



The Branding Strategy in the Brand Image of Natural Cosmetics Companies

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Abstract. Social media marketing has positioned consumers in a leading role, as they have the power to give a positive or negative image to brands. Their favorable appreciation of certain products contributes to the consolidation of industries such as natural cosmetics. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how women aged 25 to 39 perceive the branding strategy in the brand image of Ainhua Bio and Lou Botanicals & Co. A qualitative approach with a phenomenological design was used for this analysis. For the interviews that were carried out, 15 women between 25 and 39 years of age who have purchased at least once in Ainhua Bio or Lou Botanicals & Co. participated. It was identified that women look at the colors and the logo that the brands have in order to purchase a product. Therefore, the branding strategy in the brand image of Ainhua Bio and Lou Botanicals, acts favorably for these organizations and are a key factor for the interaction of female consumers.

Keywords: Brand Image, Branding, Customers, Natural Cosmetics

1 Introduction

There is a growing trend in companies towards going natural, i.e., looking for organic products to replace chemicals. This is very noticeable in the field of cosmetology; for example, In-cosmetics, Latin America's leading event on ingredients for personal care, highlighted the support for the transformation of the beauty industry towards a more innovative, inclusive and above all sustainable one [1]. In parallel, after the Covid-19 pandemic, consumers became increasingly aware of the benefits of using natural and organic cosmetics and skin care products [2]. All these circumstances have motivated several companies to include sustainable practices in their product-making and to focus on developing products containing natural ingredients.

Specifically, the global natural cosmetics market is constantly booming. Its rapid growth is reflected in profitability over the years, increasing from US\$500 million in 2017 to US\$800 million in 2023 [3]. Peru is no stranger to this situation, as the

cosmetics market contributes 1.4% of tax revenue to the country's economy and 9 out of 10 women use skin care products [4].

In this growth of the cosmetic industry, the perception of users has a significant influence, since they evaluate organic products in great detail, by their labels, packaging and all the elements that make the product more attractive [5]. Brand image can generate positive attitudes towards the purchase of natural products. The greater the number of consumers with high brand loyalty, the more the brand can increase its market share, improving profit margins [6]. Thus, brand image is important to further promote the growth of natural cosmetics.

The strengthening of the brand image is achieved through strategic processes that achieve a competitive effect compared to others [7]. One of these processes is branding, through which brand elements are selected and a product or service is differentiated to convey its identity [8]. In turn, the success strongly associated with branding is related to "the face" of the company, i.e., with that which physically identifies it such as colors and logo [9].

On the one hand, colors provide an idea of brand identity, so brand recognition also increases [10]. Among its benefits, it is mentioned that colors help customers' purchasing decisions, immediately capture customers' attention, influence brand personality, can signal product quality, contribute to brand recognition and brand image [10]. Color in the brand image of an organization operates through the cognitive mechanism, this means that it plays a diagnostic role, so it can characterize the object it is representing [10]. In that sense, organizations select colors strategically to communicate signals and produce emotions, express personality and stimulate associations to the brand [9]. Therefore, it has been identified that when the use of colors in a brand is restricted, it reduces the attractiveness and positive affiliation [11]. From another point of view, colors not only remain in the perception of the brand image, but also reach the product packaging [12]. As long as colors are more neutral, people perceive them as more natural. In this sense, colors are key in the design of product packaging, since they can guide the buyer's attention, transmitting information related to the product.

In Peru, two of the 10 best brands for skin care in natural cosmetics are Ainhoa Bio and Lou Botanicals & Co [17]. Their prestige and recognition have shown a tendency to continue to grow as they gain user value. Therefore, the general objective of this research is to analyze the perception of women aged 25 to 39 years according to the branding strategy in the brand image of the natural cosmetics companies, Ainhoa Bio and Lou Botanicals & Co. Specifically, the questions are: In what way do women from 25 to 39 years old perceive the branding colors in the brand image of Ainhoa Bio and Lou Botanicals & Co? And, In what way do women from 25 to 39 years old notice the logos in the branding strategy in the brand image of Ainhoa Bio and Lou Botanicals & Co? This research will contribute to the studies on colors and logos in the brand image, since it has been identified that branding consists of everything that visually identifies the brand.

