



UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

ANALYZING THE EFFECTS OF SAFE AND NATURAL INGREDIENT
CLAIMS ON BRAND REPUTATION IN CLEAN BEAUTY BRANDING:
THE CASE STUDY OF BENAMÔR

Internship Report to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain a Master's
Degree in Communication, Marketing & Advertising

By Pauline Moulineau

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Abstract

In recent years, a new trend has emerged in the cosmetics industry: the “clean beauty” movement. Faced with a growing awareness of the health risks associated with certain hazardous substances and the negative impact of this industry on the environment, consumers are now turning to safer, more natural products, prompting companies to adapt to this evolution. It is therefore legitimate to question the real impact of this transformation on the reputation of these companies.

This research aims to determine whether natural and safe ingredient claims influence the reputation of cosmetic brands, particularly in the context of clean beauty. While current literature focuses mainly on general aspects such as transparency and trust in eco-friendly brands, this study specifically explores the impact of such claims on brand reputation, focusing on the Portuguese brand Benamôr 1925. The aim is to study Benamôr employees' perspectives on these ingredients and evaluate their influence on brand reputation for consumers.

This research was conducted through both qualitative and quantitative research. First, individual interviews with 6 employees of the Benamôr 1925 brand revealed their motivations and impressions behind the use of the natural and safe ingredient claims on their products. Subsequently, it analyzed the opinion of 34 consumers, based on a questionnaire sent in order to get insights on consumer's perception of the brand's reputation in relation to the natural and safe ingredient claims.

Findings suggest that Benamôr 1925's emphasis on safe and natural ingredients is vital for its strong reputation in the clean beauty sector. Both employees and consumers value the brand's transparency, educational content, and ethical practices. This commitment fosters significant trust and loyalty among consumers.

Keywords: clean beauty, brand reputation, safe and natural ingredients, consumer perception, Benamôr 1925.

Resumo

Nos últimos anos, emergiu uma nova tendência na indústria da cosmética: o movimento “*clean beauty*”. Face à crescente consciencialização dos riscos de saúde associados a substâncias perigosas e o impacto negativo da indústria no meio ambiente, os consumidores interessam-se cada vez mais por produtos mais seguros e naturais, obrigando as empresas a adaptar-se a esta evolução. Assim, surge a legítima questão sobre o real impacto desta transformação na reputação das empresas.

O presente estudo teve como objetivo determinar se a afirmação de ingredientes naturais e seguros influenciam a reputação das empresas cosméticas, particularmente no contexto do *clean beauty*. Ao passo que a literatura corrente foca-se em aspetos gerais tais como «transparência» e «confiança em marcas *eco-friendly*», esta investigação explora o impacto destas afirmações na reputação na marca Portuguesa Benamôr 1925, examina as perspectivas dos seus colaboradores e afere a influência que estes ingredientes têm na reputação da marca, para o consumidor.

Esta investigação seguiu uma abordagem qualitativa e quantitativa. Inicialmente, as 6 entrevistas conduzidas individualmente a colaboradores da marca Benamôr 1925 revelaram as suas motivações e impressões subjacentes ao tema das afirmações do produto. Posteriormente, recolheu-se a opinião de 34 consumidores a um questionário que pretendeu compreender a perceção do consumidor em relação à reputação da marca em relação às afirmações do produto.

Os resultados sugerem que o ênfase da Benamor 1925 no uso de ingredientes seguros e naturais é vital para a reputação da marca dentro do setor *clean beauty*. Os colaboradores e consumidores demonstraram valorizar a transparência, o conteúdo educacional e práticas éticas. Este compromisso alimenta significativamente a confiança e lealdade entre consumidores.

Palavras-chave: *clean beauty*, reputação da marca, ingredientes seguros e naturais, perceção do consumidor, Benamôr 1925.

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Table of contents

Abstract.....	3
Resumo.....	4
Acknowledgments.....	5
Introduction.....	8
PART I - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	11
Chapter 1 - Theories and concepts of brand reputation.....	11
1.1 Introduction to brand reputation.....	11
1.2 Brand reputation theories.....	17
1.3 Brand identity and brand image.....	26
Chapter 2 - Clean beauty branding.....	31
2.1 Clean beauty.....	31
2.2 Foundational concepts of clean beauty branding strategies.....	39
2.3 Strategic elements of clean beauty branding.....	45
Chapter 3 - Consumer perception in clean beauty.....	52
3.1 Consumer perception.....	52
3.2 Consumer purchasing behavior.....	57
3.3 Marketing claims and consumer expectations.....	62
PART II - EMPIRICAL METHODOLOGY.....	68
Chapter 4 - Internship descriptive memory.....	69
4.1 Company overview.....	69
4.2 Internship objectives.....	69
4.3 Description of tasks and responsibilities.....	70
4.4 Conclusion.....	73
Chapter 5 - Methodology.....	74
5.1 Research relevance.....	74
5.2 Research question.....	74
5.3 Research objectives.....	75
5.4 Research design.....	75
5.5 Data collection techniques.....	76
5.6 Ethical considerations.....	80
Chapter 6 - Results presentation and discussion.....	80
6.1 Interview.....	80
6.1.1 Results presentation.....	80
6.1.2 Discussion.....	97
6.2 Questionnaire.....	105
6.2.1 Results presentation.....	105
6.2.2 Discussion.....	127
Chapter 7 - Conclusion, limitations and future research suggestions.....	139
7.1 Conclusion.....	139

