry in itself.

Nonetheless, it is important to highlight the fact that there are commonalities among the companies studied. They all share the same ~~I~~identification of a problem stemming from the current regime and are being supported by landscape developments such as COVID 19 and the climate crisis. Consumers are looking for solutions to the growing dissonances of the regime and their needs. It could further be observed that all companies studied theorize in the same manner: by conceptualising and defining those concepts that are blurred within the regime: natural and safe. This conceptualisation is key for the building of any niche. It is a promising sign that all companies theorize in the same manner. On top of that, the way companies build expectations are somehow shared as well. Against this background, this research provided a number of recommendation how to develop the proto-niche into a niche, including a standardised and

regulated definition of what distinguishes natural cosmetics form other cosmetics, increasing networking and learning, and rethinking the confusing term of Edible Cosmetics.

This present research had its limitations. As mentioned earlier, there were only five interviews performed instead of the desired ten, due to lack of response despite multiple reminders. Moreover, the desk research was limited to the companies that the researcher could find online. There could be many other companies that also all under the Edible Cosmetic definition that could revert the results of the present research. On top of that, the information available online regarding the companies is limited to what the companies decide to present online. As the unit of analysis of this research is the Niche Entrepreneur, it would require a conversation with more entrepreneurs to deepened the knowledge of these mechanism and how they affect the proto-niche development. Lastly, the netnography could have also been more extensive regarding the discussion boards studied. The netnography was limited to the language of English, yet there could be discussions online regarding EC in other languages.

Due to the novelty of this research, there is space for future research regarding the development of proto-niche. One tentative future research could the investigation it it is possible for a proto-niche to develop into a niche without a protective space. Another component that would require future research are the factor of Expectations and Framing with more companies. As mentioned earlier, the information that can be gather by the desk research on companies is limited to what it is presented online. However, talking with the entrepreneur of more companies by performing future interviews, could shed some light on a deeper level on these components.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Interview guide

Unit of analysis: Niche Entrepreneur

Warm-up questions:

- Please, introduce yourself.
- Please tell me a bit about what you were doing/working on before …. (Name of the cosmetic brand).
- Is this your first time working with cosmetics or in the cosmetic industry?
- What does the word 'natural' mean in your own terms?
- How did you get interested in natural cosmetics?
- When did you start using/purchasing natural cosmetics?
- How would you describe what 'natural cosmetics' are to you?

Product questions? (Learning process)

- When was the first time that you created a product?
- What was the process of formulating this product?
  - What learnings could you draw from this process?
- When was the first time you sold a product?
- To whom did you start selling your product(s)?
- What type of clientele were they?
- How would you describe your average consumer?

Company questions:

- Why and when did you start this company?
- What inspired you to start this company?
- When you founded the company, what principles do you wish the company would stand for?
- What type of product were you expecting to create?
- What consumers did you expect to satisfy by creating this company?

Terminologies:

- You mention **……** on your website, what does this mean to you?
- Why do you use this term?
- Why when speaking of your products, do you choose to use these sentences ……..?
- Why do you label it like ……..?
- Which of the following categorisations would you consider that fits your company the best? (You can choose more than 1): Sustainability, bringing back ancient techniques, and health and transparency.
  - Can you elaborate but why you chose/these categories?

Strategies:

- Now that we have some terminologies clear, what makes your products different than other natural cosmetic products?
  - Why do you put an emphasis on ….. (Whatever they describe in the last question)
- How would you describe your marketing strategy? And why did you choose this one?
- Why do you claim your products are "….."? How do you sustain these claims?
- Why do you emphasise…… over …….?

Expectations:

- Personal expectations:
  - When you started this company, did you had envisioned a future for it? And if yes, how did you see your company in the future? (Being 1 year, 5 years, 10 years after creation)
  - Have you come close to this today?
- Collective expectations:
  - During the process of the company creation, did you do any prior research?
    - Follow-up questions depending on the answer.
  - Did you find anything interesting that you still remember?
  - When talking about investors, how was that process for you? Finding them, talking to them all that.
  - What were the most important key notions of your business proposal for the investors? Was this different from yours?
  - Did you have to do something that you would have not expected during the process of finding funding?
  - What was the convincing factor for your investors? And how did you substantiate it?

Network:

- Starting a company does not happen from one day to the other, how would you describe this process of creation, from the idea conception until the release of the first(s) products?
- Would you say that this was an individual effort? Or a communal effort?
- From whom or from where did you rely on advice/expertise while creating the company?
- Are you in contact or have you been in contact with other similar companies?
- Who would you say is your biggest competitor and why?
- How do you expand your knowledge of formulation, ingredients, technologies, etc….?
- Would you say that there is knowledge transfer among natural cosmetic companies?
- What joint activities, if any, do you undertake with fellow entrepreneurs in the edible cosmetics field
- Give them the list of the companies present in this research and ask them to tell you if they know some.

Edible Cosmetics:

- Have you ever come across the term "Edible Cosmetics"
  - If not, ask them what they could infer from it.
  - If yes:

- How would you define it in your own words?
- What do you think is the main characteristic of “Edible Cosmetics”?
- What connotation do you have of the term?
- Would you consider your products to fall under this category?
  - If yes, would you consider marketing with that term? Why not or why yes?

COVID:

- How did the COVID pandemic affect you as a firm?
- In your experience, how did the COVID pandemic and consequential lockdowns impact consumer behaviour?

Appendix B Coding

In here the reader can see the codes that were used for the analysis of the interviews and the categories constructed based on those.

Codes

- **Deductive Codes:**
  - Natural vs Mainstream Consumer
  - Natural vs Mainstream Companies
  - COVID Customer
  - COVID Company
  - **Edible Cosmetics Definition**
  - **Edible Cosmetics Agreeability**
  - Identification of a personal problem
  - Identification of the problem in the market
  - (S) Diagnostic framing
  - (S) *Prognostic framing*
  - *(S)* **Motivational framing**
  - (F) Theorization
  - Personal Expectation
  - Collective Expectations
  - Client Network
  - Business Network
  - Customers Learning Process
  - Company Learning Process
  - ***Formulation Learning Process***

- **Inductive codes**:
  - Background of the entrepreneur
  - Background of the company
  - **Reason to start the company**
  - User Innovation
  - Spin-off Innovation
  - Proto-Niche
  - *Customer Profile Before*
  - Customer Profile Now
  - Entrepreneur's Testimonial
  - Client's Testimonials

Themes

- **Deductive themes:**
  - COVID
    - COVID Customer
    - COVID Company
  - Edible Cosmetics
    - **Edible Cosmetics Definition**
    - **Edible Cosmetics Agreeability**
  - Identification of the problem
    - Natural vs Mainstream Consumer
    - Natural vs Mainstream Companies,
    - Identification of a personal problem
    - Identification of the problem in the market
  - Framing:
    - (S) Diagnostic framing
    - (S) *Prognostic framing*
    - *(S)* **Motivational framing**
  - Theorization:
    - Theorization
  - Expectation
    - Personal Expectation
    - Collective Expectations
  - Network:
    - Client Network
    - Business Network
  - Learning process:
    - Customers Learning Process
    - Company Learning Process
    - ***Formulation Learning Process***
- **Inductive Themes:**
  - Background:
    - Background of the entrepreneur
    - Background of the company
  - Reason to start the company:
    - **Reason to start the company**
  - Type of Innovation:
    - User Innovation
    - Spin-off Innovation

- Proto-Niche:
  - Proto-Niche
- Customer profile:
  - *Customer Profile Before*
  - Customer Profile Now
- Testimonials:
  - Entrepreneur’s Testimonial
  - Client’s Testimonials

Appendix C Transcripts

Transcript Eccora

- **Type of coding**: deductive and inductive coding
- **Type of transcript:** Intelligent transcription
- **Structure:** Hierarchical
- **Duration:** 52 min

- **Maria:** Okey, entonces empecemos con [Spanish speaking] the first question which would be: please introduce yourself, who you are, what you do and how long have you been doing it?
- **Ursula**: Okey so, my name is Ursula Nicolls. I am a pharmaceutical chemist. I studied first anthropology as my first degree and then I studied pharmaceutical chemistry, because I decided to created a skin care line, and I wanted have more knowledge about what I was doing. I've been working in skincare for the past 10 years as a chemist for the past 2 years. However, while studying I was working in a lab, and I was also studying chemistry.
- **Maria:** So, you have been working with cosmetics quite some time. Right?
- **Ursula:** Yes.
- **Maria:** The question is: Have you been working with natural cosmetics for this time? Or have you also been involved with mainstream cosmetics?
- **Ursula:** No. Only natural cosmetics since I began, only natural cosmetics.
- **Maria:** Okey. What drove you to natural cosmetics?
- **Ursula:** Well, I was a mom very young. I was finishing my last year of anthropology. I was living in El Choco. That is a place in Colombia in the pacific coast, and I was working with communities doing ethnobotanic, recovering the knowledge of the plants. How they used them. I became pregnant with my first born, and she when she was around 6 months old, I applied on her sunblock which generated an allergic reaction. Then, I started reading what could have been the allergen, and I really did not understand the ingredients. I then noticed that there was wrong for me as a consumer, there was a lack of of knowledge of what I was putting on my baby's skin, *so I decided to search about natural cosmetics and started doing things at home; doing shampoo.* I got really interested because of what happened to her. That was what trigger or drove me to then focus my next degree in pharmaceutical chemistry in cosmetics.
- **Maria:** Okey. That is actually very interesting. I have another question for you which is: What does the world natural means to you? How would you define "natural" in your own terms?
- **Ursula:** Okey, non-synthetic based.
- **Maria:** Okey. Did you use natural cosmetic before this episode with your daughter or not at all?
- **Ursula:** Well, I used what at the moment what I thought there were natural cosmetics. However, as I did not have any knowledge about ingredients now when I look at the products that I used to use, I know that they were not natural. They had some natural extracts.

- **Maria:** Now let's go more a bit into product questions, so when was the first time that you created a product? Because you were talking about that you were experimenting and that you were experimenting on your own after what happened with your daughter. So when was the first time that you created a product?
- **Ursula:** ***The first time I created a product was around 2011. I did a shampoo at my house in my kitchen. It was a very funny shampoo because of course I had no knowledge about emulsification systems, nor how the preservation system had to be created but it worked. Well, it worked in so far of making my hair healthier*** **and then was a lot of people started asking me questions about what I used, so that was like what drove me then to create a company.**
- **Maria:** Okey.
- **Ursula:** *And shampoo was my first ehh product.*
- **Maria:** Okey that is very interesting actually. So, how was the process of formulating? This shampoo in the sense like how did you start? What was the first successful attempt? Did it fail? How many attempts did you have to make to make a successful shampoo at home?
- **Ursula:** ***Oh no the first products failed a lot. I think that it was not a proper product until maybe four years later. As I was not a formal company and my products were very handcrafted, the people that maybe purchase at the beginning would not criticise if it separated or if it did not make as much foam. Or if the product would go bad in a month or two. From that shampoo to the product that I sell today, it would be four years. Understanding what a good product was and creating like a real batch industrial batch were four years.***
- **Maria:** That is a long process and what kept you going? Until you mastered the formula of this shampoo, because four years is quite long. What motivated you to continue trying to find a proper formula?
- **Ursula:** **Well, It was not really about that shampoo specifically. I really wanted to create a skincare line. So, from the beginning until I decided to study pharmaceutical chemistry, that is what would kept me going. I really feel a passion for chemistry and I liked the science-based cosmetics**. I believe people that handcraft cosmetic have a strong value preposition but in Colombia we have a very strong regulation for cosmetics. For everything that you are going to sell, you have to have a number and a registration. I really wanted to created a company that was legal and that was real, so that is what really keep me to making better products the shampoo and all of the other products that came throughout the process.
- **Maria:** Okey and going back to the product questions a bit. So you first created a shampoo, and what kind of other products were there before? Because I know there are different types of complexity when you formulate natural cosmetics, right? So you have oil-based, but then you have water-based and then they become even more and more complex with the emulsification, with the preservation. How did that journey between simple, or like not simple but easier products to formulate to more complex products? How was that process?

- **Ursula:** ***Well, since the beginning, I started with emulsions and those are the most complex formulas. There are three types of emulsions: oil in water, water in oil and liposomes. So, you can have different types of emulsions that you create. They are very hard to do and to make them stable. Nevertheless since I began, I always went for emulsions because I do believe that oil in the face has a lot of benefits, but most of the extracts that are in them are done with alcohol or that with Glycerin. They would be better they would have better performance, when they are formulated with water. Obviously at first they always broke (the emulsions), but as I began having more knowledge and having better equipment, the formulas improved. Nowadays they are super.***
- **Maria:** Going back to the shampoo question, so you told me that in 2011 you formulated your first shampoo for yourself. When was the first time you sold a product?
- **Ursula:** That product, I think about 2012, but I would sell I do not know four or five per week? Something like that or maybe per month?
- **Maria:** And to whom did you start selling it? Who were your first buyers fo these pilot projects?
- **Ursula:** Friends.
- **Maria:** Friends.
- **Ursula:** Mostly friends.
- **Maria:** Okey and how would you describe your average consumer nowadays?
- **Ursula:** My average consumer? Okey, age group would be adulthood? People in their 30s and 40s and eco-conscious. People that have a knowledge or curiosity about essential oils and people that have like a strong feelings about plastic; as none of my products cope in plastic except for the shampoo.
- **Maria:** For example you just described to me your average consumer and the average consumer of your first clients? So your friends. How were they? Would you describe them more in this way? Or were they supporting your entrepreneurial activity rather for you being a person that they know?
- **Ursula:** No. They are all also very eco-conscious.
- **Maria:** Okey, so from the begging your started with clients that are eco-conscious.
- **Ursula:** Yes.
- **Maria:** Okey. Moving forward to company questions now, when did you start the company? When was it founded?
- **Ursula:** Well, the company as the lab in 2016.
- **Maria:** Okey.
- **Ursula:** But as the idea and the name, 2011.
- **Maria:** So, from the beginning you had the idea. You had the name.
- **Ursula:** Eccora was the name since 2011, but from 2016 was like the growing part.
- **Maria:** The growing part.
- **Ursula:** Like the legal part.

- **Maria:** Like the creation of the actual legal company. You already told me a bit about the story with your daughter, but what inspired you to start a company beside or if there is another reason for the inspiration of the company? What else was in the back of your head?
- **Ursula:** **Well, I am very strong minded about ecology. I studied anthropology and eco-preservation also, that was my minor in my first degree. And I consider myself an anarchist … (lost of audio due to internet problems).**
- **Maria:** I lost you for a second.
- **Ursula:** Do not worry! I saw that it said lost connection. Sometimes where I am at, the internet fails. **So, I consider myself anarchist. Im very about people knowing and doing themselves and not letting like others over empower them. That was really what drove me.** *I saw that where I was from and in my country, there is a lot to give. We also are so biodiverse***, but there was no one doing thing that I was doing.** And I wanted people to be able to consume safe cosmetics, clean cosmetics, and be very aware about what industry, the big industry, big Pharma, is giving to the people**. That is also why I studied pharmacy. I wanted to be inside big Pharma, but not really in it.**
- **Maria:** That is pretty cool actually. Okey, and when you founded the company, so when you founded Eccora, what principles did you wish the company would stand for? I think you already talked about it a bit like anarchism, empowerment, consciousness with the environment, but like, if you could put the ideology of how the company was born. How would you describe it?
- **Ursula:** I wanted to do things from the earth that could back to the earth. It was really mainly about clean botanically based skincare but scientifically thought through. That was the core of our company. I wanted to be very clear about the traceability of ingredients for the people that buy it. I think there is like this disconnection in our society between who does the products we buy, how are they done and the brands that sell them. I wanted to be everything. That is why I created a lab. I didn't want to outsource. I wanted to be the one that did it and tell you, 'This product works because we did this, this and this and I am sure it doesn't have this or this or this ingredient'.That is the core of the company.
- **Maria:** So, basically you wanted to have full on transparency with the supply chain, but also in-house production to have. The most clearer for the consumer.
- **Ursula:** Exactly. That was it.
- **Maria:** So, consumer empowerment and product transparency are also very important for Eccora.
- **Ursula:** Very.
- **Maria:** So, what kind of product were you expecting to create?
- **Ursula:** Well, for me, sunblocks were like the most important. ***It has been very hard because sunblocks are not a drug, but they have drug claims. So, they have to be proven***. They have to be with Colita, that is the European regulatory system or with FDA. So, I wanted to create incredibly clean sunblocks that have extract from Colombia. ***I work a lot with uchuva and***

guava and things like that. I am still creating them. We've done a lot clinical trials to verify that they work, but that is a super complex product to produce.