2 Methodology

For this research, an interpretative paradigm was used, because the interpretation that the "actors" make of their reality is analyzed. The research was interpretative, because it inquired into natural situations, giving meaning to the phenomena that people give them [18]. It also had a phenomenological design, since the aim was to investigate the experiences that people have had with the brands and thus describe them in order to obtain a basis for the reflective analysis that will represent the essence of the experiences [19]. In the same way it was also qualitative research, since it interpreted the practices and materials that are visible to everyone in general. Normally these practices are transformed into representations that may include interviews, conversations, recordings, photographs and personal notes [20]. In this sense, the researcher studied the situations that occur in the natural environment, trying to make sense of or interpret the phenomena in terms of the meanings that people attach to them.

Being a qualitative research, it explains the rigorousness of this study by deploying it in two phases.

First phase. A documentary review and systematization of research on branding strategies was carried out. We reviewed articles published in educational journals extracted from prestigious academic databases, as well as official websites. This phase was complemented with a reflexive hermeneutic process of the information that was emerging around branding and brand image. This literature review allowed us to elaborate a matrix of interview questions.

Second phase. This phase consisted of fieldwork involving qualitative interviews with fifteen users in order to explore their perceptions of branding and brand image. It should be noted that qualitative interviews are professional conversations with a purpose and design oriented to social research [21]. In that sense, it was considered quite opportune to collect the opinions and contributions of the users in order to deepen their perception of branding. This second phase was developed in three fundamental stages: fieldwork planning, fieldwork execution and information coding, categorization and triangulation process. For a better understanding and scientific credibility, each stage of the process is described below.

Fieldwork planning. The data collection technique chosen for this research was the Anglo-Saxon tradition of an interview, since it is one of the three most important components of qualitative research. Specifically, use was made of the semi-structured interview type, since they will have a degree of flexibility, either in the format or in the order and terms of execution for the different people, who belong to the target audience (Bernal, 2010). For this purpose, in this first stage, a set of fifteen questions was designed and constructed. Next, communication was established with fifteen users who had purchased at least once in Ainhoa Bio or Lou Botanicals & Co. To maintain the anonymity and privacy of the identity of the research participants [22], a code was assigned to the interviews that were processed: E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7, E8.

Execution of the field work. The fieldwork consisted of conducting the interviews, which were individual, qualitative and semi-structured, since guides and lists of questions previously designed by the research team were used. The questions were open-ended, giving the informant the opportunity to elaborate on her answers. The research involved 15 women between the ages of 25 and 39 years old who have purchased at least once at Ainhoa Bio or Lou Botanicals & Co. This age was considered

since this is when the skin begins to lose collagen and, therefore, aging begins [23]. Furthermore, in the Digital 2020 report, it has been identified that women in this age range have a greater presence in social networks [24]. In this case, convenience sampling was used, due to the fact that it is not known how many people may belong to the phenomenon, and, therefore, people who are found are approached [25]. The users gave their consent to have the interviews recorded for later analysis. They were also informed that participation was anonymous, voluntary and confidential, and that the results obtained would be used only for research and academic purposes.

Process of coding, categorization and triangulation of the information. The coding process, as well as the comparison, relationship, classification of codes, categorization and triangulation of data from the different interviews conducted with users of the brand, was carried out using the computer program Atlas.ti version 7.5 in Spanish, as it is a very useful software for the researcher to develop the processes of analysis and interpretation of qualitative data [26]. In this case, triangulation was carried out between the information obtained from different angles [27] such as the documentary review and the empirical data collected in the fieldwork. This resulted in the construction of two emerging categorizations, i.e., thematic units according to the research objectives.

3 Results and Discussion

The results will be described in terms of two emerging categories, which respond to the specific objectives of the research: (a) Color in branding and brand image and (b) The logo as a differentiating component of brands.