7.2. Limitations and future research suggestions.....	142
References.....	143
Appendix.....	153

Index of figures

Figure 1 - Conceptual Model

Figure 2 - Calculation of natural origin content by including formulation water

Index of tables

Table 1 - Participants involved in the interviews

Table 2 - The Corporate Character Scale developed by Davies

Index of graphics

Graph 1 - Familiarity with the brand

Graph 2 - Self perception in relation to the brand

Graph 3 - Importance of natural ingredients in cosmetics

Graph 4 - Control of ingredients' naturality in cosmetics

Graph 5 - Natural ingredient usage by the brand

Graph 6 - Impact of natural ingredient claims on brand's perception

Graph 7 - Comparison on the market in terms of naturalness

Graph 8 - Likelihood on buying Benamôr 1925 products based on naturalness claims

Graph 9 - Likelihood on recommending Benamôr 1925 products based on naturalness claims

Graph 10 - Perceived safety of natural vs. synthetic ingredients in beauty products

Graph 11 - Importance of safe ingredients in cosmetics

Graph 12 - Control of ingredients' safety in cosmetics

Graph 13 - Safe ingredients usage by the brand

Graph 14 - Impact of safe ingredient claims on brand's perception

Graph 15 - Comparison on the market in terms of safety

Graph 16 - Likelihood on buying Benamôr 1925 products based on safety claims

Graph 17 - Likelihood on recommending Benamôr 1925 products based on safety claims

Graph 18 - Involvement of Benamôr 1925 in the clean beauty movement

Graph 19 - Transparency of Benamôr 1925 about their products' ingredients

Graph 20 - Benamôr 1925's personality attributes

Graph 21 - Gender of the participants

Graph 22 - Age of the participants

Graph 23 - Nationality of the participants

Graph 24 - Country of residence of the participants

Index of appendices

A) Interview with Pierre Stark, CEO & Partner at Sociedade de Perfumarias Nally, Lda

B) Interview with Andreia Lança Magarreiro, Global Brand Director of Benamôr 1925

C) Interview with Andreia Rodrigues, Laboratory Director of Benamôr 1925

D) Interview with Inês Henriques, Digital Marketing Manager at Benamôr 1925

E) Interview with Joana Mauricio, Marketing Manager at Benamôr 1925

F) Interview with Ana Medeiros, Marketing Intern at Benamôr 1925

G) Questionnaire's script

Introduction

The "clean beauty" movement aims to transform the cosmetics industry into one that is more ethical and environmentally conscious. It encourages consumers to use more natural products that respect their skin and the environment while also encouraging brands to be more involved and open about their manufacturing processes. Having started at the beginning of 2010, this movement has really taken off in the last few years, bringing to light an increasing number of new brands based on this idea while also encouraging more established brands to follow suit by introducing safer and more natural products.

In fact, consumers in the cosmetics industry are showing an increasing interest in natural alternatives that present no health risks; this trend has undoubtedly been reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 lockdown. Additionally, consumer society is coming under increasing scrutiny for its production systems' detrimental effects on the environment, which makes consumers more aware of the issue and encourages them to switch to more ethical and ecologically friendly products.

Benamôr 1925, established in Lisbon in 1925 by an apothecary, has always been recognized for its use of natural ingredients. Following its acquisition by Pierre Stark in 2015, the brand has reformulated its old recipes in addition to incorporating more Portuguese botanical ingredients into its new creations. This historical formula revision work aimed to remove potentially harmful ingredients while remaining true to its commitment to provide safe and health-conscious products without compromising its original values. Today, the brand hopes to go even further both overseas and in its own country, with its latest store opening in the heart of the Portuguese capital in March of this year.

In this context of changing consumer expectations and heightened awareness of environmental issues, Benamôr's efforts to highlight the safety and natural origin of its ingredients reflect a wider transformation within the cosmetics industry. As the "clean beauty" movement gains momentum, it becomes essential to understand how these claims of safety and naturalness influence the reputation of the Benamôr 1925 brand. This research aims to analyze the effects of these claims on this brand's reputation, considering in particular how these strategic shifts resonate with growing consumer demand for ethical and environmentally-friendly products. The central question of this thesis is: "How do claims of

safety and natural ingredients influence the reputation of the Benamôr brand in the context of clean beauty?” seeks to explore the implications of this evolution for Benamôr's market positioning and consumer perception.

As mentioned above, the cosmetics sector is facing a specific context where it is increasingly saturated, with intense competition between brands and permanent evolution of consumer expectations. Consumer perception is a key factor in brand reputation, making this research question even more relevant in this context. In addition, this study is particularly interesting for the Benamôr 1925 brand, which aims to be both contemporary and traditional, while satisfying consumer expectations in terms of transparency and naturalness.

The precise impact of safe and natural ingredient claims on the reputation of cosmetics brands is little studied. Available research focuses on broader issues, such as trust in environmentally-friendly brands and the importance of transparency in attracting consumers. According to these studies, consumers attach great importance to transparency, and are more inclined to trust brands that adopt environmentally-friendly practices. Yet no in-depth study has yet been carried out to assess the influence of these particular claims about natural ingredients on brand reputation. Further research is therefore essential to better understand the effects of natural ingredient claims on brand reputation and commercial success, particularly for complex brands like Benamôr 1925, which find themselves in a transitional context between tradition and modernity.

To address the research question mentioned, two types of analysis were combined. Firstly, to explore Benamôr employees' opinions on claims for safe and natural ingredients in their products, a qualitative analysis based on interviews was carried out. Thanks to a six-month internship with the company's marketing team, I was able to interview the CEO, the laboratory manager, the brand manager, as well as members of the marketing and digital departments. Secondly, to assess the impact of these claims on Benamôr's overall reputation in the cosmetics sector, a quantitative study was carried out using a questionnaire asking 34 consumers about their perception of the brand.