- **Maria:** So, on top of having hmm like the fact that you also want to work with extracts from Colombia also add to your sustainability claim? Would you say? Cause everything is local.
- **Ursula:** Yes. Well, no. We have local ingredients but for Colombian suppliers, for me to use their ingredients, they have to show me how they were made. They have to have a good lab practice certification from the INVIMA (that is our FDA). Also, not all of the extract that you could get from Colombia are really from Colombia. So I have a lot of extracts that are from Brazil or they are then process in the US and then they come back to me. There is like a supply chain problem.
- **Maria:** For you, ingredients are important and the kind of certifications that the ingredients that you use have, rather that they are local.
- **Ursula:** Yes.
- **Maria:** Okey. And now, going back a bit, what consumers did you expected to satisfied by creating this company. You already mentioned what kind of consumers you have right now, but when you created the company, were this the kind of consumers that you were expecting to satisfy?
- **Ursula:** I wanted to satisfied also luxury consumers. For me it was very important to catch them, and I think I am still in the process. They are very fragrance driven. Natural products are not so fragrance attractive sometimes, because we do not use fragrances we use essential oils or butters. Luxury clients. I really would like to catch them.
- **Maria:** I am right now in your page of Eccora and I am reading your 'Who Are We or Our Story' and there is an emphasis on 'formulas 100% naturales, de quimica verde y sostenible', right? Why do you make an emphasis on this three terms? Why is it important for you? Why is it important for your company?
- **Ursula:** Because 100% natural means a 100% natural. I get really bugged when I see brands that say *'we are 98% natural'*, because the 2% that is not natural, is the 2% that everybody use like preservatives and fragrances. You are not going to use these ingredients more than 2% of the formula because the formula does not accept it. Is kind of like a word play and that is why I emphasise on a 100%", because it has been very hard for me to make stability with a 100% natural. It is not that easy. It is hard. I refer to green chemistry because synthetic vitamins and synthetic products sometimes have gone by certain industrial processes. For example, let's say with vitamin A. People don't understand that vitamin A is only synthetic, because if not, its not is vitamin A. Why? Because it is process inside mammals. You cannot have vitamin A from a vegetable. You process it inside a mammal and then it becomes vitamin A. I do not like synthetic products. So green chemistry is very important to me. Sustainability is about the weight that we put about how we use water inside the lab and who we buy from. Also, I always verify that suppliers have the Fair Trade certificate or ECOCCERT. I like to know where my ingredients come from. The packaging that we use is also important. I has to be recyclable and we assure

that it is being recycle. We have a group that is called Cora Ambiental and we outsource with them that they recollect our products and they put them inside the recycle system.

- **Maria:** When you mention when you label you products are 100% natural, green chemistry and sustainable it means that you really have a care for what goes into your products. You really have an emphasis on the ingredients.
- **Ursula:** Yes.
- **Maria:** Which of the following categorisation would you consider that fits your company the best? You can chose more than one: we have sustainability, the other one is bringing back ancient techniques, and health and transparency.
- **Ursula:** Health and transparency.
- **Maria:** Health and transparency. Okey. And can you elaborate a bit why? Cause you were mention sustainability, so why wouldn't you choose sustainability and health and transparency?
- **Ursula:** Health and Transparency because sustainability is a very tricky words. Although we pursue sustainability, I know that it is not very sustainable to bring the ingredients from other countries. I know that glass is not very sustainable because although it has a better impact afterwards than plastic, glass does generate pressure to the environment. Also glass is very heavy and it also produce a lot of carbon dioxide. So, from a sustainability perspective people could tell me that I am not sustainable because of the glass. Therefore, I assure health and transparency because that is what really based. Like you are going to know what you are putting on your face and you are going to be sure that was made under the best conditions and scientifically claimed.
- **Maria:** Okey. So, now that we have this terminology clear of health and transparency, what makes your products different from other natural cosmetic companies?
- **Ursula:** Okey so one, I don't outsource. That is very important. Most of the brands they outsource. I am the creator of the brand, but I am also a pharmaceutical chemist. I think that is something that is very important because a lot of brands have someone creating the products based on trends but not scientifically driven. I really have like a focus on creating the products that I can claim I have a hashtag that says *'if you claim it, prove it'*. So if I claim it has SPF protection, I have clinically proven it. If I claim that it hydrates, I have clinically proven it, because I think it is very important. The industry has ways of telling you it is gonna make your face I don't know whiter without dark spots, but have you proven it? How do you know?
- **Maria:** Okey. How, based on this, based on the USP that you just described, how would you describe your marketing strategy? And why did you choose the marketing strategy that you chose?
- **Ursula:** I have no marketing strategy. It is so organic. Because we are such a small group and our group is really based on scientist, no one knows anything about marketing. We use instagram, and well, our strategy is telling people what we know. Sometimes we go very scientific way and there is people that tell me 'we didn't understand what you were trying to

say'. Therefore, our marketing strategy is trying to tell people what we know in a scientific manner but for everyone to understand. But no strategy, we really do not have a strategy.

- **Maria:** So is very organic, it is how it happens.
- **Ursula:** It is very organically.
- **Maria:** Okey. That actually very interesting. I think these two question are already done, so let's speak about expectations. First personal expectations and then we are gonna go to the collective expectations. When you started this company, did you envisioned a future for it? And if yes, how did you see your company in 5 years and in 10 years? How did you expect your company to grow in terms of products, but also in terms of personal matters? Also in terms of consumers, the market all of these kind of stuff
- **Ursula:** I had a vision that it would be bigger than what it is right now. More stable… stable market. It still fluctuates too much. When I bagan, I had no competition whatsoever in my country, like nothing. Right now, I have so much competition and it is crazy because now people are very interested in natural cosmetics. Seven years ago nobody cared. Also South America is a very different market. **I envisioned to have more economic balance, because I really wanted to create legal labs around Bogota were the economically and socially vulnerable are. Also for young people to be able to be linked with cosmetic chemistry. Obviously, it cost money and security so, I have not gotten there yet. I wanted to be there by now. I will be there someday, just not now.**
- **Maria:** Just something of the future that you are moving towards. That is actually a really beautiful goal.
- **Ursula: Ay yes I hope. I think it would be so nice because sometimes chemistry, sciences and STEM related is not out there for people to have access to education.** But why not? Why most the cheapest ingredients are the most toxic? *Why not make it something like this brand Fubu? For us by us. An African American brand of clothing and it was created because they said 'well if nobody else is doing thing for us, well we will do it' so it was kind of that logic to start Eccora.*
- **Maria:** Okey so like there is a social entrepreneurship idea behind it as well.
- **Ursula:** Yes, very anthropological.
- **Maria:** Very anthropological.
- **Ursula:** Yes I have her there, the real Ursula, the anthropologist.
- **Maria:** Yes. Okey now with collective expectations. Right? So during the process of the company creation, did you do any prior research? For the company creation? The market? Or of anything that would imply creating a company? Or did you just jumped and started?
- **Ursula:** I kind of jumped and started ***and throughout the process I started doing research. I looked upon other brands that I admired. I looked at what people were using. What ingredients? I went once to a a show that was done in california, but I already had launched the brand. So I've been doing some steps, doing a lot of errors. Making it better. Growing. Growing back. Growing a little bit.***

- **Maria:** So, for you collective expectations of the company could be not necessarily a linear growth of market of profit, but rather just really staying to your true purpose of transparency, health and scientific proven claims.
- **Ursula:** Completely
- **Maria:** so you rather always, even if it doesn't mean fulfilling your goals, you rather stay within your own sphere of ideologies. Rather than just go big, scale up.
- **Ursula:** Yes.
- **Maria:** At the creation of the company, when we speak about investors, did you had any investors at all?
- **Ursula:** Well, yes. I had investors but they were very like funny investors. It was very family-oriented. I was like '*hi I have a great idea. I need money'* My sister, she pitch in. I have a cousin who is very interested in natural cosmetics, so she pitch in as well and my mom too. So, with that money, I was able to create the lab and I started with 0. It was month 1 of being open and if I did not sell, there was no money. Since then it has been like that. I sell, it comes in and it goes. I sell it comes in and it goes. I sell, it comes in and it goes. I have been growing now. Now I have more people that work for us. I never had investor that would be like *'okey we are gonna put all this money and you have to grow 25% a year'*. Everyone that was my investor was like *'okey! Great job! You are doing great'.*
- **Maria:** So is not like you had a structure for investors that 'you need to fulfil this and this task'.
- **Ursula:** No. Not at all.
- **Maria:** So, the most important thing for your investors would be basically the idea itself.
- **Ursula:** Yeah. They thought it was great.
- **Maria:** During this process of the creation, did you encounter yourself with something that you were surprised by?
- **Ursula:** Well, I was surprised about the financial part. It is critical because I had to learn as you know I am not finance person at all. Another thing is that something that block a lot of entrepreneurs in Colombia is that each time I want to put a product in the market, I have to pay for its registration. I have to pay money to get a number. So if I want to change the color of the box, I have to pay. And if I want to pay a fruit in the box I have to pay, so that compared to other countries is tough. That was something that I encounter that I have not thought about before until I encounter that.
- **Maria:** so more bureaucratic stuff, regarding products.
- **Ursula:** Uff so bureaucratic.
- **Maria:** Okey, this goes a bit back to the investors, I kind of already know, but starting a company definitely does not happen for one day to another, right? How would you describe the process of creation? but from the idea and conception until the release of the first products. Do you remember anything specific that happened in those years or weeks or months?
- **Ursula:** Well, yes. I was working with another pharmaceutical chemist because in Colombia we are the only ones approved to sign the release of products. He was the the one that created the

whole lab and we had a visit from the INVIMA. I remember a lot that visit because it was the one that would tell us if we could launch or not the products. When they give us the green light, I send in the information about the product and launch the products. I remember that a lot because it was a very stressful.

- **Maria:** And you would have to start the process all over again, right?
- **Ursula:** Yes.
- **Maria:** Okey. And when you start this process with your business partner, from whom or from where did you rely for advice or expertise while creating the company. Cause you just told me that you do not have a financial background, right? So, when you were dealing with topics that you did not know, to whom did you go?
- **Ursula:** Everything happened really organically. Well my father has companies, so he has experience. I would ask just him. There was also a family friend that works with companies doing the DNA of the company, and with him, I would sit and he would like tell me *'you have to look at this. Look at this brand'* but it was very informal. So, it was more like "so I have this idea!". This company has grown because I think I have a very incredibly story and very good products. I dedicated 6 years to get the degree. So I think I like made it, but its like super organic growth. People are asking me '*what is your margin?'* And I am always answering *'my margin of what?*'. I just do what it feels right. It is very like that.
- **Maria:** Hahaha so okey okey, so is organic. And is also like, you have kind of like a safety support net around you.
- **Ursula:** Yes! Exactly.
- **Maria:** That does not force you to go into a very like formal structure of business. Right?
- **Ursula:** Yes! yes, exactly! Is an error tho. Im trying to make it very structure this years. Is like what I am now doing. That could lead to like better performance.
- **Maria:** Okey. But it has worked so far.
- **Ursula:** It has worked, with tears. So far.
- **Maria:** With sweat and tears but it has worked so far.
- **Ursula:** Exactly.
- **Maria:** Have you been in contact with any other similar companies as Eccora?
- **Ursula:** Yes. As one of the first entrepreneur of green cosmetics in Colombia, many of the companies that now I see in the market, first contacted me. They asked me '*hi, do you outsource?' 'Hi, I want to see if you could do this formula*'. I always said no, because I do not outsource and I know how to do formulas for my company. If I would do them for someone else it would be like my formula, the same thing that I am selling, but with another name. I know a lot of companies. I have been in contact with them sometimes. I would give some information, like packaging information, more like who does the boxes. But there is a lot of information or ingredients that I would be very private about. I mean its its what I've been working for such a long time, so sometimes I would not give any information. I have worked

with some of them in places like fairs and stuff like that. Mostly, that would be like the type of work that we have done together.

- **Maria:** You have your reservations with sharing information, of your firm and stuff, but you do have kind of a community feeling of natural cosmetics and you are willing to share things that don't compromise your own products.
- **Ursula:** Exactly.
- **Maria:** Okey good. And who would you say is your biggest competitor right now and why?
- **Ursula:** In Colombia?
- **Maria:** In Colombia.
- **Ursula:** My biggest competitors are ppl that are not in the natural industry.
- **Maria:** Okey.
- **Ursula:** But they are like kind of migrating. But the thing is that they are my competitors but im not theirs. There is a brand that is called Loto del Sur. They started very small. They are not a 100% natural and that is not what they try to sell, but they have a very natural aesthetic. Sometimes, I see that my consumers they buy from me some products and they complement with Loto del Sur products. However, they use fragrance. I do not. They are another type of company but they are very big. They are part of Mango and Zara conglomeration. They were bought by them, so they are big and they are very beautiful" There is another company that their names is fausto or fauno.
- **Maria:** Fauno, fauno.
- **Ursula:** Fauno. fauno. I do not know a lot about them. But I also know they are in the natural industry. I don't know if we are direct competitors, but maybe? Someone else I got in mind, there is a brand that is called Santo Remedio. I like it a lot. The girl that makes it, she is also a pharmaceutical chemist, so we have like a really cool relationship. We follow each other and we always put like when she post and me too. I would say they are also a competitor.
- **Maria:** So, I am seeing a commonality between Loto del Sur and Fauno. I think what they do it is also they advertise a lot with using Colombian extracts and stuff, but I understand that they are not on the same line as you, because they are not 100% natural.
- **Ursula:** Exactly. That is something that is hard to divide. Because consumers sometimes will not see that 100% natural as something.
- **Maria:** Okey. And did you expand your knowledge when it comes to formulations, ingredients, especially technology? And how did you keep yourself as a pharmaceutical person. How do you keep yourself up-to-date with the new technologies and natural cosmetics?
- **Ursula:** ***I read a lot of articles. I always follow Cosmetic and Toiletries (that is a magazine). I try to go to the cosmetic chemistry symposiums. They do them in NY and I am always aware of what they will be talking about there, even if I do not go. In the US, like broad in the US, they do a lot of conferences about sunblocks and I am always there. I am in everything and I am always reading what is new coming out. Very ingredient driven. A lot of my providers, they***

send invitations for webinars. I always go to the webinars of new ingredients, and webinars for new technologies and equipments. I love new equipments. I am like an equipment geek.

- **Maria:** Okey, like tools?
- **Ursula:** Yes, I love them. I go like 'wow it goes faster!' 'Wow, it is small!' 'I want them all'.
- **Maria:** And do you ever interact with people in the symposiums? in the conferences? in the webinars with fellow natural cosmetics entrepreneurs?
- **Ursula:** ***Yes. Sometimes in the webinars that I go, most of them are marketing and commercial, so their approach is so different because for them is 'how am I going to sell it?' 'Why is it cool to sell it' and for me is more like 'wow what is it going to do to the formula?' And then we talk and it's nice, because I learn and sometimes how am I going to use also that information.***
- **Maria:** Okey okey, so would you say that there is a knowledge transfer among natural cosmetics companies?
- **Ursula:** I am not sure. I am not sure about that. I would say that it is maybe growing, but it is also so competitive out there that everybody wants to be the one that has the knowledge. The one that does it better. That sometimes is kind of sketchy.
- **Maria:** Okey, so it is a highly competitive market at this point.
- **Ursula:** At this moment, everybody has the word natural. It could be like swear water, but it is natural.
- **Maria:** Yes! I know haha I have seen these kind of stuff. I actually have a question for you that I didn't ask you before, so you sell in Colombia, but do you also sell products outside Colombia?
- **Ursula:** No. I want to start that this year as I am living in the United States. I want to bring the brand here.
- **Maria:** Okey. So, so far is only in Colombia.
- **Ursula:** Only in Colombia. I have customers from other countries, but they… they send the money like though wire-transfer and then I send them the product. But is not very common, because taking things out of Colombia is very expensive.
- **Maria:** Okey. I didn't know that. I am going to give you a list of the companies that I have been researching. I want you to just take a look to see if you have heard these companies or if you have been in contact with these companies. This is more of a question to kind of map a network of the market.
- **Ursula:** If you want you can send the list through WA and I can take a look at it.
- **Maria:** Okey.
- **Ursula:** I probably have heard of all. And like … I'm like that type of person. The whole day, I always see who is new! Like 'where did this brand come from?' Im highly competitive. I am an over achiever.
- **Maria:** Done. I sent it to you through WA.
- **Ursula:** okey. You know something that is going to be very funny? Sometimes you remember them by the logo? And not by name.

- **Maria:** ohhh okey.
- **Ursula:** I know from the list: Mamaearth, 100% PURE I am not sure because I have someone that I buy essential oils from and they have this name, Mayachia and that is about it.
- **Maria:** okey. Now I am going to go into a new area of topic. A new topic. Have you ever came across the term edible cosmetics?
- **Ursula: I know that right now is very like in furor. When I was a teenager, I remember that they use to sell this powders that you put on your skin and it would be like a sexy powder that it will taste like marshmallows. I loved them. I would buy them. I thought that was so cool that when my boyfriend kissed me I would taste as marshmallows. I did not see that skincare went through that wave and now I've seen a lot of publicity that says *'if you cannot eat it, don't use it'*. So I have like this vision about it and I have had customers that tell me like *"I love your products because you obviously can eat them*'. However, I am thinking like '*please do not eat them***
- **Maria:** How would you define edible cosmetics in your own words then? If you have heard of it?
- **Ursula: There is cosmetic-grade and there is food-grade. So not because my products have essential oils it means you can eat them. Nonetheless, I have about it and I think is cool. I would define it as: edible cosmetic are cosmetics that formulated to be eaten. Also that they have effects on skin, but really when they are created, all of the ingredients are food grade.**
- **Maria:** Would you consider your product to fall under the category of edible cosmetics? Or no.
- **Ursula: No.**
- **Maria:** No. okey. And last questions, last 2 questions…
- **Ursula: I am going to do a parenthesis, because although if you ingest my products you are not going to have a toxic reaction […] they are not formulated to be eaten. I think sometimes it could be a misconception. If someone thinks like 'I'm going to eat' my Eccora products, maybe is not going to necessarily toxic, but also they might not be good for your either.**
- **Maria:** Okey. Last two questions. How did covid pandemic affected you as a company?
- **Ursula:** Covid pandemic in fact was really good for the company because people became so aware at the fact that they were doing nothing at home […]. I am talking about people that were comfortable with money, because that it was not like that for everyone. These people would start to buy a lot of SPA products such as face masks. They would be very in the mentality of '*Okey I'm going to pamper myself. I'm all the time in the computer. I'm very aware of my skin and I have time*'.. One of my fastest years was 2020 and half of 2021, as for 2022 it was the other way around. I also saw an increase in cosmetics brands, but I saw less customers. So, for me, COVID was great. Although, something that was really bad was the supply chain. That was very bad. It was like catastrophic. Moreover, People were very much in the mentality of helping the world, by buying from small business so they would not go broke. Customers were very aware of this, the risk of small enterprises during the pandemic.