Color in branding and brand image. All the interviewees have had some kind of response when they have seen the colors of Ainhoa Bio or Lou Botanicals & Co, as mentioned [9]. Regarding the sensation that the colors transmit to them, the great majority of them feel calm and relaxed while others feel activated, however, only one interviewee loves them because the brands use colors that she likes. This can be identified in interviewee two where she mentions: "the colors are quite soothing" (E2).

In relation to the responses to the two brand's colors, it can also be said that all of the women interviewed are attracted by the colors used by these brands. Most of them are attracted to them because they are light colors; however, the minority argue that they transmit tranquility and only one because they look elegant. This is only a confirmation of what she says [9].

As mentioned by [28], women associate the colors of the brands in question with the message that the brand or product wants to convey. In this case, most of them relate it with fruits and flowers, or with peace and tranquility. To a lesser extent, women associate the colors used with self-love. This is reflected in interviewee 6, when she mentions, "colors of peace and tranquility, I feel that these colors connect a lot with women" (E6). According to the relationship with natural cosmetics, all the interviewees believe that the colors used by the brands mentioned are related to natural cosmetics.

Most of them mentioned that the colors are related to natural cosmetics because they are colors that give tranquility or are related to the main ingredient of the product. A smaller number of them mentioned that although they are related to natural cosmetics,

they lack additional colors that represent nature. This confirms what [28] mentions, that colors create different perceptions about the brand image.

As mentioned [29], colors can indicate the quality of the products and this is confirmed by the fact that all the interviewees mentioned that colors do reflect the essence of the products. The vast majority mentioned that the colors represent the natural color of the main ingredient of the product, while only one mentioned that they reflect the essence of the products because they are flashy colors. As mentioned by the fourth interviewee, "these colors, because they are not so flashy, reflect elegance and quality" (E4).

Regarding the perception of colors in the different products of the brands, a large number of them mentioned that they perceive the color according to the main ingredient of the product and to a lesser extent mentioned that they perceive the colors in a friendly and affectionate way. This confirms what [12] mentioned, that colors in packaging designs are key.

Regarding whether colors influence how they interact with brands and whether they will buy their products, all of the women interviewed answered that colors do influence their purchase choices. Most women mentioned that they are influenced because they like colors, while one of them mentioned that colors can lead to a topic of conversation. Another woman mentioned that it influences her because of the versatility of the products and the last woman mentioned that it influences her because of how feminine the product looks. This confirms what they say [11] that the use of colors in a brand should not be reduced, so that in this way more attraction and links with the public are created.

Finally, according to whether colors help to create a good perception of the brand, all the interviewees agreed that colors help to have a good perception, most of them affirmed because it is related to the essence of the brand and because it gives them confidence, to a lesser extent, they affirmed because of the ecological tendency they have. This confirms [10] that colors help to have a good perception of the brand.