This study is subdivided into seven chapters, which consist of two distinct parts. In the first chapter of the first part, which constitutes the literature review, the focus is on theories and concepts related to brand reputation to help develop a conceptual model. The next chapter focuses on the visual identity of ethical beauty brands. In the third chapter, we

look at how consumers perceive clean beauty brands. The following section is divided into 4 chapters. The first deals with the details of my internship at Benamôr 1925, the second with the methodology of this study, the third with the presentation of results and discussion, and finally, the last section addresses the conclusion, limitations and suggestions for future research on this subject.

PART I - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter 1 - Theories and concepts of brand reputation

1.1 Introduction to brand reputation

The term "brand reputation" has evolved over time, and its origin is linked to the development of branding and marketing concepts. The combination of "brand" and "reputation" indicates the current notion that a brand is more than simply a logo or a name and includes people's views and opinions about a company or its goods. In today's corporate scene, it has become an essential component of business management and marketing strategy.

For several decades, academics and practitioners have researched brand reputation especially since the 1990s, as it has played heavily in management research (Rindova et al. 2010). The importance of brand reputation in any industry cannot be overstated, as it is a multidimensional notion that plays a crucial role in defining customer behavior and affecting corporate performance in any industry. It also acts as an important intangible asset that may influence consumer trust, loyalty, and purchase decisions. Nowadays, brands must have a strong reputation in order to be successful and therefore lucrative (Herbig and Milewicz, 1995).

Reputation is the general opinion held by outsiders about the distinctive characteristics of businesses, or brands (Fombrun and Rindova, 2000). Researchers describe a company's reputation as its overall appeal (Fombrun 1996), recognition and respect (Hall 1992), an indication of significant component (Fombrun and Shanley 1990), and attributes arising from prior actions (Weigelt and Camerer 1988, p. 443). Brand reputation may also be described as the outcome of a company's activities and interactions with its customers, which are primarily determined by the products and services supplied, the brand's connection with its customers, and social responsibility practices (Feldman et al., 2014). Brand-related behaviors and messages shape customers' perceptions of brand reputation (Ponzi et al., 2011). In this way, brand reputation can be defined as a consumer's opinion that is formed through an evaluation process based on a unique set of criteria (Ponzi et al., 2011). It is an output of the brand identity that the company proposes, the promises that the company makes, and the extent to which consumers experience the offer that the company promises (Veloutsov and

Moutinho, 2009). According to studies, customers might conceive of companies as celebrities (Rook, 1985) or as if they had their own personality (Blackston, 1992, 1993).

Companies and brands with a good reputation are more likely to attract customers, whereas a brand will lose its positive reputation if it fails to meet its stated aims or marketing signals on a consistent basis (Milewicz and Herbig, 1994). However, once positively established, brand reputation can provide many benefits to the brand, including facilitating brand extensions, the introduction of new products by lowering perceived risk (Corkindale and Blender, 2009), and mitigating negative bias or spillover effect risks towards the brand in the event of negative events (Tipton et al. 2009). According to Keller (2008), brand reputation is the proof that the brand can deliver on the brand promise over time.

The vast industry of global beauty now impacts nearly everyone's everyday life. There is a growing need for trendy goods with unique and varied features as the global beauty industry penetrates both domestic and international markets (Jones, 2011 in Kim et al., 2021). Most consumers are women who are always investigating new brands, goods, and fashions. Younger customers are abandoning big brands that their parents favored in favor of locally produced, artisanal, and natural goods across all consumption categories, which is a major generational shift (Kumar, 2005 in Kim et al., 2021). As a result of growing customer demand and technology advancements, the beauty business is undergoing fast change. Digitalization, customisation, premiumization, and sustainability are the main forces behind this industry's shifting trends.

The beauty sector is one of the most competitive nowadays, mostly because the growth of digital and personalized trends necessitates different marketing and distribution techniques than in the past. In highly competitive industries like this brand reputation is particularly important as a strategic asset that may have a big influence on a company's performance. In this market, companies rely heavily on brand reputation as a strategic pillar. It influences a brand's capacity to set itself apart from rivals and overcome obstacles in addition to fostering consumer trust and loyalty. A strong brand reputation may be a major factor in long-term success in a market where customer perception and trends are the driving forces.

In this context, corporate reputation plays a very specific role because stakeholders make their decisions based on the reputational status of the firm in question (Maden et al., 2012). According to Helm (2007), people's views and attitudes influence their behavioral intentions and outcomes, which in turn affects all of the advantages associated with reputation. Several scholarly works examine the phenomena of brand reputation and its impact on the actions of three primary stakeholders: customers, employees and investors.

From the perspective of the customer, a positive brand reputation lowers monitoring costs related to perceived performance ambiguity and information asymmetry and conveys the idea that the benefits of the purchase transaction are relatively good (Hansen et al., 2008 in Maden et al., 2012). This increases the perceived value and purchase intention. A good reputation also enhances consumer loyalty to the business (Fombrun and van Riel, 1997 in Maden et al. 2012) and decreases switching intentions (Walsh et al., 2006 in Maden et al. 2012). Several scholars argue that consumers who attach a positive reputation to a certain company have commitment beliefs, favorable intentions to continue interacting with the same company, or other types of goodwill (Zeithaml et al. 1996 in Maden et al. 2012).

Concerning current and prospective employees, brand reputation helps a variety of behavioral effects along. Social identity theory holds that people identify themselves into social groups according to the company they work for, and that these groups have a significant influence on how they perceive themselves (Ashforth and Mael, 1989 in Maden et al. 2012). In a comparable way, candidates for jobs strongly choose companies with excellent reputations as potential employers since they increase self-esteem (Turban and Cable, 2003 in Maden et al. 2012). These theoretical foundations illustrate why more reputable companies hire and retain highly qualified employees.