- **Maria:** So, you are talking about like 2020 was like your … yeah the year that grew the most, but do, would you say that the covid pandemic and the consequential lockdowns affected consumer behaviour in some way? And in consumer mindset as well?
- **Ursula:** yes. I think that.
- **Maria:** wait, regarding the type of products that they buy.
- **Ursula:** COVID pandemic affected consumer behaviour because it did this in people's mind that they wanted to know more about science. Consumers would read more. Everyone knew about vaccines, and everyone became a biologist or a doctor. Individuals would become very evidence- oriented and very conscious as well. They would have the drive to read about why are ingredients are toxic. I think it opened a lot the opportunity for green-based-eco-conscious consumers because consumers now they want to know what is in their products. They really want to know and they want to know scientifically.
- **Maria:** Well, so far we went through all the questions so we are done.

Transcript Ere Perez

- **Type of coding**: deductive and inductive coding
- **Type of transcript:** Intelligent transcription
- **Structure:** Hierarchical
- **Duration:** 1.22 min

- **Maria:** Okey. We can start the interview and the first thing im going to ask you to do is please introduce yourself. What where you doing or working before founding Ere Perez?and how did you get interested in natural cosmetics?

- **Ere:** Well, hi my name is Ere Perez. I founded this company 20 years ago. Today, I am all about powerful botanicals, which is about homemade products made with integrity. This means fresh, happy, beautiful, and multitaskers. Is also about products that are practical. Products that are not about fixing, but embracing. These things are what Ere Perez is about. What I like in beauty. This was the idea since the beginning. Is doing something simple that can fix a problem. **For any job or idea that you do or have, you really need to think about the environment. I mean today, the world is all about commerce and profit. However, if you are selling something or if you have an idea of a service or a product, you need to think if we really need that. Nowadays, as an entrepreneur, you cannot just bring another product or service that we do not need and that it will be harmful to the environment. People really do not need that.** I think that with the COVID lockdowns, people have changed the way they see the world and they question more their products and services. It has become more minimalist but also the market has moved to the online arena. We all order so many things online. I see myself as a visionary. Why? you might ask. I think is because what I offer, my

products, are very simple, down to earth and is beauty with heart and consciousness. The ingredients' dignity is real. They are all about nutrients, real food, and products that efficient and beautiful. Because of this, they have good value in the sense of what you get for what you pay. They are also about caring for sustainability and good solutions. We, as a company, have been exploring these ideas for the last two decades. How did I started it? Is probably something that an entrepreneur would find interesting. I always think *'I am probably not going to come across as what everybody has tell you at school what an entrepreneur is or has to be'*. I actually do not have a plan; never had. In fact, I still do not have a business plan. Ere Perez began with what I like to call '*the power of intention'* or just doing something. Just have to have the will to start. I think the new generation has changed. I think the millennials were very much into 'having a plan' and 'organise where am I going' or 'to have everything prepared and set before it gets done'. I think they (*Millenials)* are incredibly hard workers. They are the ones that are ruling the world right now as CEOs of companies. However, I feel the new generation (Generation Z) is very sensitive. With this I mean individuals under 25 years olds, they are looking for something simple that can really make an impact, that has a story behind it, and that has a why or a reason to be. This is the new mentality, but I think I did that 20 years ago. I think it was the beginning of 2000s, around 2002. I arrived in Australia when I was 23 years old. I was really young and I just stayed here doing anything that I could get to get some money. I was looking out for children and cleaning. Even though I did have English in Mexico, my English was very bad but I needed to do something. I found a problem, which was that I needed a mascara. I have very very sensitive skin and eyes**.** I grew up in a in a family that was all about natural living and my Mexican heritage is very strong when it comes to that. From a young age, I was exposed to powerful botanicals. I learned that you are what you eat. All the way back to university, I was always studying a lot of natural healing and therapies by myself. I did a lot of mini degrees about naturopath while I was doing my bachelor in nutrition. When I did my thesis, I focus on my passion which is food and science. So, when I got married and immigrated to Australia, I needed a job. I needed an income to go back to Mexico every year, because I wanted to see my family! I just arrived in Australia, and I realised the cost of living there. Soon I realised that it was going to be hard for me to go back to Mexico a few months later. I thought to myself '*I wanna go to Mexico how can I afford that?'*. **I had an idea and a need.** I think that for that one mascara that I was talking about that I needed, I discover clean beauty. I was not looking for it, but I found it. Today it is something trendy and innovative, but I wasn't looking for it and I found it 20 years ago. **Moreover, we (as individuals) need to find a way of doing something you love. I do not think anybody wants to do something they don't like. So, for me, I focused on my passion and my needs. I love science and food. I like research too. In my case, I also need money to go to Mexico to see my family. I have very sensitive skin, and I needed something to put on my eyelashes**. I put all of this together in a plan and in a very nice story and just like this, I think I just discovered clean beauty. I wasn't thinking on it I didn't have a plan, I just discovered it myself. Maybe someone else discovered out at the same

time. News travel very fast nowadays. Because of my heritage, I asked my grandpa who is a natural healer, how to create natural formulas. I wanted to make teas, tables, to help and heal people. How is this possible? I am in Australia, there is all these rules, all these laws. You know in Mexico there is a lot of green washing, like chemical green washing. There is also a lot of 'magic' treatments that are not real. *'Try this cream and you put it on and you will look young tomorrow'.* I think I the conception of what is natural has changed throughout the years. Even though in our cultures, like in Colombia and Mexico, we have beautiful natural ingredients, we have not actually discovered them for ourselves. Because before that, there was a lot of 'magic' behind the natural. Therefore it does not have the integrity that the mainstream beauty products have. As soon as I discovered that I wanted to do this product (the mascara) I started to think *'how can I bring it into the market?'*. I am a very hippy person by heart. I don't fancy anything luxurious or expensive. I like having quite a simple life at my house. Like the way we live is very simple. I love discovering things. Like I wish I had students coming at me and saying "look I have this idea let's do something like that". I would find that amazing. *The minute I realised I could not make a formula myself, then I look for alternatives.* So that is the next part of the story.

- **Maria:** Wait, I have a question for you. So what does the word natural means in your own terms? Because you are telling me that you grew up with natural healers, such as your grandparents, so how would you define it in your own terms?

- **Ere:** The word 'natural' has changed a lot in my head. Why? Because it depends on who you are asking. I give you an example, you have a beautiful eucalyptus soil which is natural, because it comes from a beautiful tree. In Australia we have plenty of those. The koalas feed themselves with them. However, the eucalyptus soil is quite hard on the skin. I might put it in a natural product for my house, to clean my clothes or my benches, but I am not going to put it on my skin. So, when it comes to clean beauty, as its called today, I was talking about clean-tox beauty. I arrived in Mexico with these idea. I was doing clean-tox beauty myself. I just thought "I wanna talk about a clean life". This terminology started to change with the years. I have seen how the industry have talked about "botanical", "plant-based", "natural", "organic". There has been so many terminology. Nowadays is called clean beauty. What is going to he the future of this term? I think is going to be what natural really means: safe. There is a lot of information about what a clean product it is or should be. This information is not right or wrong, is just a matter of everyone's perspective. There are a lot of retailers who have very different definitions about what clean beauty is. For some retailers it means, "it is made safe", even if it is not natural. How do I know this? Because I have seen it. In fact, the list of the ingredients that are considered safe are also different nowadays. Today there are around 2000 ingredients that are banned for use in clean formulas or natural cosmetics. However, at the end, I am not going to put eucalyptus soil in my mascara. Just because something is natural does not make it safe. Another example is people putting Argan oil to moisturise their face but that oil is pretty thick

for the skin of the face. It can give you break-outs. In fact, it is a products more for the hair. So, an ingredient being natural does not mean is safe or enough for us to put it in our formulas. Therefore, for me something natural is something that is nutritious, which is what I focus on. Another thing, in regards to natural, is about the ethics behind the whole supply chain. I give you an example. These big companies, such as P&G, they have very different products that are being in the market for a long time. They are very essential. Every time I go to the airport, I love looking at the pharmacies in the airport. A product that they have at the airports, for me, they are the kings and queens of the airpot. Like when you look at the airport and you look at the products that they have there, you think "the products that have made it to be in an airport, that means they been doing something right. Why? Because the consumer wants them or sees them as an essential". So, for me, going to an airport and finding a Nivea cream. I think "you have this very simple cream that costs nothing, and yes, it is vegan, yes it is sustainable because it doesn't have plastic packing it comes in a nice thin, and yes it is also safe, but yet is not clean." You see? Clean could be anything. It is quite delicate and quite fragile to put yourself out there as a clean cosmetic brand. **That is why I pride myself about what I think is the next thing in beauty; which is nutritious**. I think is going to be just about embracing, less is more, about celebrating the uniqueness, about healthy skin, and about practicality. In beauty, you have a very different consumer out there and most of them are now worrying about sustainability. I think covid has change a lot. It has change the way we see the world and beauty has shifted, so if you make an interview in a year time, I might have say something different to say. Because whatever you are using today, it might be not what you are using in 3 or 4 months. Is so fast, people change views so fast.

- **Maria:** Okey. Thank you. That is actually really good. Now, I am going to go through product questions. That you are gonna tell me the story. When was the first time that you created a product? and how was the process of formulation such products? What did you learn from that? How was the whole process of this first creation of the mascara that you ere telling me?

- **Ere**: ***Well. The first mascara, it was very simple.*** **I was in Brisbane, Australia with these beautiful Australian girls and I was a Mexican girl (is what I thought). I did not have blue eyes or blond hair. I was just brown hair, brown eyes, brown skin. I needed a mascara to enhance my beauty, because like most latin woman we have long lashes but quite flat. We call it just down, they don't curl. So you need to curled them and put some mascara to enhance your beauty. So I said " I need a mascara".** I did not have a mascara that was waterproof that did not hurt my eyes. Then, I understood that the products that I was wearing, those that were hurting my skin, they did because they had all of these toxic ingredients. Since I was in Mexico, my mother used to give me beetroot pieces for me to put in my cheeks as a natural blush. She said to me *'no no no don't put any make up, just put some beet root in your cheeks you don't need anything. Make up is bad for you*'. My household was like the hippyests. I would never swallow an aspirin because she (my mother) wants to fix everything with garlic,

lemon, getting into the water, all these things. *So, I needed to find a mascara and then I started to think 'well I am at home and I have olive oil and honey and they are all pure ingredients and nothing has happen to them. They dot have any problems'. They still look good after so long. Have you ever seen an olive oil that has like something green?*

- **Maria:** No.

- **Ere:** *So those were the questions I asked myself. I though 'oh! maybe I can make a natural products out of ingredients that are natural and they will not go bad'. Then, I found myself, looking at the yellow pages and I found a chemist. Well, in fact I found a few, but I tried to contact many about my idea and nobody cared. Until finally, I found someone who believed in me. He was curious about my questions.* This guy was like 'what you mean you want a natural mascara?'. He said 'look I make some natural products'. He was making some products for some companies and he showed me what he was doing for these natural cosmetic companies. However, I was like 'that is not natural because it has these ingredients that I do not understand'. I had no idea of cosmetics at the time. I was like 'what is petrolatum, mineral oils, and parabens? What is all of this?'. Then he was like 'oh well, these are chemicals we use in the formulas and that are safe to use'. I was like 'wow! This is not safe for me, cause it just irritates my skin'. *Then I told him 'I have honey in my pantry and I put it on my face as a mask and it works. I also put banana peel on my skin'. He said 'well, you need preservatives because it has water'. Then I said 'oh it has water, why? Can't you remove the water?' And he said 'sure! We can try'. And I was like great!'. And that was it Maria, just remove the water . **Then, the next step was to try again and again like a hundred times until he came out with this formula. Just like that! we came out with a natural formula! Which is it is still the same one I had for 20 years. It was very simple.***

- **Maria:** Yeah!

- **Ere**: Why do we need to put all of these ingredients into cosmetics that we do not really need in the cosmetics? Why the yogurt needs to be pink? If it is made of strawberries, like why do people think that people want to eat a pink strawberry yogurt? Instead of just removing the ingredient and leave it naturally rose. **The future of beauty is everybody has to make their products in the country they are gonna consume them! And that could be made by different manufactures, that would have to be made by people. This is just the future. This is having consciousness. This is how one mascara can be made and exponentially be a big company.**

- **Maria:** And from like this mascara, to whom did you sell the first mascara? Family? Friends? And what kind of clientele did you get at the beginning of your company? What kind of people, like in their mindset? How could you describe them? And do you still maintain these customers or have you expanded to different types of customers?

- **Ere:** I have the same customers. Actually, we have this little book that I was putting in an album. I didn't have a software. I just had a book, I still have it. Red book. And every page was like the file of the customers. Just a notebook, a simple notebook. So, page one, file number one. Page two, file number 2

- **Maria:** How would you describe your clients? Are they like eco-conscious? Or not at all?

- **Ere:** *Definitely. That has to be the niche, like all the first clients were like that.* Slowly, I moved into pharmacies customers. Pharmacies customers are people who believe in science. People who believe also that we are kind of moving towards something new and innovative. People who want something new

- **Maria:** okey. In your website you mention the following sentences: *"beauty almost good enough to eat"*. What does this mean to you?

- **Ere**: **beauty that is enough to eat is like saying *'do not be afraid! It is safe'*. This is our pride. This is definitely something we take pride about. Is saying *'this product is natural, is safe, is good for you'*. I call it food for the skin. I call it beauty made better. I think is about making someone feeling comfortable with themselves. For example, a brand like Clinique, is a very strong about *'It is good for sensitive skin'* so that is the speech. Is because they care about the pH of the skin, so they cater sensitive skin and that is great. It is a great brand with great products. Also Clearance, brands that have been around for ages and they have survive so many economical crises because their message is very strong. That is what I am trying to do with the message of '*beauty almost good enough to eat'*.** When did beauty and cosmetics shifted towards needing toxic ingredients that are test on animals? **For me, the message that I give when I say '*is good enough to eat'* is a statement. *Competition is the worst among the beauty market. Is up there and very strong. This makes the messages very confusing for the consumer.*** What is really natural? What is really toxins free? **So with open arms and heart, I just try to explain, in the best way I can, what my products are.**

- **Maria**:When you talk about for example *"we create innovative make-up skincare for today's consumer seeking minimal, ethical, and healthy beauty"*. What do you.. what are you… in what kind of side are you trying to pose yourself.

- **Ere:** Which side of beauty am I?

- **Maria:** Yeah! With minimal, ethical and healthy beauty.

- **Ere:** Minimal I can give an example. Instead of 50 shades of foundation, I have 12. That is being minimal. That is hard. Is taught. However, people would think this is not inclusive enough. Well, in fact it is. The formula is medium coverage and it is what my clients like. My clients don't like full coverage. They like to look natural. They like the skin to breath, so having a product in 12 shades makes me being inclusive and also makes me being, I guess, more sustainable than having 40 shades. Healthy skin comes from creating formulas that are good for

sensitive skin. Formulas that do not hurt your skin and not necessarily because they are natural. So, my edge is: I use simple ingredients that are not dangerous, made with powerful botanicals, sustainable, made from fair-trade ingredient. I did the same with beauty. You know? Nothing fancy. Simple things, like beetroot, quinoa, oats, camomile, and avocado. It is nothing that fancy. For me, this are ingredients that are in abundance everywhere. Ingredients that are good enough to eat! And are simple enough to get that are not in danger or dangerously harvested.

- **Maria:** Okey. Thank you. So, with everything that you already told me I kind of have an idea of the answer, but I am still going to ask it: which of the following categorisations would you consider that fits your company best? You can choose more than one categorisation: sustainability, bridging back ancient techniques, and health and transparency.

- **Ere**: I think I am a mix of the three. I think the strongest is health and transparency. Regarding sustainability, I am as far as you can get. For example, 80% of the line is plastic free. There is still plastic packaging in mascara and lipgloss. Plastic is still a great solution for transport and weight nevertheless.

- **Maria:** Now we are going to talk about expectations. When you were building your company, 20 years ago., more or less what kind of personal expectation did you had and if you had any? Also did you had investors? Or how did it it work with founding? Did you had to report to someone else?

- **Ere:** I put together my own money. I put together 2000 Australian dollars just working. That is how we started my first production. It was very small and very expensive obviously because it was hard to find someone who could sell me very few raw materials and I had to put the stickers for labelling. I enjoyed that a lot back then. Today, what I enjoy the most is to actually give a better message out there. I think learning to grow was really important. Learning to grow my family, now I have 3 children. In my case, I didn't do this by myself. I had with my husband with me. Who had a different instinct than my, which is knowledge. He is an engineer so he was good in math, finance, and production. All these things were things that I was not good at. I was great at sales. That is who I am. If you have the money you can start your own company, but that does not mean you can fully executed. Just because you have the idea and the money does not mean you know how to do everything: sales, finances, marketing, social media, IT. For example, I do not have WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok. I do not know how to use them myself. My company does. We hired people to do all the things I cannot or don not want to do. However, in the past I just had to really on friend, family and people who believed in me to do all the things I did not know how to do.