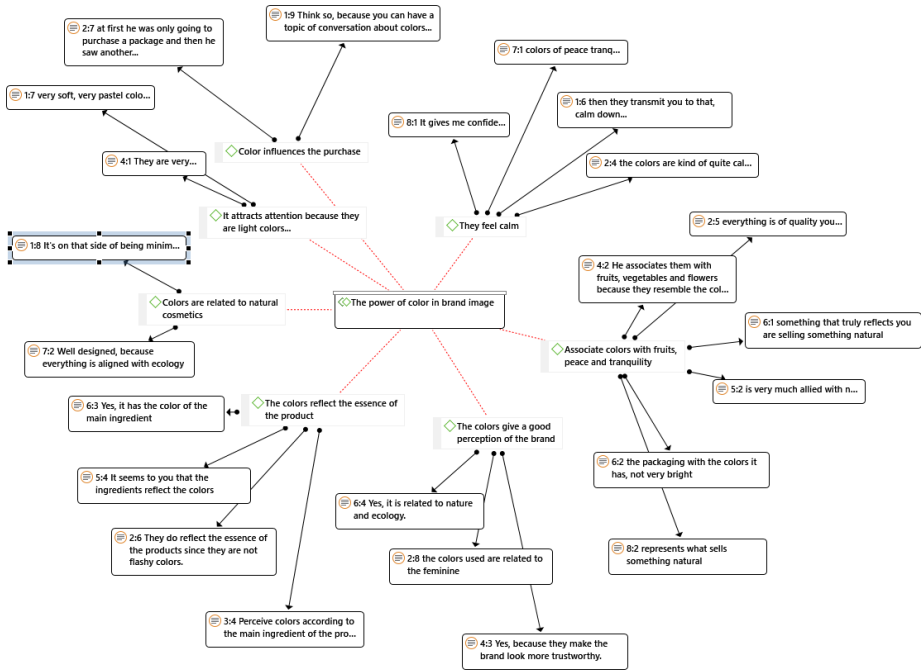


Fig. 1. Emerging category of color in branding and brand image.

The logo as a differentiating component of the brands. When asked about what most attracts attention to the logo, most of the interviewees answered that it is the graphic design of the logo. A smaller number answered that what most attracts their attention is the typography because of its minimalist and elegant nature. Only one said that what most attracts her attention is the calmness transmitted by the colors of the logo. This confirms what they say [14], that the logo competes for the consumers' attention. We can see this reflected in the fifth interviewee when she mentions: "(...)what I remember most I think is the typography, I think that is what attracts me" (E5).

Regarding whether the logo was easy to recognize, only one said it was not, because there were other brands with similar logos. Most of the interviewees mentioned that the logos were easy to recognize because of the simplicity of the typography and colors, while one said it was easy to recognize because of the connection she had created with the brand. This confirms what [30] says, that an organization's logo must be distinctive and innovative to be easily recognized. As the last interviewee mentioned: "(...) yes, it is easy to recognize because it does not have many elements and it is easy to remember" (E8).

According to the relationship of the logo with a lived experience, a portion of respondents mentioned that they relate it to being in contact with nature. One mentioned that she relates it to her mother getting ready, and another one relates it to a time for herself. Another considerable part did not relate the logo to any lived experience. A fourth significant group linked it to moments when they are in contact with nature. For example, interviewee 7 mentioned: "(...) With a day of rest and with a day in the field"

(E7). This confirms what they say [9], that logos make people relate it to experiences they have lived before.

Regarding what they remember most about the brand's logos, most of the interviewees mentioned that what they remember most is the typography, while to a lesser extent they responded that what most attracts their attention is the drawing they have in the logo. An example of this is indicated by interviewee 1: "(...) What she remembers most is the typography, because it is simple" (E1).

Regarding the messages conveyed by the logo, all of them affirmed that logos convey messages, half of the interviewees affirmed that they convey messages of peace and elegance, while the other half mentioned that they convey a message of simplicity and nature. This confirms what Lencastre et al. (2023) says, when they refer that the logo is the fundamental visual representation of an organization. As interviewee 5 mentions: "I think the message is to go back to the simple, to the natural, to the most basic things a person needs to be well, to feel good" (E5).

According to whether the logo helps buyers to differentiate it, most of them agreed that it does, of which a large percentage of interviewees mentioned that it helps differentiation because of its simplicity and naturalness. As interviewee 5 pointed out: "(...) Yes, because it is so minimalist." A minority mentioned the diversification of products and alluded that it was different from the others; however, only one mentioned that it would be better to change the color to make it more different. This coincides with what was mentioned by [13], according to which the logo helps to differentiate the organization in the market it serves.

Finally, in relation to whether the logo is adequate for the brands in question, we find that a large number of interviewees affirm that the logo is adequate, while to a lesser extent they mention that something else could be added to differentiate them, as indicated by interviewee 6: "(...) Yes, but they should put something that represents them." This confirms what [31] mentions, when she says that the logo is a fundamental component that helps to differentiate brands.