Investors are the last group of stakeholders impacted by a company's brand reputation. According to studies, current or possible future investors place a higher value on a company's reputation than on its financial success (Srivastava et al., 1997; Maden et al., 2012).

As well as being of key importance to the various stakeholders in a company, brand reputation can also serve as a valuable asset for brand differentiation. Keller (1993, 2003) asserts that customers select brands based on perceived distinction, where differentiation means meaningful and distinctive additional values that more closely meet their demands

(Porter, 1976 in Vahabzadeh et al., 2017). This implies that difference may be used to help customers choose between different products, services, and brands. Finally, it gives organizations brand equity and strength (Keller, 2001; Vahabzadeh et al., 2017). Other researchers frequently note that brands must be distinct in order to be purchased, because consumers must have a reason (Andrew et al., 1997 in Vahabzadeh et al., 2017).

According to Kapferer (2008), differentiation is the foundational step of brand creation. A corporation that employs a differentiation strategy seeks to distinguish itself. It selects one or two features that are important to a big proportion of purchasers in a particular market. There are various methods to distinguish yourself, ranging from the apparent physical or utilitarian to the less obvious, nuanced, or emotional to the differentiating but unimportant (packing color). According to the author of "The New Strategic Brand Management," distinctive qualities allow firms to increase revenue, widen brand visibility and exposure, and make the brand more relevant (Kapferer, 2008).

Cosmetics are a successful industry that is gaining popularity in marketing research. The highly competitive environment in the cosmetics industry makes it an ideal place to explore brand trust, brand image, and consumer loyalty in cosmetic products. These are the critical factors that allow management to sustain a competitive edge in the marketplace.

An individual bases his or her perception of a brand's trustworthiness on their interactions with it. As a result, it will be impacted as an experience attribute by the consumer's assessment of any direct (such as a trial, usage, or level of satisfaction) and indirect (such as advertising, word-of-mouth, or brand reputation) contact with the brand (Keller, 1993, Krishnan, 1996 in Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001).

A company may present a better image in the market if it has a high reputation, according to research by Richard and Zhang (2012). The signaling hypothesis states that consumers base their opinion of a company on its reputation. Customers choose businesses with a strong corporate image when making purchases of things that are excessively costly or risky (Hetze, 2016). A strong company reputation fosters and builds a successful connection with customers, claim Helm and Tolsdorf (2013). In fact, Caruana and Ewing (2010) discovered a favorable correlation between customer loyalty and a company's reputation.

Saydan (2013) asserts that brand image is crucial for both consumers and marketers. Marketers, in particular, use brand image to position, differentiate, and expand the brand as well as to foster positive attitudes and feelings toward the brand and outline the advantages of choosing and buying that particular brand. In reality, while making a purchasing choice, customers use brand image to interpret, arrange, and recollect the information they can remember about it (Lee et al., 2014 in Chan et al., 2016). As a result, effective branding is crucial to positioning the company's identity and effectively communicating its mission.

Customer loyalty was described as "loyalty as attitude, loyalty as behavioral" by Jacoby and Kyner in 1973. According to Thakur (2016), loyalty is the outcome of psychological processes brought about by commitment and is exemplified by recurring purchases. Some of the factors that researchers have discovered influence customer loyalty are the following: customer satisfaction (Herrmann et al., 2007 in Islam, 2021), trust (Pratminingsih et al., 2013 in Islam, 2021), service quality (Cho and Pucik, 2005 in Islam, 2021), corporate reputation (Helm and Tolsdorf, 2013 in Islam, 2021) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Martínezand del Bosque, 2013 in Islam, 2021).

These days, having a solid brand reputation is really beneficial, especially when it comes to customers. We will look at these hypotheses in this part. Brand reputation does, in fact, have a lot of influence on customer behavior. Nowadays, the common belief is that emotion guides behavior. Most of the time, people interpret someone's behavior in casual conversation as having been done because of emotions. Indeed, Loewenstein, Weber, Hsee, and Welch (2001) conducted a significant literature review and stated, "The idea that emotions exert a direct and powerful influence on behavior receives ample support in the psychological literature on emotions." Considering this hypothesis, we will see that brand reputation has a causal effect on consumers' feelings that will later impact their behavior towards that specific brand. Thomson et al. (2005) defined emotional attachment as the favorable emotional outcomes of a strong relationship between a customer and a brand, one of the many theories for emotional attachment. By conceptualizing emotional bonding, the degree of affection, passion, and connection to assess attachment, they were the first to establish measurements of emotional attachment. Subsequent studies clarified that brand attachment represented the brand and self-connection by capturing both emotional and cognitive bonding (Park et al., 2010; Japutra et al., 2014 n Ahmadi, A., & Ataei, A. in 2022).

According to Khan and Mohsin (2017), the higher the brand's reputation, the more favorable the emotional appraisal felt by customers in the context of sentiments of contentment and pleasure. Bairrada and Coelho (2018) discovered that brand reputation influenced emotional worth significantly. Customers' happiness and emotional value will be enhanced and fulfilled by a brand reputation that reflects the symbol and prestige (Bhat and Reddy (1998); Hammerl et al. (2016) in Saputra et al., 2021). While customers are now equipped with the information to scrutinize the claims made by the firms and look for superior brand alternatives, customers' emotional values were proven to have a favorable impact on their attitudes and to create a strong psychological bond with the brand (Duman, Ozbal, & Duerod, 2018 in Saputra et al., 2021). Researchers generally agree that cognitive and emotive evaluations of a company's reputation eventually shape customers' behavioral intentions (Bartikowski et al., 2011; Su et al., 2014). Customers are more likely to make future purchases if the business is linked with good attributes and consequently has a higher reputation (Bartikowski et al., 2011 in Su et al., 2014).