- **Maria:** So basically you had a communal effort from people who believed in you and helped you to create this idea. Yes?

- **Ere**: Yes.

- **Maria:** That is beautiful and this is a question I wanted to asked you for a long time: have you heard of the term edible cosmetics before?
- **Ere:** yeah!
- **Maria:** Yeah? And how would you define it?
- **Ere:** That is actually a beautiful friend that has a brand called edible beauty. She is Australian. **Is all about the ingredients been also naturally made. I think edible beauty or edible cosmetics is hard to define. I think it has to do not having harmful ingredients. For example, Anna, she is a naturalpath herself and she has the brand of skincare that she makes. She believes in natural healing and ingredients. She has certified ingredients, which make the cost of the product more expensive, but the way she produces the formulas is about fixing and healing. It is very different from what I do. I only use essential oils. She does way more than me. Edible beauty in this case are things that you do not ingest through mouth, is about they are penetrating your skin to your bloodstream. That is good because it is safe. Edible cosmetics are very interesting, is not about actually eating the product but about how nutritious is for your skin.**
- **Maria:** I actually understand. I am going send you to your email a list of companies. This is more of a question to map the market of the natural cosmetics and the niche that I am studying. Im gonna send you the list and I wanna know if you recognise some of the companies. Edible beauty is in there already hahah but yes I wanna see if you recognise some of them or how many.
- **Ere:** I have heard of: 100% pure, edible beauty, Agent Natur, Wildcraft Organic, and Maya Chia
- **Maria:** Okey! So we are done with the interview! Thank you so much.
- **Ere:** Thank you!

Transcript Witlof Skincare

- **Type of coding**: deductive and inductive coding
- **Type of transcript:** Intelligent transcription
- **Structure:** Hierarchical
- **Duration:** 45 min

Maria: So, im going to do some warm up questions to get into the interview. So, basically please introduce yourself, but in a matter of if you were working in cosmetics before? How did you get interested in cosmetics? Stuff like that.
Caroline: Okey. It started when I was about 17 years old because I had all types of allergies or what I though were allergic reactions. I got really got interested in food because at one point, I

experiences that if I would keep to a certain diet and avoid certain foods, I didn't have to take any medicine. For instance, I got from the doctor this thing for asthma or pill to get itching and redness away. So, I could live like a normal person without taking any medics, but that I would just have to be careful with what I ate. I thought that was very interesting. Mostly because I was seeing this allergist professor in a hospital and I said to him "well this is very interesting. I don't need your medicine if I do this" and he couldn't care less. He said "yeah fine then just keep to your diet I don't care". I was like okey, but let's research this and he didn't want to. So I started to research by myself, and on that point onwards, I was always interested in food, ingredients, and in how the body works. Then, my interested was broadened to not only food, but what stress and cosmetics do to your body. That is how I got into the skincare field. **Meantime, I just finished my studies and I started working. At that point, I was a lawyer, but at that point I did not feel a spark by it or interested in pursing a career in that field. So then, I quitted my job and took some time to think what I really wanted to do with my 60 hour work week. If I put those hours into something better, something better than just making profit for my already rich clients, I might be able to contribute something more in my life. So, that is the reason I quitted, and I fairly and quickly, realised that I wanted to do something with the knowledge that I have been acquiring for 10 years already.** Then, I met a beautician and we talked about this. She said *'I can't do my work with natural cosmetics, because there was no place in Amsterdam at the time (or still). I can't give treatments with natural cosmetics'* At the time, there was one natural brand for salons and she did not really wanted to use that brand but she didn't have any options. *Then, I got the idea to start a beauty salon and an online shop with only natural cosmetics with different brands*. In the Netherlands there were not many brands, maybe 2 or 3 and they have been for 20 or 30 years. They were the old type of dusty granola type German brands (sorry haha). I noticed that in the rest of Europe and in the United States it was really upcoming clean beauty; as we call it now. *I searched for all types of new brands of natural cosmetics, and I got them to the Netherlands by import. I introduced these brands to the Netherlands and Belgium*. I started a shop with I think 20 or 25 brands and with treatment rooms or beautician rooms with different type of brands. I am not a beautician. I was a lawyer, but I did do the training for beautician, so in theory I could train them! I always told them a lot about ingredients, cosmetics, and the theoretical part of the field. They would do the practical part of the business. They have a lot of knowledge for the skin and treatments. In the meantime, I started a distribution company. From the brands that I got to the Netherlands, I started to distributing them in the Benelux (name of the company) because I was the first one to introduce them to the European market or the dutch market. So, I talked to the branch to see if I could have the exclusivity of distributing them. **After 5 or 6 years, I wanted to make my own products because I saw that there were some products lacking**. From a price point of view, some products were good but they were too expensive and *I thought 'if you would be able to offer such products for lower prices it would sell more and there would be more ppl that could benefit from the effectiveness of the products'. I found many factories in the Netherlands, and I made all the formulas to start for the my products.*

At that point I had 3 businesses and I have 2 small children so it was a bit much at the time for me. So, I spoke with a good friend of of mine from university (I did law school and she did business), and she worked in the marketing field working for big international companies. She quitted he job because she had to move from the US back to the London where she was before. Anyway, she was back in London with her fourth child and looking to start working again! Because, in the United States it was really hard to find a part time job and then she became pregnant again, so she said "oh we are moving back again so ill just leave it, but I really want to go back to work". **One day we were talking about it and she asked me how was my business going? And I told her that it was good, but too much for me right now. Then, she proposed '*why don't we do it together? Because I haven't been doing any other stuff than putting brands into the market*'. That is when I thought it could have been a good match. Ever since we have been working together.** *Now, it's been 5 years and 3 years ago we launched our own brand. So we took a little bit of time to prepare everything to work together, to prepare the launch, to finalise the branding (especially) because I had the formulas and the products but not the packaging or the looks, the brand name. We did that all together and then we launch in September 3 years ago*. The online shop is closed after 10 years. I made some choices cause I couldn't really combine it anymore and I had to prolonged the rental agreements for another 5 or 10 years. I could stop now, so I did. The ladies that worked there had a nice pay and they all work for themselves now. We finalised that project and then I went on with Witlof. That is the story of how it all began. So, that is the story of how all began.

Maria: Okey. Within this story, what does the word natural means to you? Especially thinking about your story of your allergies when you were 17 years old. What does the word natural means in your own terms?

Caroline: Well, something that comes from nature; to start with. If you look at it specifically from a perspective of cosmetics, I know that a lot of the natural products are altered. How do you say it? They are in a factory and they do stuff with them so you can use them for cosmetics. So in that sense, I know is not natural in the sense of for example having some aloe juice and I rubbing it on my face. That would be 100% natural. In our products we also claim we are 100% natural and we are because there are no synthetic ingredients. So, we have only natural …. (Word in dutch)…. Is all going from nature and it has a bit sometimes a tweak a little bit to be able to put it in cosmetics, but still has no synthetic compound.

Maria: So, basically … just to make sure I am understanding, natural ingredients with very minimal process of transformation, in order to make them available for cosmetics?

Caroline: Yes.

Maria: Okey.

Caroline: Well… sometimes is minimal, or maybe more than minimal, but in the end is a natural products and there is no human-made compound. It doesn't have plastic for example or that you cannot break it down.

Maria: Okey. perfect. So now going into more into product questions. You were saying g that you wrote the formulas for the company, right? So when was the first time you created a product's? You, yourself?

Caroline: **The idea for products started in the shop**, because I saw a person that used …. We have a lot of loyal customers because when you switch to natural cosmetics the skin really improves. Then they never go back to normal beautician or normal shop. During those 10 years that I had the shop, I could really follow ppl using products and ingredients. At one point, I saw so many ppl with gluten allergies that were totally broken out after they quitted eating gluten, after their doctors said to them "oh no is not necessary. You are not intolerant". They stopped and their whole skin cleaned up. I saw this lady with dark spots on her face. She had very red skin and very sensitivity too, so it was difficult to find specific products for her to use; that worked for her. Then, she started to use rose-hip oil, just pure rose hip oil all day or just once or twice a day. I saw what it did to her skin. It was amazing. We also had fruit acid peeling in the shop and I also saw ppl who were using that that really improved their skin. It really benefited skins conditions. **However, the brand took the products out of the market and then I though "we have to make it ourself!, I mean it is such a shame that we cannot get this product anymore. Let's make it ourselves". Those were all triggers.** For instance, there was this lady that lived in hong kong and she is Dutch, but came to the Netherlands once or twice a year. She always came to my shop and bought a lot of stuff. She said "there is so much pollution there, than her skin got a bit reddish and it got sensitive. She started using apple cider vinegar. I saw with my own eyes how much her skin calmed down and how the redness went aways. Then I though "oh we need to put this in a product!"**. These were the triggers to start formulating our first products.**

Maria: Have you ever formulated yourself a products? Have you ever experiment, let's say in your own kitchen at your own home? To create stuff?

Caroline: No.

Maria: Or have you always done it through someone?

Caroline: We went to a professional laboratory.

Maria: okey.

Caroline: yeah. I checked out several manufactures in the Netherlands, and I ended up with one that the our formula was working. She was a French lady, and she studied chemistry but her masters was developing natural cosmetic products. She was really really specifically trained to do this. It also helped that she was vegan. She ate healthy. When we were there in a meeting, that everyone had this dirty long sandwiches, we would eat from our own food haha what we brought. So we connected immediately. She knew what I wanted and how I had the products in my head.

Maria: okey.

Caroline: but she did the first prototype, and then we tweaked it a little bit, but they were already really good.

Maria: Okey. Okey and when was the first time you sold a products?

Caroline: at their laboratory.

Maria: Yeah. No, but I mean to a customer?

Caroline: To sell them! Yeah. Prototype was ready. Packaging was ready. We produced it and then we put it on the shop. Back then, I still had the shop for a couple of months, so there. We put it there for one month and we had a website with the online sells. That is how we started to sell for the first time.

Maria: So, going along these lines, what kind of clientele did you had a the beginning? When you started with the online shop selling your products?

Caroline: the really first clients, ppl that we knew. Or ppl that I knew through the shop. They were not friends or family, but ppl that already came to our shop. They said "oh I trust you, if you say this is a good product I'll use it" and then they would buy it.

Maria: How would you describe the average consumer?

Caroline: I think between 25 and 40 years old. Female. Masters degree in general, higher educated. Most of the time with good jobs so they can afford products and conscious. Living a conscious life or trying to live a couscous life.

Maria: When you describe a conscious life, what does this entails?

Caroline: At least aware what you are doing. Aware of the behaviour that you have as a consumer. Maybe, still you go and take a plane or you buy stuff from Zara, but you know or you feel a little bit guilty. We had all these talks in our branding about what was our branding position. The women that buy from us, they feel guilty if they do stuff that they shouldn't be doing, because they know what is right and what is better for the environment, they know what is better for your health, they know what is better for them. They don't drink that much. They do exercise ofc. They eat healthy. They take care of their children but also have a job. They are able to spend money, so they have a good job. If you have a good job, then you need to have a good education most of the time. So usually they are more highly educated and they follow the news. They are engaged, so they are conscious of the results of their behaviours. Not all of them, but more than the general.

Maria: The average consumer of the mainstream market. Yeah?

Caroline: yeah! More than the average actually.

Maria: when you founded Witlof, what kind of principle did you wish the company stand for? And does it still stand for the same principles?

Caroline: No we have not switch. Moreover, it is the principles that guide us every time we need to make choices, it is really easy. For example, for packaging, when I look for new packaging for new products, yes it is white, this is nice! But this is the green version. Okey, done. Choice is made. We go for that. Our principles help us making decisions. I think the principles, depending on the subject…… but for instance for packaging, we do use plastic, but we want them to be post-recycle consumer plastic. Totally recyclable, so this means not virgin plastic or only one type of plastic cause, if it is mixed, it is more difficult to break down and re-use. These type of things. We also tried to take the train instead of the plane. Cis lives in London. I live in Amsterdam, but we work together. Although we are small company and we do not have that much money, we really

try to make the greener choice. Also in our personal life as well. Maybe you have another ideas in mind?

Maria: I was thinking that you were talking a lot about sustainability, but also a lot of holistic health. So health health and transparency. I would also pointed out as a principle of your company as well.

Caroline: ***yeah. The holistic part is always in the advice because 9 out of 10 times when ppl call or mail us with skin problems, is food related. I know a lot of that from experience and I know a lot about it.*** So we have these online calls with clients, that you can register for, and we have a conversation and I give diet advice. For ppl who have have eczema, I tell them to stop having nuts. I tell them "just try for 2 weeks and see if it helps". 9 out of 10 times, it is gone after this advice. I am not a doctor or anything, but I have seen it happening, so I am quite convince that I can help ppl with the experience that I have. The food part is something holistic but also the lifestyle and the mindset. I have seen ppl in my shop that had pigmentations on their face and it was not hormonal, nor pregnancy related. However, I knew that they were certain types of characters. **At one point, I started seeing that these are all women that are so stressed out and so over-achieving with not a good relationship with their emotional balance. They put literally a mask on. That is something that you can really pinpoint, and you can really sell or put it in a product, but it is the holistic view that keep us going.** Also the educational part. I do workshops and masters classes. We are starting this year to give master classes to the school in Amsterdam for beautician and hair dressers. That is the MBO level and then you also have mass class for skin therapist; which is an education level higher. To make them aware of this and to tell them "you are going to be the professional in the industry, so it is very important that you know what you are doing and what type of products and ingredients you are using as well. Where are they from? What do they do to the skin?". That is also something that I think is holistic. The education and the making ppl aware of what they are doing, the consciousness, is a very big part of our daily motivation.

Maria: I was actually going to ask you, when you mention these sentences in your website: *"creating awareness about healthy skin care is an absolute mission of ours*", but you already answered haha. **[Irrelevant speech]**

Caroline: They say that the gut is the second brain. All of our hormones are made in the gut! I mean your serotonin, your happy stuff, is made in your gut. Is amazing!

Maria: Okey. Moving forward a bit into personal expectations and collective expectations. So, expectations of you and expectations of the company. When you started witlof, did you envisioned a future for it? And if yes, what was that future? How did you imagine it? And have you come close to them?

Caroline: yeah. Okey the idea we had was to put my knowledge and experience into really nice products that would really help ppl. With that creating a national, or even international, platform where we could be able to reach ppl and tell our story. Creating awareness and consciousness. So, it has a commercial part and it has a educational idealist part. For the commercial part, we realised

that two be able to grow, to be a sustainable business literally in the sense of us getting a normal wage from the work we do and being able to hire ppl and giving them a normal salary and nice working conditions, we had to go commercial. We need to look at costs, ingredients and production. It is a business at the end, so we have the business side that makes us make choices. We go and work with this type of retailer and the retailer could be not sustainable, but they are big, so we are going to go with them. Why are we going to do this? Because we want to go big. We want to go large. We want to be there in a shelf next to this shitty products that are big already. Because we are a niche! Exactly what you thesis is about. We are niche, we are only 8% of the market. So we envisioned a big more abstract way of doing a business and caring out our ideals. Now that we are working for 3 years in, we see that it is actually a business and it has to be profitable. We don't want to be profitable at the cost of not being sustainable.

Maria: compromising your values. Yeah.

Caroline: Sometimes is difficult, but other times is set. We know that it is easy to make a choice. For example this pump for the new packaging and is green, but is more expensive than the other one, but that it what it is…. We will take the green choice.

Maria: Okey. Now on the topic of building collective expectations, during the process of the company creation, did you do any prior research about natural cosmetics, profitability of a company? All these kind of stuff. Did you find something interesting that you still remember?

Caroline: well, the 8% of the market. That is something that we remember because we said "okey we have only 8% to pursue"… so we are still small. It also explains sometimes why we have to take herbals that ppl don't understand or why they don't buy us. Because we are a niche and ppl just don't know. The total market in the world, I was shock by the amounts. Also, we did a business case ofc. Cis she did business at university, and she has always worked with large companies where you really had to put the research before putting out a new idea. Everything is sort of researched-based. Sometimes is difficult, because I go with my gut. I never did any kind of research for my shop or SPA. I thought "this is what we should be doing! And I am not gonna wait for customers to tell me what they want. I am going to tell them what they need to want!". So, for us, that is sometimes a bit of a discussion. Because Cis is always like " yeah we don't know if that is what customers want!" And tell her "well, we are gonna tell them that this is what they want. Is new". This is what you need and why you need it. We did a lot of research, but I am still a bit skeptical about research because is figure showing past results and not future vision or new markets. Opening new markets.

Maria: When talking about investors, how was the process for you? Finding them? Talking to them? How was the financing of Witlof?