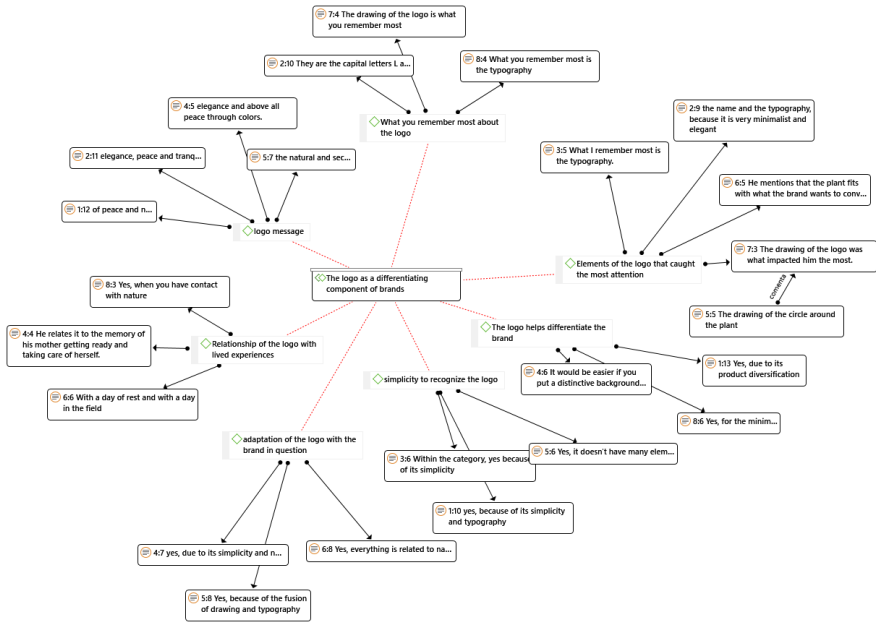


Fig. 2. Emerging category of color as a reflection of the essence of the product.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

According to the general objective of this research, it is verified that women perceive the branding strategy in the brand image of Ainhoa Bio and Lou Botanicals in a friendly way, since they feel that it transmits a message of tranquility, this helps the brand image of the companies, because with a favorable message, they have more opportunities to create loyalty with the consumers. It can be inferred that the branding strategy of Ainhoa Bio and Lou Botanicals, in terms of colors and logo of the brands is closely linked to what they want to reflect in their brand image, which is ecological and natural. Thus, it is evident that they were aligned with what they want to represent, since the interviewees positively received the message. That is why the choice of colors and logo design are aspects that require important attention in the branding strategy, because through them, consumers see reflected the brand image of the company.

Regarding the first specific objective, which is linked to the question of how women from 25 to 39 years old perceive the branding colors in the brand image of Ainhoa Bio and Lou Botanicals & Co, it is evident that they perceive it in a friendly way, they feel that somehow these colors relax them. Thus, it is evident that colors can produce emotions in people. In addition, it is of utmost importance to consider colors within the branding strategy, because with them you can have a first perception of what brands want to reflect to their consumers. In this sense, the choice of colors is crucial, because they must produce emotions, attract attention, and above all reflect the essence of their products. Thus, the choice of color that brands choose for their logos is strategic, since this element of branding is the first impression that consumers will have of the brand.

The second specific objective addressed the question of how women from 25 to 39 years old notice the logos in the branding strategy in the brand image of Ainhoa Bio and Lou Botanicals and it was found that they notice the logos in the branding strategy in the brand image, according to the element that is inside the logo or according to the typography it carries. The logo in the branding strategy is of utmost importance, since it transmits a message to consumers and is the first impression they have about the brand. In the case of the brands mentioned above, the message conveyed by the logo was of elegance and nature, although it still lacks a touch of differentiation for the logo to fulfill its mission of contributing to the brand image. For any brand, logo design is a differentiating element from other brands in the market. That is to say, brands must take into account all the elements of the logo design, since each one of them will send a message to consumers, which will make them stand out from the others.

Finally, it can be inferred that the branding strategy regarding the choice of colors and the logo design is of utmost importance to contribute to the brand image of an organization, since these tools are strategic to create an emotional link in consumers, positively influencing their purchase decisions and representing a differentiating element compared to other brands. In this way, the brand image of an organization can be strengthened through trust and credibility, creating long-term brand loyalty.

For the following research, it is recommended to emphasize the importance of logos in the branding strategy, since it is a crucial element for the brand image of organizations in this area to be positive.

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