Actually, the functions of emotions and cognition in judgment and decision-making are well-documented in the literature (Weiner, 1980; Schwarz, 2000; Han et al., 2007 in Liu et al., 2018). Additionally, according to consumer research (Oliver, 1993; Caro and García, 2007), customers' pleasure and future behavioral intentions are shaped by cognitive and emotional aspects. According to Lee and Workman (2015) in Ahmadi, A., & Ataei, A. in (2022) psychological attachment to a particular brand may also be important determinants of consumer behaviors, such as repeat purchases of the brand and willingness to expend resources to obtain the brand. These behaviors ultimately lead to brand loyalty. Indeed, As affective reflections of consumer advocacy, consumers with strong emotional brand attachment are anticipated to participate in behavioral objectives including word-of-mouth marketing, brand promotion, and brand community involvement (Chelminski and Coulter, 2011). Strong emotional brand attachment consumers disregard the brand's drawbacks, respond resiliently to unfavorable brand information, and defend the brand on social media (Japutra et al., 2014 in Ahmadi, A., & Ataei, A. in 2022).

As we saw in this first part, the reputation of a brand can be defined by the function of both external and internal impressions of the products and services we provide, as well as the company and its management. It also represents the total of stakeholders' past and current

perceptions, as well as their future aspirations. These days, a company's brand reputation may be a very valuable strategic asset if it wants to be profitable and successful, particularly in highly competitive areas like the cosmetic industry. A company's brand reputation is a benefit which allows it to retain market share and customer loyalty in spite of most customers' rising demands for the brands they consume. This is especially true when it comes to brand differentiation, which is made possible by a positive brand reputation. While brand reputation is significant in terms of customer behavior, acting as a trigger for emotions and sentiments that would later contribute to the establishment of a decision-making process, it also has an impact on other stakeholders inside the firm, such as employees and investors. The second part of our first chapter will take a closer look at various theories on brand reputation in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the subject.

1.2 Brand reputation theories

To obtain a deeper understanding of the brand reputation phenomena, we will now look at the essential principles involved. In this part, we are going to study the concepts of brand equity, which is closely related to corporate reputation. In the early 1990s, the notion of brand equity arose. From the standpoint of the individual consumer, brand equity might be viewed as a management idea, a financial intangible asset, a relational concept, or a customer-based concept. Brand loyalty, brand recognition, perceived quality, and brand associations are the four key asset aspects of brand equity. There are three methods to leverage brand equity: first, develop it, then borrow it, and last, purchase it. Brand equity may provide advantages and benefits to the company, the industry, or the customer (Tuominen, 1999).

One of the most influential books on brand equity is undoubtedly David Aaker's book "Managing brand equity : capitalizing on the value of a brand name" published in 1991. According to a review of the piece of work:

“David Aaker's book provides a valuable contribution to the practice of product/brand management by synthesizing current thinking in this area. The author sets forth four objectives for the book:

- 1.To define and illustrate brand equity and provide a structure that will help managers see more clearly how brand equity provides value.

2. To document research findings and illustrative examples which demonstrate that value has emerged (or has been lost) from marketing decisions or environmental events that have enhanced (or damaged) the brand.
3. To discuss how brand equity should be managed.
4. To raise questions and suggest issues that should be addressed by thoughtful managers who are trying to think strategically.” (Zinkhan and Smith, 1992),

The authors of the review explain that the work of David Aaker is divided into 11 chapters that give a logical foundation for thinking about long-term brand management. According to Aaker, the term "brand equity" refers to "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or detract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers" (p. 15). Then, in the remainder of his work, he will define five broad types of brand assets that contribute to brand equity: (1) brand loyalty, (2) brand awareness, (3) perceived quality, (4) brand associations in addition to perceived quality, and (5) additional proprietary brand assets. All of these components may be measured by using a powerful platform that highlights the areas that need to be improved in order to increase the value of the brand. The buyer's perspective must be assessed throughout the client journey. Data must be collected at various stages, and strategies and tactics must be used to maximize customer retention and strengthen the brand's distinct identity (Qualtrics, 2022). These five distinct characteristics are incorporated in David Aaker's conceptual model of brand equity that is the most often referenced nowadays. It has been investigated in a variety of empirical studies (Eagle and Kitchen, 2000; Yoo et al., 2000; Faircloth et al., 2001; Washburn and Plank, 2002), the most important of which is the validation of the aspects on which brand equity is built (Atilgan, Aksoy and Akinci, 2005).

Another viewpoint on brand equity is that of Keller, who defines it as the difference in how brand awareness affects how consumers react to a company's marketing (Keller 1993, 2; Keller 1998, 45). The conceptual model of brand equity by Keller Model was published in his influential book *Strategic Brand Management*, is the most well-known Customer Based Brand Equity model. The concept of customer-based brand equity, or CBBE, demonstrates how consumer perceptions of a brand directly contribute to its success. In other words, we can say that the differential impact that brand awareness has on consumers' reactions to a brand's marketing is known as customer-based brand equity. Three essential components

make up this definition: "Brand knowledge," "differential effect," and "consumer response to marketing" are the first three concepts. First, variations in customer reaction give birth to brand equity. The brand can basically be categorized as a commodity or generic form of the product if there are no distinctions. Secondly, the variations in reactions might be attributed to the consumers' awareness of the brand. Therefore, even though the company's marketing efforts have a significant impact, brand equity ultimately comes down to what customers believe. Third, perceptions represent the varied reaction from customers that constitutes brand equity (Tuominen, 1999).