Caroline: Well, the first round was friends and family. That was not that bit, but it helps you produce your first product. We also put money ourselves, ofc. Then we went to look for our first investors and we have talked with different parties, but the end, the gut feeling was what it is. We were talking to this company of 2 brothers that were sort of cowboys, and I was like "do they really think that two woman, cause that is also something that takes a role you know? They had a

very distinctive way thinking because they were older men. Old fashion way of regarding you! They really think that we are these twi cheek yes trying to do some nice cosmetics and they can be in the front seats for like 0 euros, so we are not gonna do this." It was very interesting thing. At the end we got a call from a lady. She said " I have seen you just launch. You are a very interesting company. I would like to join you". Then we said "okey, we do this together, so joining us is not an option". Then after 2 years, she developed as an investor and she developed other projects. We kept in touch all the time a little bit and then we got in contact together and we needed a new investing round. She said "I don't really need to be one of the board members, because I did different projects now. I still would really like to be in the side". Then we thought "this would be interesting". Yeah. She bought part of our shares and she only invest in sustainable companies. She has a financial background and she is very, I don't know … we have a very rich relationship compared to normal investors and company type of relationships. She is not asking for reports every week. She just calls and ask "how are you doing? What are the ideas?" And she helps us think. It is a really nice way to work with an investor.

Maria: [irrelevant speech]. Now going a bit more into network. So, we already know that it was a communal effort, that you didn't do it alone, your first investors were your family. When you were starting the company and you had some doubts or questions, or even things that you were outside your scope, to whom did you go an ask for advice? Or where did you research? How was your medium to research and get into this market?

Caroline: well, since Cis worked with P&G and Heinz. I worked at the law firm. We have friends from university that work in different places, that are interested in the business view, through a friend I got in touch with one of the founders of Rituals. The Dutch brand that is worldwide now. He was one of the first advisers that we had. We just went and asked "hey! Can we have a coffee" and he said "sure!". We went there and talked to him and he gave us advice. He helped us to structure things. "Have you thought about this? Have you thought about that?". It was nice to have to have him. It was really good. Then Cis got in touch with her old boss in Heinz. He is a marketing manager from Heinz and then he went to Rituals. In the four years that the guy worked there, (Rituals) went from 250,000 million to 1 billion revenue a year. So, he was there at a very interesting time. He was also challenging us and asking us things. I don't know, but through meeting ppl and through ppl you meet ppl and we just talk to them! Just saying "hey! Just have a coffee and tell me what you doing! Would you like to help us". We are starting a board of advice with all of these types of ppl.

Maria: That is really cool! Have you or are you in contact with other natural cosmetic brads?

Caroline: Well, we were at the time I had the shop. This is also through network, because these are 2 guys who funded a baby brand in the Netherlands. You probably have seen it on the shelfs. One of the guys is a friend of the husband of Cis. So we all know each other from university. Is all one big networking thing. These guys came to my shop and said "we are working on a baby brand, natural, would you sell this in your shop?" They came to me. I looked at the ingredients and I said "no. I'm not going to sell this. This needs to be out and this needs to be out". They said "Oh! okey.

It is made in Switzerland and we thought it was really good!". I said "yeah. It is fine, but I am not going to sell it because it is not natural". They adapted the formula, but still had the perfume and everything in it. At that point, I was no competition to them. So, sometimes we had lunch together and they introduced a lot of things and asked a lot of questions. Then, when we started Witlof, they totally closed off and even Cis meets the guy in birthday parties and he has never ever talked about business with her anymore. We feel very honoured that they are not sharing anything because that probably means that they think we are competition. They launch a women's brand, besides the baby brand, a couple of years ago. Before Witlof. Yes we do have contact with companies, but with the direct competitors, we don't have any contact. They don't really want to.

Maria: Who is your biggest competitor?

Caroline: It depends. Depends on the shop. If you look at it from a point of sells, different types of products have different competitors. For example, we are sold in a beauty salons. Therefore, our biggest competitor there would be Dr. Hauschka or a salon brand. Spa brand. That is a totally different competition than a cosmetic shop, that has not salon products but just off the shelf products that ppl just take over the counter. Then you have different types of brands that are our competitors.

Maria: When you try to keep yourself updated with technology of natural formulations, ingredients, and processes, how do you keep yourself up to date?

Caroline: ***We have a news letter from cosmetics business. Researching and going to trade fares. Also, asking our producers, because they are closer to the market. In case there is something that is a hype or something coming up or interesting, they are the ones to know. Although, there is a problem we are usually better informed that they are. They are just doing their business and they are not really in the whole development hing? So I usually take ingredients to them saying "this might be interesting, can we put this in a product? Or this might be interesting or I have read about this!". So it is mainly online and going to places where they introduce new stuff.***

Maria: You are telling me that you don't really talk to your competitors. Would you say that there is kind of a knowledge transfer among natural cosmetic companies? Or not really.

Caroline: It depends. If your are a direct competitor, no. Because you are all in the same fishing or pond. You want to keep new stuff for yourself, but you have to be ahead of things and stay ahead of things too. If you look at it a little bit more broad ….. okey, if you look at sustainable businesses, for instance a lady who has these kind of room sprays and she is like from a holistic point of view working with aromatherapy, when I meet with her or a friend who has a whole chain of yoga schools, they are gonna sell Witlof too. So, if I am with these type of ppl who are outside the cosmetic business, then they tend to share everything! And me too. Because we really think that we are working in a field that needs more space and awareness. A space that needs more market participation. I think a good entrepreneur shares a lot. A good entrepreneur help each other.

Maria: I just sent you to your email a list of the companies that I have been doing the desk research. I have been scanning them and analysing them under my framework. I want you to tell

me if you have ever seen one of the companies, or you have heard one of the companies. This questions is basically to map a network, not for anything else.

Caroline: To see if I know them?

Maria: yeah. If you know them or if you have ever heard of them. Or even talked!

Caroline: okey. Let me just open it. Okey. First I haven't heard of it. I have heard of: Wildcrafted Organic, Baiobay, Ere Perez, Innersense, Flow Cosmetics, Nyok, Sara Rosalie (might be one of our competitors), Company A and SoBio.

Maria: Have you ever came across Edible Cosmetics?

Caroline: Yes and no. Not in the sense of a brand name, but I was a distributor for an American brand. They said *if you cannot eat it, don't put it on your skin'*. In that sense, when I was trying to sell the product to other people, I talked about edible cosmetics. We even had a press launch and we put the product in the snacks! "You are eating your cream"! Like beauty editors were like *'what? Are we eating the cream?'*. So yeah, I know the term but not as a brand.

Maria: How would you define it?

Caroline: That is food-grade quality ingredients.

Maria: Would you consider Witlof fall under this category?

Caroline: yes. We say you can eat it. We would not recommend it. I mean is not nice to have a flower taste in your mouth, but you can eat it yes.

Maria: Last questions, how did the covid pandemic affected you asa firm?

Caroline: Our sales went down. Our online sales went up, but not as much as we expected. I think that is because we are a small brand. We are not the big "go-to". It affected our mental state, so that also reflects I your work. Like okey, we are not selling. We can't visit beauticians. Beauticians were locked down. The ones that we had as costumers were not buying from us and the ones that we wanted to visit, well we couldn't. We really relied on our online sells. We did a lot of online online promotion and marketing. Plus the fact that we had to work without seeing each other (Cis and I) for a year; that was also shitty.

Maria: How did you see that the covid pandemic affected consumer behaviour?

Caroline: More online. definitely.

Maria: Okey.

Caroline: and also ppl wanted to spend more on home products; Papering themselves a little bit.

Maria: Well that is thus far I have with questions. Is there anything else that you would like to add to this interview?

Caroline: Maybe if you need more insides in numbers o figures, then is better to talk to Cis. She is more into that! So just, beware if you have any other further question that go into this area, I can connect you with her! Besides that no.

Maria: Thank you!

Transcript Company A

- **Type of coding**: deductive and inductive coding
- **Type of transcript:** Intelligent transcription
- **Structure:** Hierarchical
- **Duration:** 55 min

Maria: Please, introduce yourself.

Founder: Okey. I live in Hamburg with my husband and my daughter. I am 67 years old now. I moved to Hamburg 35 years ago, because I am coming from a small village in Germany, and I wanted to go to the big city. I always loved Hamburg. When I met my husband, he bought just before we met, this finca here in Spain. He introduces me to his finca and it was supposed to go a holiday home for him and his daughter (she is my step-daughter). Yes. I liked it very much and the thing that I remember the most is the smell of the orange flower trees, because it was March. At that time is when they bloom, so we have a lot of orange trees here and also avocados. In that year, we made a round to meet our neighbours, because we were new in Andalusia. There was this American guy who later in the evening walked to his car and came back with a strange thing, I thought. He said "Sabine, I have something for your skin". I was very angry at him because I thought it was not nice from him to walk up to me and talk to me about these things. My skin was my big problem in those years. I had really bad skin. I had acne since I was 14 or 13 years old and it never went away. I was 30 years old and I still had pimples and inflammation. I thought it was really good at camouflaging this, but he clearly saw it. He gave me this cactus leave and said "take it home and cut it into pieces and there is something transparent in it and put that onto your skin twice a day". I remember, I didn't do it at first because I loved expensive creams. I was a perfect client for the cosmetic industry. Perfect. I spend all my money to solve my skin problems. I could not imagine how this simple thing would solve my skin problems. At the end, I did it because I thought that maybe he will ask me how it was and I had to make the experience with the cactus leave. I am going to say, the first impression I had of it was that it really felt great on my dry inflamed skin. You probably know it, inside the aloe is a slimy and very soft and cold. It is a very good feeling for skin that is ill or not working. After somedays of using it, my husband said to me "what happened to your skin?" And I said " yes… this leaf from our neighbour…" and he asked me "what kind of leaf is it?" And I said "I don't know". So we asked our neighbour and he was surprised that we didn't know aloe vera. He told us that it was a big business in the US! They drank it and put it into their cosmetics. He said that it was a miracle plant (very American description of something). He had the plant in his garden and he showed it to us. He told us that they grow here in this climate very well. Then, we (my husband and I) developed the idea to pay the finca's cost to take away all the potatoes, onions, and tomatoes from the fields and plant Aloe. We were planing to harvest it and sell it to the cosmetic industry in Europe. So, for example we were planing on sell it to Nivea in Hamburg, P&G, or Unilever. So, we grew the Aloe for 2 or 3

years. The plants were big already when we started phoning our tentative clients. The first phone call was Unilever. We talked with the production area and we said "oh we are growers and it is really good". I told him over the phone about my own experience with it and he said nothing. Then, he asked me "are you from the cosmetic industry?" We answered "no. we are farmers who own a finca". Then, he said "yes. That is nice to hear this, but what I use for my aloe material is a white powder; a concentrate 200/1. I dilute it with water it when I need it into the right dilution (200/1)" which makes it very little aloe and lots of water…. And then he continued "this is allowed and this is natural. Like this we have aloe in our product. It is perfectly white and it has no smell, because it was deodorised. It was bleached, so it had no colour. It gives me the possibility to make my formula consistent and always the same. Something this natural, like what you are offering me, I cannot control it. The colour could change. It would smell. I don't need it". My husband and I, we were so disappointed because we saw a product from them (Unilever) on a shelf where the aloe leaf was on the packaging and we though "the impression for the consumer must be that there is really this inside of the leaf in there!" But there is not. In these years, it was not dictated by law that you needed to make full declarations on the product. Now is by law that you have to make these ingredients declarations. In the 80s and 90s, there was nothing like this. You didn't know what was inside, which was very nice for the producer. They made a nice marketing and a nice packeting, but they didn't have to declare anything to their customers. Ppl had to believe in the brands that they were buying. We were so disappointed, as a consumer I might say, at the cosmetic industry! *So we thought, let's not try it and we will produce our own cosmetics.* My husband and I are no chemist, nor biologist. We are business people. We are money ppl that is what we learned. However, we thought that we were able through our contacts, meet all the right ppl for this endeavour. *In the end, in the middle of the 90s, we created our first cream with our fresh aloe in it, instead of water.* ***This is something I invented in my kitchen. It was very easy. When you make your own cream, the formula has a lot of water, a bit of oil, and a little bit of extras.*** ***My idea was to change the water with the aloe so I have much more value in my product.*** ***It was a very easy processes because you can really see it. Then, the idea of Company A was born.*** ***This formula, this principle, it is the one thing that makes the brand***. The next step was to grow this aloe juice in our own finca. We don't buy it in china or America, but we grow it ourself. In that way, we have the control that is fresh. You cannot buy this quality in the raw material market. It is not possible, you have to produce it by yourself I you want that. This is the DNA of the brand. This principle of the formula: growing the leading material by ourselves and having all the signs of true animal caring and 2 more certifications that we are looking for all the values that consumers are looking for and that we are striving for.

Maria: What were you doing before getting involve with Company A or even thinking of it? You told me you are a business woman, right?

Founder: Yes. I am. I am coming from a business family. We had a big company when I was a child, but it has getting a lot of problems. I know how difficult business can be. Later, we had a very small company, my family and I. My mother, my sisters and I are the leaders and we make

products out of plastic, but is a special material. It is something you can use 1000 times and it is for hospitals. You can sterilise them, but its a [something in German] a better thing that plastic. Bu you know what I mean?

Maria: yes. I do.

Founder: It is a complexity different thing than Company A. This is what I was living off and working for.

Maria: What does the word natural means to you?

Founder: It is a word that I think is overused. They inflate the meaning of it. Everything is natural because the word is not protected. It is like sustainability. They are some words that I cannot hear them anymore. However, we need to communicate with our clients that we are natural, that is the first thing. We belong to this big natural thing and we belong to the true ones! Not the fake ones, so natural means, for me, like in the beginning something very very positive. Nature is something we are coming from. We are part of nature, this is what I learned to understand while working with plants. We are like plants and animals. We are all depending of water and we are part of nature. Nature is the biggest thing, because I am not religious, nor spiritual. For me, nature is the big thing with a lot of wonders and we are part of it. This is my personal view.

Maria: Now, I'm going to go more into the products questions. Again, this has to do with your own experience. When you were telling me that you started your own products in your own kitchen, when was the first time that you created this product? And how was the process of formulating it in your own kitchen?

Founder: It was a very special time in the 90s, and this is very important to understand, because this years it was very popular to create your own cosmetics. ***You could buy a lot of books or in the TV there were series where ppl showed how to make cosmetics. There was one series that it was extremely well known in Germany. The name was Hobbyte. In it, there was somebody teaching how to make your own shampoo, cleaning materials, and how to produce a cream, which was something very simple like mayonnaise or vinegar. You needed water, oil and something that emulsify it! And then you have it. You could use different oils and also a lot of different emulsifiers. Because it was so easy to learn this principles in these years***, I think a lot of women in this time were able to create cosmetics. I remember a lot of companies coming out to the market because women were making their own brand. Sadly, they are not there anymore because you need to have a lot of patient and some money. *They all were very similar to me, but they didn't have this aloe juice. Everybody produces and produced with water. I think 99.9% of the industry works with water. This is the thing of Company A, even when natural cosmetics are not so popular anymore in 20 or 30 years from now.* What was the question again?

Maria: This process of formulating. How was it?

Founder: yes. The process. It is very simple. There are a lot fo formulas. When you want to do a cream of 100 ml, you take 70ml of water or juice and then you take 20ml of oil, any oil. Lastly, you have 10ml extra for extras, such as perfume, stabilisers, extracts and for the emulsifier. [irrelevant speech]. This is the basic product and basic process. You can do it in your kitchen! The

wonderful thing is that when you put it together at a temperature about …. 70 degrees. When you have the adequate temperature, and you mix it, it will go from transparent to white! And then you get the cream. It is a nice experience. Did I answer your question?

Maria: Yes! You did actually thank you. When you started doing these products, to whom did you sell the product first? When you were starting?

Founder: I am a private person and not a professional. I am not allowed to sell it. Therefore, I went to a pharmacy. I went to my pharmacy which I knew the chief. She was very experienced old woman. I asked her if she could make this creams for me, because ppl who are pharmacist are allow to create these formulas to sell them. She did them and filled them in a cream packages. I bought them back from her and then, the first things I used for myself and friends. From this, I got all of this experience. Then, because in Hamburg is a city where a lot of media is, I went to a company that has a lot of magazines. I showed them my cream and also I brought to them an aloe plant and a leaf. I told them my story. For me, it was very surprising to me because I got a four or five pages article about my product and the finca. They took photos of me and made a big article. After this, a lot of people called me and wrote me to buy the creams from me. This is how Company A started, by sending end consumers this quantities of my products.

Maria: How would you describe your clientele at the beginning and now? What is your average consumer?

Founder: *So…. We started with ppl who had skin problems, because the were the ones that had a different understanding. They wanted to solve a problem. They were not this beauty client that just wanted to have something agains wrinkles or ppl who believed in magical cosmetics. The ppl with skin problems are absolutely different. They were the 100% of our first clients*. Then, it changed because our formulation were getting better. The more I sold, the more eager I was to go to a chemist or companies that could make the creams for me in a more comfortable manner. For all of this, you needed quantity! So before doing this step, I had to sell a lot of cosmetics from the pharmacy. The nicer, the more elegant, the nicer and the closer they were to mainstream cosmetics, the more clients I got. The client group changed to beauty ppl. Ppl who only look for beauty. Now, 70% of my clients are beauty clients and the other 30% is clients that want to solve skin problems.

Maria: That is actually very interest! You are the first company that I have interview that say that their clients are skin problem clients.

Founder: Yeah? I mean they are the ppl with complete different expectations! They are interested in this formulation, while the beauty ones, like me before, they want to believe. They want to have a goal. They are absolutely different! These type of clients.

Maria: When you founded the company, what principles did you wish that the company would follow? And do you still follow the same principles?

Founder: Yeah. The first principles were to grow ecologically and this is something we pursued, because when we started with the aloe our neighbour (who was from Oklahoma), he told us a lot about the industry in the US. He said that they had congresses, meetings, and events. He suggested

that maybe we wanted to be in these events! And we did! We were at the International Aloe Vera Science Counsel. This is a very important congregation in the US, until today. This is the industry group where all the producers are in. There, we learned a lot about the brand and aloe. Can I have the question again?