The multidisciplinary idea of signal theory, sometimes referred to as signaling theory, has its roots in economics and has subsequently been used in a number of disciplines, including marketing and brand management. Michael Spence, an economist, initially formulated the idea in the context of information asymmetry, which occurs when one party has access to more or better information than the other. Signal theory provides an explanation of how companies utilize signals or messages to tell external audiences about their goals, goods, and brand reputation in the context of marketing and brand reputation.

The notion originated in reaction to information asymmetry, which occurs when two participants in an exchange have access to different types of information (Taj, 2016; Kirmani and Rao, 2000 in Boateng, 2019). Typically, the sender must decide whether and how to signal or transmit a certain piece of information, and the recipient must decide how to interpret the signal. Signaling theory has been widely utilized to explain consumer choice theory in a variety of domains. It advocates three key components: the signaler or service provider, the receiver or consumer, and the signal or message.

The primary goal of this theory is to reduce knowledge imbalance between the two parties (Spence, 2002 in Connelly et al., 2010). Spence's (1973) important work on labor markets, for example, illustrated how a job application may engage in activities to lessen information asymmetry, which hinders potential employers' selection capacity. Spence demonstrated how high-quality prospects separate themselves from low-quality prospects through the expensive signal of rigorous higher education. This study sparked a massive body of literature that used signaling theory to select scenarios that occur in fields ranging from anthropology to zoology (Bird & Smith, 2005 in Connelly et al., 2010).

When it comes to asymmetric information, it frequently comes down to the qualities of the service provider and how well it can meet the demands of its clients while also setting itself apart from competitors (Connelly et al., 2011 in Boateng, 2019).

In order to influence their customers' thoughts, service providers frequently disclose information about their brand qualities and the quality of their service delivery. They want to reassure customers of their reliability and integrity, therefore they turn this information into signals that are appropriately sent to their clients via various means. Firms are increasingly using IT features and the deployment of various online tools and apps to communicate transparency, security and privacy (Mavlanova et al., 2012; Benlian and Hess, 2011 in Boateng, 2019). Additionally, other signals are also sent through the performance of specific activities over the internet including engagement, interaction, personalization and collaboration to foster long lasting relationships with customers (Guo, 2014; Farquhar and Rowley, 2006 in Boateng, 2019).

Because companies know the quality of the goods they sell better than consumers and consumers cannot easily evaluate the product quality or experience, there is a need for market mechanisms via which firms may credibly tell customers about the quality of their products. However, one reaction to one sort of information asymmetry problem known as adverse selection happens when one party lacks the abilities required to produce high quality while claiming to have such talents (Eisenhardt 1989; Mishra, Heide, and Cort 1998 in Kirmani and Rao 2000). The usage of signals, which are acts that parties do to indicate their real kinds, is one possible solution to this problem.

Brand name, price, warranty, and advertising spend are examples of signals that indicate product quality and communicate positive messages about quality (Kirmani & Rao, 2000 in Smith and Font in 2014). These variables represent essential marketing decisions, such as what to title a new product, how much to charge for it, whether to give a guarantee, and how much to spend on promotion. One area of information economics study has demonstrated how a brand's investments (Klein & Leffler, 1981 in Erdem and Swait, 1998) and reputation for high quality (C. Shapiro, 1983, 1985 in Erdem and Swait, 1998) may assure its commitment to high quality.

A second line of research investigates marketing mix aspects as quality indicators. Spence (1974) defined signals as manipulable features or behaviors that transmit information about the characteristics of economic actors. Thus, marketing mix elements such as packaging, advertising, and warranties not only give direct product information but also transmit indirect information about product features about which customers are insufficiently educated. Indeed, Kirmani (1990) discovered that when product quality information is unavailable, buyers utilize perceived advertising expenditures of businesses as indicators to infer quality.

Advertising content is informative about the quality of search characteristics, and the quantity, memorability, and online effect of advertising are informative about the quality of experience attributes, according to the information economics approach (Nelson 1974 in Kirmani and Rao in 2000). Due to the consumer's ability to check ad copy claims before making a purchase, advertising text is informative for search characteristics. Businesses may exaggerate their experience qualities, and customers would be unable to verify this information before making a purchase. On the other hand, if a company invests a lot of money in advertising, the corporation will not recover these costs if the promises regarding unobservable quality are not genuine. In the event that a low-quality company ran a lot of advertisements, it would force a trial and expose its true low quality; since there would be no more purchases, the advertising expenses would not be recouped (Bagwell and Ramey 1988; Kihlstrom and Riordan 1984; Milgrom and Roberts 1986; Nelson 1974 in Kirmani and Rao in 2000).

Another aspect closely linked to the evolution of a company's brand reputation is, of course, reputation management. A collection of guidelines and tactics known as reputation management theory aim to mold, sway, and regulate the public's opinion about a person, group, or other institution. Actively managing and enhancing a good image while reducing the impact of unfavorable information or events is the main objective of reputation management. Fombrun (1996, p. 37 in Waeraas and Sataen, 2014) defines reputation as the "total appraisal in which a corporation is regarded by its constituents". The goal of reputation management is to systematically change the perceptions that create this estimate (Elsbach, 2006 in Wraas and Sataen, 2014). Such a reputation is based on everything the company does

as a whole, especially the signals and messages it chooses to send out to the market (Weigelt and Camerer, 1988 in Davies and Miles, 1998).

When properly maintained, the corporate name, which serves as a representation of that reputation, favorably represents the company to the public and may be especially useful to its clients (Margulies, 1977; Berry et al, 1988; Balmer, 1995; Brown and Dacin, 1997 in Davies and Miles, 1998). Therefore, reputation is a complicated issue, but one that is important to manage. Many practitioner texts have addressed what distinguishes good reputation management from less-than-good reputation management (Bernstein, 1984; Smythe et al, 1992; Sauerhaft and Atkins, 1989 in Davies and Miles, 1998). However, academic research has produced far less material outside of the potential connections between an organization's culture and image, either to the market (Hatch and Schultz, 1997 in Davies and Miles, 1998) or with its employees (Dutton et al, 1994 in Davies and Miles, 1998).

Basically, a theory based on reputation management is the concept of controlling the market presence to influence the perspectives of various stakeholders. Though there are different approaches to optimize it, it frequently focuses on "brand perception" and how to enhance it. Maintaining and enhancing your brand's reputation is the goal of reputation management. It's also a kind of power as you may manage your reputation to influence how others perceive you and what they think of you (Wilcher, 2023). Understanding reputation management theory is crucial because it sets the rules for how individuals and companies communicate with the public. It includes both the good and bad facets of a person's or business's reputation. One may take action to enhance or safeguard their reputation by knowing how various facets of reputation are created and preserved. This entails preserving and improving their reputation, averting unfavorable connotations, or emphasizing positive attributes. To achieve this, a range of strategies can be applied. (Wilcher, 2023).

Reputation management is a generic phenomena that doesn't always arise in reaction to a reputation issue. Put another way, even an organization with a good reputation may take steps to maintain or improve its reputation, just as an organization with a bad reputation may take similar efforts. Since results judged significant to the company are connected to reputation perceptions, it seems sense that a manufacturer would be worried about controlling its reputation (Yoon, Guffey, and Kijewski 1993; Bromley 1993 Weiss et al., 1999). Positive

consumer sentiments regarding the company's goods and salespeople (Brown 1995 Weiss et al., 1999), for instance, have been connected to favorable reputation perceptions and a firm's capacity to weather crises (Shrivastavas and Siomkos 1989 Weiss et al., 1999), as well as increased purchase intentions (Yoon, Guffey, and Kijewski 1993 Weiss et al., 1999) and choice (Traynor, 1983 Weiss et al., 1999).

However, the idea of reputation management is far more nuanced than it first appears, and it has several well-documented drawbacks in the literature. Indeed, Doug Newsom [7], David Finn [6], and others have noted that ideas like “image” and “reputation” are typically not controllable directly, but rather are pervasive outcomes of a company’s or person’s actions. One may compare trying to control one's reputation to controlling one's own popularity. Conversely, some proponents regard reputation management as a new paradigm or guiding force for the industry as a whole, in line with Warren Buffet's advice that an organization's loss of reputation is a far worse transgression than its financial loss. The most frequent worries of proponents of reputation management center on reputation management practices, which have come under fire for being erratic and invalid. Several commentators have argued that no universally applicable measure of reputation exists or can exist for all stakeholders, and that reputation is a relevant notion only insofar as it pertains to certain audiences or publics (Hutton et al., 2001).

Another interesting theory of corporate brand reputation, or rather a brand reputation measurement tool is the corporate character scale developed by Davies, Chun, Vinhas da Silva, and Roper in 2001.

In their study called "A Corporate Character Scale to Assess Employee and Customer Views of Organization Reputation," published in *Corporate Reputation Review*, the authors look at different ways to measure a company's reputation. They point out that simple rating scales often don't explain why some companies are seen as having better reputations than others. (Davies, Chun, Da Silva, & Roper, 2001)

They give the example of well-known methods like Fortune's Most Admired Companies survey, which rates firms on factors like management quality, innovation, and financial strength. Even though these methods have been used a lot, they also went under some criticism for focusing too much on financial performance and lacking a strong theoretical basis. (Davies, Chun, Da Silva, & Roper, 2001)

The study also discusses the corporate character scale by Fombrun et al. (2000), which includes emotional factors like admiration and trust to measure public opinion beyond just financial aspects (Davies, Chun, Da Silva, & Roper, 2001). The authors' goal was to improve reputation measurement by creating a more complete scale that includes both employee and customer perspectives.

The research paper explains that corporate reputation is a difficult concept and that the metaphor of personification can help make it more comprehensible to researchers and respondents. By comparing a company to a person, it becomes easier to grasp this concept using familiar human characteristics. The authors of the study will therefore use this approach to define what they call the "corporate character scale" (CCS) which is able to define how stakeholders perceive a company by also capturing the emotional aspects of their relationship. In other words, the CCS scale is a measure designed to analyze a company's perceived personality, or how a brand is seen in terms of character attributes. This scale is based on the premise that brands, like humans, may be defined by a collection of personality qualities that impact their reputation and how stakeholders perceive them (Davies, Chun, Da Silva, & Roper, 2001).

The CCS is based on five key characteristics that describe various aspects of brand personality: competence, sincerity, excitement, sophistication and roughness. Each of these dimensions is measured using a specific set of adjectives. For example, the competence dimension may contain words like "efficient" or "reliable", whereas the sincerity dimension could include terms like "honest" or "friendly". Consumers can assess these characteristics on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating strong dislike and 5 indicating strong approval of the attributes mentioned (Davies et al., 2001).

The use of CCS in this study will allow us to capture in a precise and nuanced manner how a company is perceived by its consumers. By giving scores to the 49 adjectives that comprise the CCS, we may gain an understanding of the company's personality attributes. This research allows us to assess the congruence between the image portrayed by the firm and customer perceptions, providing important insights into how the brand's perceived personality affects its reputation and image.