Maria: the question was: when you founded the company, what principles did you wish that the company would follow? And do you still follow the same principles?

Founder: Yeah. Exactly. When we were in the US, we met growers that produced ecologically and growers who produced conventionally. We talked to them and what I liked was that the growers who were ecologically, they described their work completely different they said "when you don't influence the plant, it will be very healthy! Because it is strong from nature. You must not tamper it with fertilisers. Also, because it is so nicely protected with this skin. So you don't need all this things.". He was the one that got us into that thinking, because it was fascinating to us. The no-toxic thinking. All these things of ecological thinking are growing slowly in Europe, but I caught at them because as a child I had a pony, a dog, and a rabbit! I love nature and animals, so for me this movement is a come-back of my childhood dream. To work with nature without interference of the industry!

Maria: It is a very beautiful thought.

Founder: It happens! All this opportunity that come in life and you have to grab it. In my life, planning leads me to other things. So, that everything must be ecological, ingredients, and all the ppl working at Company A, they only buy at eco shops. It is a lifestyle.

Maria: Now, I'm going to go more into terminologies. I have done a preview researcher on Company A on the presence that it has online, and I want you to clarify somethings for me. Just to expand on these ideas. On your website, you mention: "taking responsibility and acting sustainable". What does these necessarily means for the brand? What does taking responsibility means?

Founder: This means, for me, when I am the leader of a company… I can make decisions. I can say "for my products I can buy from producers that pay fair, that grow organically, that take care of the environment and employees or I can look only at the price and make a decision based on that". I could not ask all of this questions. This are decisions that everybody has to take in the industry. You have both worlds. This responsibility for me is when I know and understand the importance of nature and sustainability for all of us and make decision accordingly. Once I know this, I cannot go back. I cannot go back to this "I don't know" mentality to the ignorance. For me personally, I said to myself "when I make products, this will be my way". Making the right choices. There is this very nice expression from the painter Salvador Dali "when you learned things in life, you cannot back that naiveté to behave as you are without this experience". That way is closed! So you have to act like that. This is what I believe.

Maria: So, this is what taking responsibility means for you.

Founder: yeah.

Maria: I was going to ask you the term sustainability, but I think we covered that as well.

Founder: yes. For me is all natural and sustainable. It's not the same tho. The difference is that sustainable is something that ….. there is another quote from a famous philosopher Emanuel Kant. He said "when you make decision, you always have to think about the consequences. You cannot make a decision for one step. You are responsible to think about the second, third and so on". This is for me the basic mindset of sustainability or to act sustainable. I produce something, but ppl don't think if they really need it! Because throwing thins away does not exist in nature! Nature only replace. This is sustainability for me, to think about the next steps and to take care of the other steps not only the first.

Maria: So I am going to give you three categories and I want you think a bit under which, it can be more than one, would Company A fall within? So the first one is sustainability. The second one is bringing back ancient techniques. The third one is health and transparency.

Founder: I think I would choose all three because also this bringing back this old knowledge, this was also very important for us. When you talk to ppl and you ask them if they like aloe vera, most ppl know and say "yes I like it". So, it is something that it is very popular and most ppl like it. They believe that it is a miracle plant and that you can use to for sunburns. It is very common knowledge. This comes from the ancient ppl who used it as natural medicine. In Mexico, everybody has an aloe in their house. This good image of the aloe, comes from there (Mexico). What the industry industry offer us now, it has nothing to do with it. This old experiences, they described what the plant is able to do. You cannot make a concentrate out of the plant. [irrelevant speech]. The good image comes from this ancient times and that it is not okey that the industry is selling products now that has nothing to do with it. A lot of these modern studies are not serious, I must say. They are created by the industry. They are missing a lot of things. They don't have enough ppl joining them…. So a lot of biologist and chemists in Europe say "the aloe…. Yes" but the studies are not nice.

Maria: and health and transparency because of how the company started itself. Right?

Founder: yes. You know, production here in Spain its build out of glass. Should be a symbol for us that we are transparent! That everybody can see how we work and what ingredients we have. Also how ppl work there and the conditions. This is something very important too.

Maria: now, we are moving forward into strategies. I remember you were telling me before that there were a lot of companies in the 90s and a lot of women were making things in their kitchens and then taking natural cosmetics out. OFC your USP is with the aloe vera made a difference for Company A. What would you describe your marketing strategy? And why did you choose the marketing strategy that you did?

Founder: What we used and what is interesting for the most ppl for when you talk to Company A or when I look at myself or ppl ask me about Company A, I always say "yes. It is aloe cosmetics" and the ppl say "ah aloe cosmetics". I can see in their faces that they are like "yes yes I know aloe cosmetics". Then I mention that we grow our own aloe in our finca in Andalusia. Then you get their interest. **This is because it is something like food! When your milk is coming from a cow call Alberta in this specific place. This is something that ppl like because it generates more**

trust. I start with this, this fact of growing our ons stuff. In cosmetics, it is not hopeful to see. Yet, is a trend now. "From farm to face". I saw it in the marketing newsletter in of Cosmetic Design. This is a newsletter that I have. It is from the US and England. They present more and more companies and women. **In a German book there is also an article about women who grow something and then put it in cosmetics.** This is were I can see the story building. When you have a place where it comes from, you have pictures and you can create an image that ppl can feel. Now, it is more than that I might say, but this is with what I started with. Later when people got this positive emotion of Andalusia, they get interested. People think about sun and wonderful nature. Yes, then we tell them how we work and yeah.

Maria: I remember that you mention having 3 types of certifications nowadays, but how did you sustain your claims back then?

Founder: So… from when we were staring until now, most ppl have a positive image of aloe vera. When I said "we are making aloe vera cosmetics" a lot of ppl would say "yes. I know it". So it was nothing that you had to describe. Most cases it has a positive connotation. Then you have to describe the differences which means that you have to take the plant in the best way, so it works. When you don't do it, it absolutely worthless. This is what follows. I always forget your question! I think I moved to the wrong directions….

Maria: how did you convince ppl at the beginning of Company A that aloe vera was working for the skin?

Founder: I used the positive impression that the ppl already had. I also strengthened it. This is it.

Maria: That was the strategy?

Founder: Yeah.

Maria: Simple, but good!

Founder: Yeah. Strengthening and a mix of other things. A mix of emotion, soul, and reality. This real and logical thing is the formula. Also men like to wisent to it then…. Cause it was something very logical. For the emotion was Andalusia where is coming from. For the soul is this sustainability and loving nature. Also being near nature. I didn't create it like this, but now a the brand fulfils this three things that you are mentioning to reach ppl.

Maria: Now we are moving forward a bit more into the construction of collective expectations. So, during the process of creation, did you do any prior research? About natural cosmetics, the industry and the market? All of this kind of stuff. Did you find something interesting that you still remember today?

Founder: I saw the chance to make something really good. I didn't see it as a business only to earn money, get rich and then sell the company. This is normally how it works. How a lot of start ups are build. They are looking what do the ppl like, then they do it and then they sell the company. My interest was completely different! I already had my life and my money from the company of my family. Company A, in the beginning it grew more like a hobby or interest. Then, it changed to a business. I think this is the big difference with other companies, at least with entrepreneurs. [irrelevant speech]. I didn't get the training on how

to do cosmetics. I developed this for myself. So this was a big chance to create a different brand.

Maria: Did you had any investors at the beginning of Company A?

Founder: no. it is the money from my husband and mine. My husband also has a different profession. So in the first 10 or 15 years of Company A, we earned money with other things and then put that money into the company. We never had a bank. Now we have a partner in the company, since 4 years because our daughter do not want to lead it when we are not in the business anymore. She is in the business realm, and she deliver us a lot of interesting people to make content for the company. However, she does not want to fill my shoes when I am gone. So, we have a partner that also has shares of the company.

Maria: But that is more recent, you said, right?

Founder: yeah.

Maria: Now I going to go a bit more into network questions. For whom or from where did you rely on advice or expertise while creating the company?

Founder: For creating the company?

Maria: mainly for the cosmetic part. Because you said you are a business degree, so no for the business part, but for the advice of formulation.

Founder: All the knowledge I didn't have, I got it from people I contacted and tried to find their contact. Hamburg is a big city, so the chance to find a lot of specialist that could help me was big. What was very nice is that I was able to, when telling my story and showing my products, a lot of people thought *"how nice and harmless"*. A lot of people were willing to help me and give me information. This was my first network. Just being nice and showing my project. People then said *"oh I have an idea for you!"*. So it was more like I was a small girl asking things and trying to get help. The more Company A developed, then I was able to pay people for their expertise. Now I have someone for branding! Because we want to change somethings of the visibility so….

Maria: have you been in contact with other similar companies as Company A?

Founder: yes. We are. We sell to ecological shops. This is something that came later, but ecological shops are our biggest groups. So we sell to end consumers by our shop in the Internet but out biggest B2B is ecological shops. Can you give me the question again pls?

Maria: have you been in contact with other similar companies as Company A?

Founder: yes. With other producers, right? yes. This comes through the ecological shops because there were more brands next to ours. Those were Weeleda and Dr. Haushcka (they are the biggest in Germany and the leaders of the market in quantity and a wonderful image). They are anthroposofic. They have a spiritual part. Together with Weeleda and Dr. Haushka, Loogona, Lavera, we found the Quality Certification of Nature! Which we have in all of our products.

Maria: Oh really?!

Founder: Yeah! There are 5 founders! Together we put some money to the side and created an office in Brussels where the laws are made. Because we have the fear that the conventional industry, with their power and the EU parliament, that they would their goal of natural cosmetics

is also a brand or a sign and then you can do what you want. We want to keep our strong rules … of formulation. So NATRUE sign is for that. I have contact with all of these companies and my closes contact is DR. Haushka. Everybody that works for Company A in Hamburg, they love Dr. Harshly and they love us. So we help each other. Is a bit of friendship. We are fighting against each other when it comes to clients, but we like each other because we have the same understanding of quality.

Maria: Who would you say is your biggest competitor? And why?

Founder:: Dr. Haushka. The only difference between the both of us, as we have similar prices and the same thinking about quality, but they have more spiritual thing going on. We are more practical. Now we do something very logical: changing water by plant juice, but is logic because I am not spiritual.

Maria: How do you keep yourself up to date when it comes to formulations, ingredients, and technologies for formulating natural cosmetics?

Founder: when we started, we engaged a freelancer who made this product and had a lot of experience from cosmetic companies. Now we have our own chemist in Hamburg. She is a very nice professional chemist and she creates all of our products.

Maria: I sent you a list with the companies that I am researching, I just want to know if you know any of the companies.

Founder: I open the list now. I know only know Khadi.

Maria: Now, have you ever came across the term edible cosmetics?

Founder: edible cosmetics?

Maria: yes.

Founder: yes. This is not a company name right? You think about cosmetics you can eat. I like this idea. I really like it and Company A has edible cosmetics because we don't get sick from them, but I don't know how they taste! I know another brand in Germany called Anne Marie B (very German), they are marketing "you can eat all things that are in". I really would like to eat Company A more than their stuff. It is a marketing tool. All of the cosmetics that are NATRUE, are so clean in our raw materials, we have a small list of plants and ingredients, that you can eat them. There are more than 10,000 ingredients that the normal cosmetics can use or need. We have 400 or 500 or 600 ingredients….

Maria: So you would put Company A under the category of edible cosmetics.

Founder: yes absolutely.

Maria: Last two questions: how did the covid pandemic affected you as a company?

Founder: we had problems with it. We don't talk about numbers, but only to give you the impression, we didn't sell as we wish by then. We still grow every year, even during the pandemic. This is coming from the change that more and more consumers come from the conventional markets to the natural market. Important is the change to online selling. Company A was in the past absolutely offline because our clients don't like to see it that we sell via internet, but now it changed. The main thing was that we are happy. We are growing, but not as we planned.

Maria: do you think that the covid pandemic affected consumer behaviour insofar that because the lockdowns, they are looking for more natural products?
Founder: yes. Absolutely. absolutely. I think there was a wish before and during the pandemic they had time to get information and educate themselves. For me it was a big switch. More natural food and cosmetics.
Maria: Okey! We are done with the questions.

Transcript Santo Remedio

- **Type of coding**: deductive and inductive coding
- **Type of transcript:** Intelligent transcription
- **Structure:** Hierarchical
- **Duration:** 1.13 hours

Maria: La primera pregunta es: introdúcete a ti misma.
Melissa: O sea, te cuento quién soy yo.
Maria: Cuéntame quién eres tú. Cual es tu historia.
Melissa: Mi nombre es Melissa y yo soy química farmacéutica de la universidad de Antioquia. La verdad, desde muy pequeña pues yo viví parte de mi tiempo en el campo. En en Eje Cafetero porque mi familia es de allá. La familia de mi papá es de allá entonces veía mucho tiempo ahi, dentro del cafe, los plátanos, y todos esos paisajes tan bonitos, ademas mis abuelos utilizaban plantas para todo. Mi abuela tenia una huerta como a la salida de la cocina y ahi tenía plantas para cocinar, para hacerse menjurjes, para hacerse mascarillas para el cabello. Sabes? Siempre estuve muy metida en ese tema, entonces cuando ya empece y decidí estudiar química farmacéutica, me enfoque mucho en esa parte de la química de las plantas y cómo actúan bio-químicamente en el cuerpo. Desde que estaba ahi, siempre me enfoque mucho en ese tema. **Cuando ya estaba a punto de graduarme, siempre pensé que quería una marca, pero realmente natural, cómo desde la ciencia.** ***La historia que siempre cuento es la de mi abuela. Ella cocinaba con leña y yo me sentaba al lado de ella a hablar. Una vez, yo me acuerdo que mi abuela nunca tenia vellos en las piernas y nunca se depilaba. Entonces yo le pregunte "abuela, como hace para que no le salgan vellos en las piernas y nunca te depilas". Entonces ella ahi me contó, que la primera vez que ella se depilo, lo hizo con la leche de la papaya. De la cascara de la papaya se puede sacar una leche y que desde ahi nunca había tenido que volver a depilar.*** Ella dijo que tenia que ser la primera depilación con eso, entonces imagínate como empezó mi cabeza a pensar una cantidad de cosas. **"Como así? Químicamente qué pasa?" Pues desde ahí empezó todo a conectar con la ciencia de las plantas**. Digamos que mis abuelos son muy empíricos. Todas las familias del campo lo son. **Mi papa me contaba que cuando tenían gripa, no sé que matas le daba mi abuela. Y empezar a realmente investigar y tener mas conceptos para poder decidir qué**

plantas si y qué plantas no, no podemos decir que todo lo que ellos hacían eran realmente ciertas. Hay muchas cosas que se han ido desmintiendo también, eso era lo que a mi me inspiro también. Pues, tengo dos hijas. Una de 5 y otra de 3 años. La verdad, gracias a ellas se creo Santo Remedio. Yo trabajé en dos laboratorios cosméticos y en la secretaria de salud. Cuando mi primera hija nació, en la secretaria me tocaba salir muy tarde de trabajar y salir muy temprano a trabajar, entonces me dio muy duro y pensé en hacer mi sueño realidad. Al principio fue un poco difícil. Ella tenía un año cuando yo empecé a desarrollar Santo Remedio y me doy cuenta de que estoy embarazada de la segunda! Entonces, fue ella la que me mando el mensaje de 'tú decidiste esto entonces acá te quedas'. Yo pensé en volver a trabajar porque pensé que un trabajo me daba un salario estable y empezar una empresa no. Yo pensaba "sera que esta sí es una buena decision? Sera que sí tengo la resiliencia para el emprendimiento? Yo siento que Candelaria (mi segunda hija) me dijo 'si no lo tenías, pues ahora sí te toco'. Ellas fueron las que hicieron que este sueño fuera creciendo.

Maria: Me estabas diciendo que tu trabajaste en un laboratorio cosméticos? Antes de empezar Santo Remedio.

Melissa: si.

Maria: me puedes contar un poco de tu experiencia trabajando en los laboratorios de cosméticos tradicionales/comerciales por favor?

Melissa: Bueno el primero que trabaje, era más enfocado al maquillaje. Ahi conoce muchos proveedores y de una vez cuando me mostraban ingredientes, propiedades, derivados yo pensaba que me parecía interesante. Yo estaba en desarrollo de productos. La empresa tiene más o menos 40 años de haberse fundado. Hace 40 años, como todo, no tenía nada de conciencia en cuanto al cuidado ecológico o de las plantas. Todos esos colorantes, que sí, son unas sombras muy bonitas con colores divinos pero todas eran con cobertura de plástico. Yo alcance a hacer un trabajo ahi de cómo migrar a empaques mas ecológicos y en medir el impacto que esos empaques generaban. Al trabajo que entre cuando estaba en el ultimo semester de la universidad, me tocaba dejar una investigación de un laboratorio que yo quisiera y lo podia enfocar en ese que estaba trabajando. También identifique muchos ingredientes contaminantes. Todavía se manejaban muchos parabenos e ingredientes que, aunque la industria intenta decir qué no, si hay evidencia que las personas que usan productos con parabenos tienden a desarrollar cancer de mama. En ese laboratorio había mucho de esos ingredientes. Aunque cuando ya hay formulas establecidas y ya llevan mas de 30 años en el mercado, yo intente hacer un cambio en la empresa , pero pues es muy difícil. Yo tenia comunicación directa con la creadora de la marca y pues ella ya llevaba muchos años con esas formulas y ella también es química farmacéutica. Yo entiendo que esos eran otros tiempos y que el cambio es difícil. Ella no tenia esa consciencia y aunque yo si quise ayudar a hacer la migración hacia una renovación de las formulas, pues no se logro mucho. Sí creo que deje un mensaje en la empresa, pero a través de las tendencias del mercado. Yo le decía a la creadora de la marca "mira estas son las tendencias que se van a ver en el mercado". Ademas es que es mucho más económico ese tipo de ingredientes. Mientras tu compras unos conservantes de parabenos que

te cuestan 50,000 COP el kilo, tu consigues unos ecológicos en 1 millón de pesos. Entonces… como le vas a decir una persona que cambie costos cuando no se creo la formula así. Esa fue mi experiencia con ese primer laboratorio. En el segundo laboratorio que estuve, ya había un poco mas de extractos. Era maquillaje también y con tónicos. Pero ellos si tenían más la tendencia que incluir extractos como aceite de pepino o de zanahoria pero también identifique que el mercado te dice a ti "tiene aceite de pepino y zanahoria" pero en realidad es un 1% o un 2% de la formula. Entonces, ahi también viví esa desilusión en ese laboratory. *Yo pensaba porque no subirle más a las propiedades del producto. Porque no en vez de que esta sombra cremosa solo me dé un color divino en los ojos, no también hacer que este dandole algo nutritivo a la piel? Cambiar ese pensamiento también era complejo, también porque yo estaba ahi en desarrollo de producto, sino en producción y apoyo técnico. Por eso vi esa necesidad*. Realmente encontrar productos que sean naturales, que realmente san naturales, es muy difícil. *A ver, natural es el petróleo también. Entonces que realmente sean a base de plantas y que tengan esa conciencia ecológica de no contaminar, ser biodegradables, o que tengan responsabilidad corporativa, es muy difícil. Esas marcas que ya están constituidas, no están supliendo esa necesidad. Lo vi como una oportunidad. La gente también se deja convencer de una forma muy fácil porque no tienen conocimiento. De pronto encuentran con un producto que también tiene pepino y me vale tanto y este tiene pepino y me cuesta mas, porque?* ***Entonces la marca también ha ido intentando eso, explicar, educar y concientizar cual es el valor real de nuestro producto****. Esa es mi experiencia.*

Maria: se puede decir que fue un poco desilusionante cuando viste como las marcas de cosméticas tradicionales funcionan?

Melissa: Si porque cuando empiezas a mirar en las tiendas naturistas y la cosmética natural, te das cuenta que es un tema comercial. No es un tema real. Es la tendencia del mercado. Pero es ahi donde el consumidor tiene que tener la confianza de que si esta comprando algo natural. Y tengamos en cuenta que natural es el petróleo… entonces es ahi donde hay que mirar el significado de la palabra "natural". Especialmente en colombia que esta palabra no esta regulada. Esta el INVIMA que revisa que tu cumplas con lo que dices, pero que haya un ente que te diga esto no es ecológico o natural, no lo hay. Entonces se presta para ser usado en temas comerciales.

Maria: entonces, en este orden de ideas, como definirías la palabra natural? En tus propios términos

Melissa: En cuanto a la cosmética?

Maria: si.

Melissa: de manera técnica, un producto natural puede ser derivado del petróleo, puede ser un extracto de una planta, puede ser un derivado de una planta, pero creo que éticamente, tiene que ser un producto responsable con el medio ambiente, biodegradable, mas del 95% de sus ingredientes sean realmente derivados de plantas o ecológicos, no tóxicos. Éticamente para mí eso es lo natural.

Maria: ahora voy a pasar a preguntas sobre producto. Cuando fue la primera vez que tú creaste un producto?

Melissa: ***En mi vida fue en la universidad. Yo hice un gel para las manchas a base de azucena e hicimos un estudio también con personas y duramos mas o menos un mes o mes y medio haciendo seguimiento de cómo disminuían las manchas. El gel tenia una concentración alta de azucena y le pusimos otros extractos para aumentar los efectos de la azucena también. En la marca, el primer producto también fue un despigmentante. Fue un suero facial. Vi la necesidad de que los sueros faciales en Colombia eran a base de aceites. Entonces hice una formula que no fuera aceite, sino gel, y que tuviera muchas plantas que fueran despigmentates, no solo la azucena. Un cocktail de plantas despigmentantes con vitaminas.***

Maria: Cuando fue la primera vez que vendiste un producto? Y a quién?

Melissa: el primer producto fue la hermana de mi marido. El primer cliente, que no fuera familia que llego desde la publicidad, se llama Daniela y todavía es cliente leal. Ella viene acá y se queda un rato hablando y preguntando cosas. Hay una relación muy familiar con ella.

Maria: básicamente tú empezaste a venderle a familia, amigos y luego por publicidad?

Melissa: si

Maria: como describirías tu clientela al principio? Qué tipo de cliente estabas atrayendo?

Melissa: Lo primero que hice cuando empece la marca, fue ir a la cámara de comercio. Ellos allá me aclararon mucho el tema de la idea de negocio, valor agregado, y valle transforma. Ellos me guiaron mucho y me comentaron sobre el comprador ideal. Yo siempre imagine mis clientes como que buscaran no solo el cuidado de la piel sino también un cuidado consciente. Son personas que tienen necesidades básicas ya suplidas, pero que buscan en sus productos algo más. Algo que no solo sea funcional. De hecho una amiga mía que fue una de las primeras clientes, ella es ingeniera ambiental y vio el producto y se enamoro de él. Empece a identificar que el cliente que me llegaba era gente que le cubría la necesidad o la propiedad funcional pero también veía todo los beneficios extra, qué era la parte no tóxica, lo natural, los ingredientes. Son clientes que tenían la necesidad de productos así, y cuando encuentran mi marca se fidelizan. Ademas que yo hablo con mis clientes como si fueran mis mejores amigos. La parte de comunidad y personalización es única en mi marca. Me preocupo por mis clientes como parte de min familia. Entonces, la gente fideliza por el producto de por sí (los ingredientes y cómo es hecho) pero también por la parte humana de asesoramiento. [irrelevant speech]. Es como tener una comunidad. No es solo la venta del producto, si no realmente preocuparte porque esa persona tenga resultados y le cambie su vida. Cuando yo empece, no pensé que las personas me fueran a escribir cosas como que se les ha mejorado su autoestima. Por ejemplo, me llego una chica que tenia problemas de acne muy fuertes y lo único que le mejoraba la piel eran pastillas anticonceptivas, pero que las tomo tanto que tuvo problemas de coágulos en la sangre y casi pierde una pierna. Entonces, le toco de parar de tomar sus pastillas y la piel se le volvió nada otra vez y que cuando encontró Santo Remedio fue lo único que le ayudo**.** Uno mira ese trasfondo de lo que es mi marca y es mucho mas gratificante que tener muchas ventas. Obviamente me gustaría tener más ventas, pero ese ayudar a la gente es más gratificante. Me da propósito. Tuve otro caso de una mamá que me escribió que gracias a mis productos su hijo se volvió a tomar fotos y se volvió a ver al espejo porque recupero la confianza

en su aspecto. Entonces he enfocado mi marca también en la aceptación personal y la auto-confianza. “Cuídate porque te amas, no porque te estas dando duro al mirarte al espejo”. Ese es el cliente que yo creo que tengo. Nada de botox o cirugía, sino mas el cliente de aceptación, amor propio y cuidado. [irrelevant speech].

Maria: Entonces tu dirías que tienes una clientela que se va mas hacia personas que tienen una conciencia por la salud, por la falta de toxinas, por como se hacen los productos (en el sentido de sostenibilidad) y un cliente que tiene una conexión espiritual/amor propio.

Melissa: si. Si tu ves, todas van conectadas. Por eso yo siempre me refiero al cuidado consiente, no solo con tu cuerpo sino también con tu mente y el medio ambiente. Yo lo encierro en eso el cuidado consciente. No solo de la piel pero todo!

Maria: un cuidado holistico?

Melissa: si, se puede decir también.

Maria: cuando tú creaste Santo Remedio, cuales eran los principio que tu esperabas que la compañía siguiera o peleara por?

Melissa: Peleara por varias cosas. Te digo, al principio el tema de los cosméticos naturales es en tendencia y es un mercado que esta en crecimiento, pero no lo hacen de forma consciente. Hacerlo de forma consciente es una responsabilidad muy grande y es un costo muy grande. Entonces, una de las cosas que yo peleo es por educar a los clientes. Mi producto puede que no sea el mas perfecto, pero espero que a la gente que haya comprado mis productos les haya funcionado. Hay personas que les funciona y hay otras a las que no. No puedo decir que mis productos seam la panacea de todos los problemas de la piel. Mi otra lucha es el tema de la cosmetica natural o ecologica u organica, en Colombia, sea realmente consciente con lo que hace. Hay mucha gente que se meten en este medio sin saber lo que hacen, y hacen mucho daño de manera irresponsable, pero como es un tema comercial…. Esto es malo porque si una marca empieza a caer, pues como en efecto domino el resto de marcas de cosméticas sostenibles empiezan a caer también. Entonces mi lucha es hacer las cosas bien, con la ciencia backing up mis claims. Así crecemos todos (las empresas de cosméticos naturales). Yo no creo que esto vaya a pasar dentro de muchísimos años, pero mí meta es poder concientizar el mercado y ser competitivos todos pero de una manera responsable. La tendencia de en el mercado tradicional de cosméticos es de hecharle un 1% de extractos naturales a la formula y llamar eso un cosmético natural. La tendencia de las compañias pequeñas es hacer formulas sin la propia capacitación en cosmética natural.

Maria: Ahora te voy a preguntar sobre terminologías que encontré en tu pagina para clarificar ciertos términos. Entonces, en tu pagina web mencionan “ciencia botánica, cuidado consiente y comercio justo”, puedes expandir un poco en estos términos? Y porque son importantes para ti? Creo que ya hemos cubierto un poco pero mejor clarificar.

Melissa: Ciencia botánica es lo que te decía ahora un poco, ciencia botánica es formular con responsabilidad. Las plantas son química. Es mas cuando yo veo marcas que dicen “libre de químicos es natural” yo me pongo a pensar que la naturaleza es química. Ademas que tiene de malo la química? La química no tiene nada de malo. Nosotros somos química, todo lo que

tocamos es química entonces cuál es el problema? Entonces cuando digo ciencia botánica es porque tiene responsabilidad de que todas las moléculas químicas que tienen las plantas, generen un resultado y que puedan realmente competir con las moléculas sintéticas. El mercado nos llena, sobretodo los farmacéuticos, crea moléculas para poner de moda y que tienen que estar metida en todos lados. Por ejemplo el acido hialuronico y al colágeno. Es tener el reto de competir con el acido hialuronico con extractos naturales, moléculas naturales, eso es ciencia botánica. Es investigar y tener el reto de que sí se puede competir con ese tipo de moléculas con las que ya existen en la naturaleza.

Maria: El cuidado consiente, creo que ya hablamos de eso, pero el comercio justo. Creo que de eso no hemos hablado.

Melissa: Comercio justo es que nosotros también verificamos que nuestros proveedores tengan temas sociales alrededor. Por ejemplo, nosotros no usamos derivados de la palma. Solo usamos uno que es la glicerina. Entonces verificamos que tenga un sello que todo lo que se hizo tiene una responsabilidad ambiental con el cultivo de esta planta, que no se sobre explota porque pues ese es el otro teman, que no solo sean natural pero también de cultivos responsable. [irrelevant speech]. Entonces es siempre tomar ese paso más allá. Preguntándose si los campesinos están recibiendo un precio justo, sí están ayudando a comunidades, y así. Yo directamente no hago mis extractos pero los busco con este tipo de proveedores. Es ver ese tema del comercio justo de dónde viene? No solo de manera ecológica pero también el tema social.

Maria: Es por esto también que en tu pagina hay un enfoque en que tus producto sea colombiano y ecológico? Que sea local?

Melissa: es importante resaltar que es colombiano porque el sueño de la marca es que algún día se valore todo esta biodiversidad que tenemos en el país. Nosotros mandamos a traer maíz, papa, mil cosas que tenemos acá o que podemos cultivar acá. A los campesinos del país les sale muy costos los insumos para la siembra y el pago es muy bajo. Entonces sí el comercio pensara un poco en utilizar estos recursos que ya tenemos de manera responsable, seria lo ideal en Colombia; utilizar los recursos que tenemos y de manera responsable. Siempre queríamos abrir la marca que aunque el guindo biloba es de Asia, utilizamos el que se siembra en Colombia. **Entonces es también educar a la gente de qué acá podemos sembrar muchas cosas sin que sean importadas de lugares lejanos. [irrelevant speech]. Los extractos de mi marca siempre tienen que ser colombianos**.

Maria: te voy a dar tres categorizaciones de las cuales quiero que pienses en cuales podrías poner Santo Remedio. Puedes recoger más de una si quieres. La primera es sostenibilidad. La segunda es revivir técnicas ancestrales. La tercera es salud y transparencia de la marca

Melissa: Sostenibilidad y salud y transparencia. Sabes porque no digo las técnicas ancestrales? Porque no es revivirlas es como cuestionarías. Hasta dónde algunas son reales y cuales no pero si obviamente es una inspiración. Me identifico más con la sostenibilidad y transparencia.

Maria: Ahora que tenemos terminologías claras, para mí, que hace tus productos diferente a otros productos que dicen ser naturales?

Melissa: Lo primero era lo que te decía, que no es por un tema comercial sino un tema de consciencia. A veces la rentabilidad no es o no puede ser la misma de uno que dice ser natural y que tiene otro tipo de ingredientes que no son responsables con el medio ambiente o cancerígenos, siempre esta primando el tema que sean biodegradable, sostenibles y responsables con el cuerpo y la piel. Esa es a mayor diferencia. La transparencia de que realmente se esta investigando y se están creando a conciencia con el fin de realmente suplir esa necesidad al nicho que lo estaba buscando. Lo otro que también pienso que ya no es tanto el producto de la marca sino es como ver el cuidado no de forma de estereotipos sino de cuidado y salud y por agregado vendrá lo otro. Es mas salud fisica y mental. Esas son las dos cosas que identifican en la marca mucho.

Maria: como describirías tu estrategia de mercadeo de marketing? Y porque escogiste esa estrategia? Y como esta estrategia transmite lo que quieres transmitir de la marca?

Melissa: yo te cuenta que la estrategia de marketing me la paso pensando todos los días. Yo no soy publicista pero me toco aprender. Esta marca empezó con un millón de pesos jajaj entonces te imaginaras el presupuesto que he tenido para la publicidad…. La estrategia de marketing que me gustaría implementar es sobre la educación al cliente. Muchas cosas que las personas no tienen porque saber, como por ejemplo que es un ingrediente biodegradable, que es un parabeno, que es un disruptor endocrino, todo eso. Es anormal que la gente sepa esto. Este es el tipo de cliente siempre llega a nosotros de manera natural, pero quien no lo sabe tienes que enseñarle y esa a sido mi estrategia. Mas que venderle el producto por venderlo, pero explicar porque elegir un ingrediente que no es cancerígeno y cosas así o como potenciar los productos antioxidantes. Un marketing muy enfocada de la ciencia, no dermatológica porque no soy dermatologa, sino mas de como actúan los ingredientes en la piel porque eso si lo conozco. Inbound, mas el tema inboud donde tu estas enseñando todo lo que va al rededor de la marca. Son las personas que te empiezan a seguir y no hacen pedidos de una vez, pero mientras empiezan a conocer mas la marca, mas les interesa y eventualmente piden y se fidelizan. [irrelevan speech]. Esa es mi estrategia de marketing que siempre he tenido presente.

Maria: cuando ti creaste Santo Remedio, tu pensaste o te imaginaste algún futuro para ella? Y has estado cerca de cumplir esa meta?

Melissa: Si, pero es muy difícil. Yo decía que en 5 años quería tener mi laboratorio propio y todavía no lo tengo. Yo alquilo. Obviamente una de las cosas importantes es generar empleo! La marca ya tiene 5 empleados pero más allá es que quiero que la gente que llegue aprenda, aporte y el día que se quiera ir sentir que hiciste algo por alguien. La otra meta que tengo es crear investigación. Eso si es mucho mas costos y utópico jaja pero digamos que es la idea. Hay mucho dinero invertido en las moléculas sintéticas, entonces la cosmética alopatíca o tradicional siempre se respalda en estudios escogidos no es que las moléculas naturales no funcionen, sino que no tienen investigaciones. La realidad es que cuando la empresa se convalida legalmente, tu empiezas a tener muchos gastos y otras responsabilidades que te toca prioritizar.

Maria: En el proceso de crear la compañía, tu hiciste algún tipo de investigación de la parte de negocios? O cuando necesitabas aprender o tenias preguntas sobre el proceso de la compañía a quien acudías para consejos?

Melissa: Siempre he estado de la mano de la cámara de comercio. Todos estos cursos que hacían antes lo cobraban y ahora que son gratis mucha gente ya no va. De verdad, gracias a estos cursos y a él personal, ademas de ganarme una convocatoria que se llama mujeres tech que era una aceleradora con asesores, yo digo que ellos me evitaron dos años de errores con todo lo que me enseñaron. Es super importante porque si quieres emprender, tienes que capacitarte sí o sí. No solamente en temas financieros sino en todo, hasta como manejar tu tiempo. Al ser tu independiente y no tienes un jefe que te rinda cuentas, entonces empiezas a meterte en el celular o no sabes cuando parar. [irrelevant speech]. Entonces si tu no te capacitas y encuentras ese aliado que te guíe, pues realmente no lo vas a lograr o te vas a demorar muchos años en poder hacerlo.

Maria: En todo en este proceso de capacitación, encontraste algo interesante que todavía te acuerdes?

Melissa: muchas cosas. El teman financiero. Yo era super reacia a todo lo financiero, sobretodo cuando me gane ese concurso de la aceleradora. El asesor se enamoro del proyecto y el quería invertir y todo pero la pandemia llego y no pudo. El me decía "*tú ya sabes producción que eso es muy importante. Sabes de sistemas de gestión de calidad también. Sabes de formulación. Todas esas cosas son super importantes, pero y lo financiero que?"* Y yo le decía que se lo dejaba a otra persona! Porque yo ya tengo el resto. El me decía que no, que era muy importante aprender a leer los números. Es bonito pore te ayuda a tomar decisiones. Entonces empece y realmente, fue el mejor consejo que me pudieran dar porque era la mayor falencia que tenia en ese momento.Esto me logro abrir un camino y la mente diferente. [irrelevant speech]. Todos los errores son aprendizajes.

Maria: cuando tiene que ver con personas que invierten en tu negocio! Inversionistas! Tuviste inversionistas? O todo fue un capital orgánico de la empresa poco a poco.

Melissa: orgánico de la empresa poco a poco. Al principio yo era muy reacia porque un inversionista te va a poner muchos peros. Cuando yo empece mi marca, yo me iba a aliar con una mujer que tenia una marca de jabones. Ella era administradora de empresas, entonces cuando yo llegue quede muy confundida con las formulas. Yo ya llegue con la mentalidad de que quería cambiar todo porque para mí ya no estaba bien. Ella empezó a darse cuenta de eso y pues su emprendimiento es como un hijo…. Entonces se dio cuenta de eso y empezamos a tener problemas. Yo pensé "es mejor estar rojo una vez que esta morado toda la vida" entonces le dije que no era buena idea de ser socias. Después de esa experiencia, yo era muy reacia a tener inversionistas o socios. Entonces me enfoque mucho que fuera orgánico con un crédito que lo paga la misma marca. Siento que en este momento ahora si me siento dispuesta a tener un inversionista porque hay un punto que la empresa crece con lo que haces, pero cuando ya crece mucho, se ve como una comunidad! Entonces quiere complementarle muchas cosas mas entonces necesitas más recursos.

Maria: Comenzar una compañía no pasa de la noche a la mañana! Y generalmente es un esfuerzo bastante grande. Cómo describirías el proceso desde el momento que dijiste quiero crear una empresa, al momento de la creación de la empresa?

Melissa: es qué fue al mismo tiempo. Todo paso muy rápido. Yo fui a la cámara de comercio, hice un curso, y salí a registrar la marca jaja. Hay algo que me quedo muy grabado y era que el asesor decía "metanse en la cabeza que si ustedes se están independizando porque quieren tiempo, pues no lo van a tener". Él tenia toda la razón! 7/24 estas pensando en tu empresa. Tienes que empezar a darte el respiro del espacio de descansar. Tu te apasionas tanto con tu idea que también te saturas. Cuando te saturas empiezas a tomar malas decisiones y tu genio empieza a cambiar porque no te estas dando el descanso necesario. También porque te estas exigiendo demasiado. Eso fue lo que mas me impacto en cuanto a la creación de la empresa. Yo sabia que no iba a tener tiempo y que iba a tener unos esfuerzos muy grandes, pero no me lo imagine así.

Maria: Has estado en contacto con otras empresas similares? Se que has estado en contacto con Eccora, pero aparte de eso?

Melissa: si claro! Como química farmacéutica muchas marcas similares me escriben para que les ayude con formulas, registros INVIMA, que los asesore y cosas así. Con la tienda física que tenemos nosotros también tenemos marcas aliadas. Por ejemplo, si yo no hago jabones busco una marca que tenga jabones. La identifico y la investigo y miro que tenga la misma filosofía de Santo Remedio. Si tengo mucho contacto con estas marcas y amistad también. No es una competencia sino una cooperación. Si todas las marcas van con la misma filosofía y estándares de calidad, el gremio crece y hay tajada para todos! Es importante que el mercado crezca y crezca bien para que la gente empiece a probar más cosas de las cosméticos naturales.

Maria: entonces, quien dirías que es tu mayor competidor en este momento?

Melissa: Como en el tema comercial, hay una marca que se llama De Planta. Ellos comercialmente la tienen muy clara, bueno últimamente no tanto, pero ellos sí en la forma de como mostrar el producto y esa filosofía. Ellos tenían una ventaja muy grande. En calidad, yo creo que Eccora.

Maria: Tu me dices que tienes amistad y una comunidad, como te mantienes al tanto tú, como emprendedora, sobre las nuevas tecnologías o tequilas de formulación o ingredientes que sea de innovación? Como te mantienes al día?

Melissa: Los proveedores que elegí, ellos saben qué es la marca y me recomendad cosas. Hay unos de brazil que soy muy buenos y ellos me mandan información y me capacitan. Ademas hay una asociación de ciencia y tecnología cosmética (ACITEC). Ellos también envían información y de todo. Tu ya tienes que filtrar lo que te interesa de ahi.

Maria: entonces tu dirías que si hay una transferencia de conocimiento entre las empresas de cosméticas naturales?

Melissa: o sea hacia otras marcas?

Maria: si, como una comunidad.

Melissa: No te entendi la pregunta… que si las otras marcas te dan información?

Maria: mmmmm mas como en el ACITEC. O por ejemplo cuando tienes compañías que te contactan con preguntas, tu los ayudas? Y vice versa.

Melissa: Si….

Maria: Obviamente sin comprometer la formulación de cada uno.

Melissa: No sé si pase con todos… pero lo que te digo, si. Ah bueno una de las competencias que también .. es Aruna. Es una amiga también. Nos hicimos amigas a través de la compañía, de hecho le estoy haciendo un producto a ella. Digamos que si de mi parte. Yo no se. Yo siente que cuando uno crece como con envidia y que esto es mío y que nadie lo tiene que saber, también es ese miedo que no te deja crecer. Yo si le ayudo realmente a las marcas cuando me pregunta o cuando me piden que les haga formulas or registros. Inclusivo había una marca que cuando me trajo las fórmulas, no dios mío casi me da un ataque. Las formulas estaban mal. Yo no le podia registrar esa marca. Yo creo que lo que te hace es la marca. Tu filosofia y tu nicho. Lo que tu comunicas lo que tu fidelices. El product es muy importante. Todo esto yo lo aprendi en la cámara de comercio. Hay miles de marcas de cosmetica y muchas panaderías. Hay de todo pero tu marca es única de por sí. Yo si siento que hay, de mi parte, una transferencia de conocimiento. Obviamente al limite. Por ejemplo, yo a través de una amiga que tiene una empresa similar hice un cambio muy grande en mis conservantes. A pesar de que eran naturales, los que yo usaba antes, generaban una sensibilidad en la piel. Yo investigaba y no le encontraba que era lo que pudiera causar irritación. A ella le gustaban mucho mis productos. Ella me dijo meli es que mi pelo es muy sensible y en el momento que me lo aplico, se me pone sensible. Yo pensando que seria …. Y pense en voz alta: sera el conservante? Y ella en su laboratorio mando hacer dos pruebas del producto, una con conservante y una sin…. Y ella me dijo que probo la que no tenia el conservante y ahi supimos por ella que el problema era el conservante. Efectivamente lo cambiamos que también lo aceptaban en cosmetica natural, y se soluciono el problema. Si ves? Si hay como una comunidad en la que se comparten cosas. Cuando tu eres muy sigilosa y precavida con la entrega de información, no se te dan las oportunidad de retroalimentación. Yo nunca he sido envidiosa con esos temas. Toda la retroalimentación que podamos tener entre todos para poder hacer mejores productos y solucionar cosas que no sepamos cómo hacer, es super importante.

Maria: te mande una lista de las empresas que yo estoy estudiando o que estoy incluyendo de mi investigación era para que tu las miraras y me dijeras si reconoces algunas de las marcas de la lista.

Melissa: a ver… reconozco: 100PURE, Eccora, Ere Perez, mamaearth.

Maria: perfecto. Ya estamos en las ultimas preguntas. Alguna vez has oido el termino: cosmetica comestible?

Melissa: **si pero no estoy desacuerdo con ese termino.**

Maria: Puedes elaborar un poco porque?

Melissa: **Porque eso de que todo lo que se puede comer, se puede untar es un mito, es mentira. Hay muchas cosas que tu puedes comer y que si untas irritan la piel. Ademas cuando tu haces una mascarilla de papaya sola…. Pues no tiene excipientes que este**

haciendo que se absorban sus activos. Las proteinas son muy grandes para poder absorberlas la piel. Entonces nunca he estado de acuerdo con eso. Hay ingredientes comestibles, como colorantes, que tu te los comes y no pasa nada, pero cuando te los aplicas tendrás una irritación fuerte. Porque? El pH o la barrera de la piel es completamente diferente a lo esta en tu estomago. Tu pH del estomago es acido y tiene que pasar por diferentes sitios, y tiene que absorber de diferentes formas. Entonces, por ejemplo, hay cápsulas de vitamina E que son para consumo, pero no te las puedes aplicar. Eso no se puede hacer. Una vitamina E hecha para absórtese en el tracto intestinal, no en la piel. Por eso no estoy desacuerdo con la cosmética comestible.

Maria: Como la definirías en tus propias palabras? A la cosmética comestible.

Melissa: Como lo que se puede comer, se puede untar.

Maria: tu no considerarías que tus productos caen en la definición del cosmetica comestible?

Melissa: Pues no porque los excipientes que tiene no están hechos para que las plantas se absorban a través del estomago. Sino para que se absorban en la piel.

Maria: Okey, pero la pregunta es mas no relacionada con que la gente se vaya a comer tu producto, sino en el sentido de que cuando se transmite este tipo de slogan o mensaje es como que si una persona ingiere uno de tus productos, se enfermaría?

Melissa: mmmmmmmmmmmm….. no. creo que no. tendría que ir mas a fondo con cada uno de los excipientes que uso. Porque si te digo de una que no podría ser irresponsable. De pronto hay un ingrediente en la piel pero que puede irritar las mucosas del estomago. Entonces no se. Es que no estoy desacuerdo que me parece que es desinformación. La gente ya tiene desinformación comercial y me parece que es demasiado comercial y que puede presentarse a que la gente se confunda. Entonces … por eso no lo adoptaría ni estaría dentro de esta tendencia.

Maria: Las ultimas dos son: como la pandemia de Covid te afectó a ti como compañía?

Melissa: No todo lo contrario. Esa año vendimos el doble del año anterior. Pero fueron varios factores. Primero que nosotros empezamos todo acelerado. Yo tome el curso, baje y registre la empresa. 13 de agosto del 2018. En un mes después mi amigo me dijo que hiciera pagina y ahi puedes meterle para pagarte en PU. El me ayudo a crear la pagina. Cuando empezó la pandemia que para nosotros en Colombia fue en marzo 2020, yo ya tenia la marca por 1.5 años. Ya tenia pagina, ya tenia plataforma de pago, ya tenia redes, ya tenia seguidores, y tenia testimonios de gente que usaba los productos. En ese momento fue cuando me gane lo que te dije de la cámara de comercio, todos esos asesores me decían que lo digital, financiero, y todas esas cosas fue que la pandemia impulsara la marca ese año.

Maria: tu crees que la cuarentenas y los encierros de la pandemia impacto el comportamiento de los consumidores de alguna manera?

Melissa: si claro. Ahora son mas emocionales. El hecho de que tuvieran que estar encerrados tanto tiempo y no verle la cara a muchas personas, ya no les interesaba el contenido ni el … en la pandemia mucha gente empezó a pagar mucha publicidad en redes. Era la única forma de vender.

Yo ya estaba saturada de producto y producto y producto en mi publicidad. La gente ya queria algo mas emocional. Mas como el consumo del video. De que estas haciendo tu en tu casa. De como haces un huevo con salchicha. De como te aplicas el producto. De ver como están esas otras personas. Eso cambio el consumo de las personas. Tu lo ves ahora. Tu subes un producto en tus redes, así super especifico, por ejemplo se vende serum despigmentante. No funciona igual cuando tu haces un video que genere una emoción. Sea risas o algo interno. Como que todo ese consumo se volvió mucho mas emocional. Eso fue lo que cambio la pandemia y se nota. Antes yo subía foto de producto solo y vendía. Ahora si hago eso no vendo tanto.

Maria: Bueno. Acabamos con la entrevista! Mil gracias!

Melissa: espero que te haya gustado.

Maria: me diste mucha información que necesitaba! Mil gracias.

Appendix D: List of Companies

5. (US) 100% Pure —> https://www.100percentpure.com/
6. (US) Natural Organic Edible Cosmetics —> https://noecosmetics.com
7. (Australia) Edible Beauty —> https://ediblebeautyaustralia.com/
8. (India) Khadi Natural —> https://www.khadinatural.com/about
9. (India) Mamaearth —> https://mamaearth.in/
10. (India/UK) Forest Essentials —> https://www.forestessentialsindia.com/
11. (India) Juicy Chemistry —> https://juicychemistry.com/
12. (UK) Loli Beauty —> https://lolibeauty.com/pages/shop-all
13. (US)Agent Nateur —> https://www.agentnateur.com/
14. (Australia) Wildcrafted Organics —> https://wildcraftedorganics.com.au/
15. (US) Anima Mundi —> https://www.sonaturalbeauty.com/en/153-anima-mundi
16. (US) Ao Organics Hawaii —> https://www.aoorganicshawaii.com/
17. (US)Aquableu —> https://aquableu.com/
18. (France)Baiobay —> https://baiobay.com/?lang=en
19. (US) Blue beautifully —> https://www.bluebeautifly.com/
20. (Canada) Calia —> https://calianatural.com/
21. (Australia) Ere Perez —> https://calianatural.com/
22. (US) Hanua —>https://honuaskincare.com/
23. (UK) Innersense —> https://innersenseorganicbeauty.co.uk/
24. (US) Under Luna —> https://underluna.com/
25. (US) RANAVAT —> https://www.ranavat.com/
26. (US) Maya Chia —> https://mayachia.com/
27. (Germany) FŪHLICH —> https://fuehlich.de/en/unsere-produkte/serum/
28. (Finland) Flow Cosmetics —> https://flowcosmetics.com/
29. (Germany) Niyok —> https://niyok.de/

30. (Netherlands) Sara Rosalie —> https://sararosalie.nl/pages/about-us

31. (Spain) Santaverde —> https://www.santaverde.com/

32. (Netherlands) Witlof Skincare —> https://www.witlofskincare.com/en/

33. (Colombia) Eccora—> https://touchland.com/

34. (France) So' BiO étic —> https://en.sobio-etic.com/

35. (Colombia) Santo Remedio —> https://www.santoremedio.com.co/

Appendix E: Netnography Sources

Factor / Platform	Identification of a Problem	Framing	Theorizing	Expectations	Network	Learning Process
Reddit			• https://www.reddit.com/r/teenagers/comments/srevly/the_fuck_you_mean_there_are_edible_beauty_products/			
Quora			• https://www.quora.com/unanswered/What-is-edible-beauty-and-is-it-suitable-for-vegans			1) https://www.quora.com/unanswered/I%E2%80%99m-working-on-my-project-to-extract-the-color-from-plants-to-use-in-mouth-and-eye-cosmetic-products-What-tests-do-the-edible-cosmetic-products-e-g-Lipstick-and-eye-products-e-g-Eye-liner-Mascara-should-be-done 2) https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-edible-olive-oil-and-cosmetic-olive-oil 3) https://www.quora.com/Is-cosmetic-coconut-oil-safe-to-use-in-lip-balm-or-is-it-better-to-use-edible-coconut-oil
Google Search	• Blufftonsun. (2015, December 14). IF YOU CAN'T EAT IT, DON'T PUT IT ON YOUR SKIN. https://www.blufftonsun.com/if-you-cant-eat-it-dont-put-it-on-your-skin/ • Seastainability. (n.d). IF YOU CAN'T EAT IT – DON'T PUT IT ON YOUR SKIN. https://seastainability.com/2017/12/27/rawbodycarecosmetics/.			• Chirico, K. & Nygaard, S. (2016, April 3). We tried "edible" cosmetics and there were some suprises. In *Buzzfeed*. https://www.buzzfeed.com/safiyanygaard/we-ate-some-beauty-products-and-had-a-really-bad-day?utm_term=.vwgxD75gPq#.uuWEaRPQLp.	• Lynch, A. (2015, April 5). 10 Skincare Products So Pure, You Can Actually Eat 'Em. In *Brit+Co*. https://www.brit.co/pure-edible-skincare-products/	• VeganMileker. (n.d). HOW TO MAKE NATURAL EDIBLE COSMETICS WITH PULPS?. https://www.veganmilker.com/en/how-to-make-natural-edible-cosmetics-with-pulps/. • Seastainability. (n.d). IF YOU CAN'T EAT IT – DON'T PUT IT ON YOUR SKIN. https://seastainability.com/2017/12/27/rawbodycarecosmetics/. • Bathbox. (2022). If You Can't Eat It, Why Put It On Your Skin?. https://www.bathbox.com.au/blogs/lifestyle/food-for-your-skin.