Using CCS, we may not only discover the personality qualities most connected with the company, but also learn how these traits affect overall brand image. This is crucial for

brand management since a favorable or bad perception of the company's personality may significantly affect customer loyalty, satisfaction, and the company's overall reputation in the marketplace.

To conclude, integrating Brand Equity Theory, Signal Theory, Reputation Management Theory, and the Corporate Character Scale (CCS) offers a comprehensive framework for navigating brand dynamics. Brand Equity Theory highlights the importance of building strong, positive consumer perceptions for a competitive edge. Signal Theory delves into how brands influence consumer behavior through their communications. Reputation Management Theory emphasizes the need for proactive management of a company's reputation across various stakeholders.

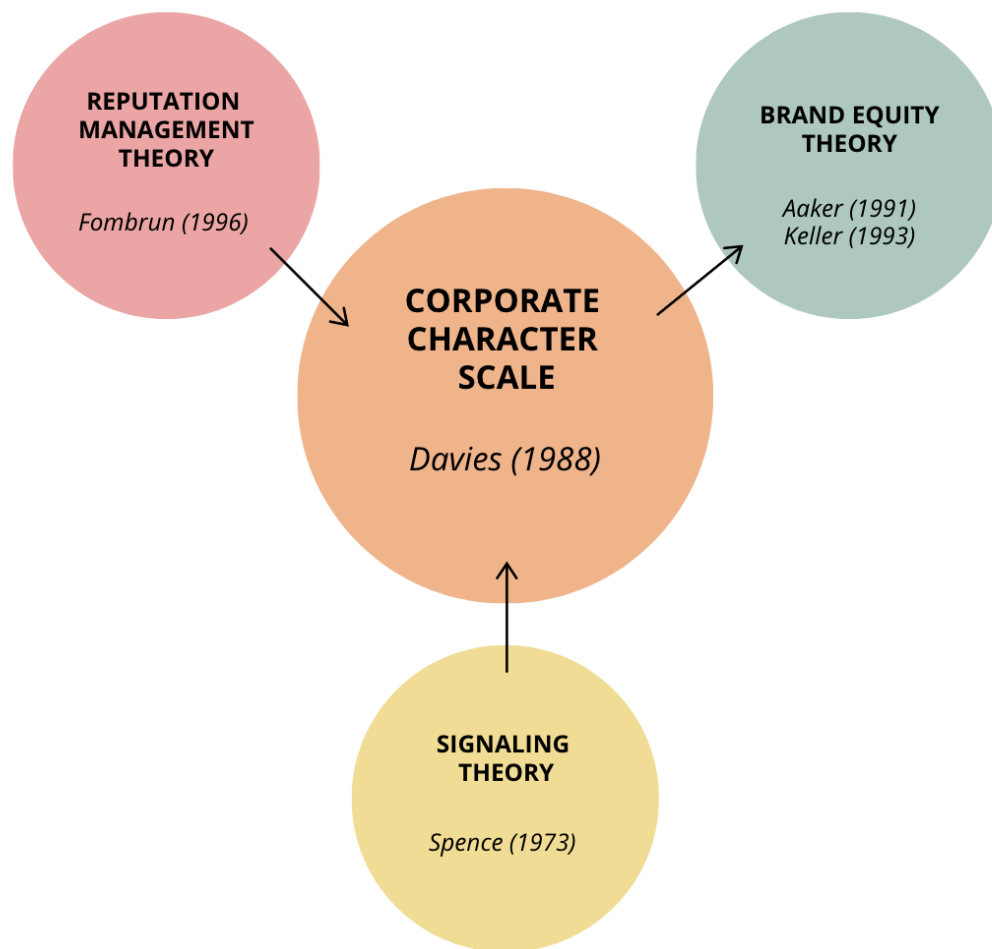
The Corporate Character Scale (CCS) adds valuable insight by providing a nuanced measure of brand reputation. Unlike traditional metrics, the CCS captures not only how stakeholders perceive a company but also the emotional connections they form with it. This tool helps in understanding the depth of these relationships and their impact on overall brand reputation.

These theories and tools are interlinked. Strong brand equity amplifies the effectiveness of brand signals, while a robust reputation acts as a buffer against potential challenges. The CCS enriches this understanding by highlighting the emotional dimensions of stakeholder relationships, allowing for a more comprehensive approach to brand management.

In today's competitive landscape, this integrated approach equips marketers and organizations to address challenges, seize opportunities, and build resilient brands. Mastery of these interconnected theories and tools provides a strategic advantage in crafting impactful and enduring brand narratives.

The following figure presents the conceptual model that summarizes the researches and that we will use for our study:

Figure 1 - Conceptual Model



1.3 Brand identity and brand image

Interrelated ideas such as brand identity, brand image, and brand reputation are critical in determining how an audience views a brand. We will go further into these two initial ideas in this section to have a more thorough understanding of the primary topic that piques our interest: brand reputation.

The works of D. A. Aaker (USA), J.-N. Kapferer (France), L. De Chernatoni (UK), T. Gad (Sweden), and a few others have been the primary sources of information on brand identity development (Yanenko, 2019). Recently, the topic of developing corporate identity in connection to commercial marketplaces has drawn particular scientific attention. We may identify S. Fournier, M. Breazeale, J. Avery (2015), C. Viot (2011), M. Urde (2013), and R.R. Gehani (2016) as some of the scholars who have written on this scientific issue.

J.-N. Kapferer originally put out the idea of brand identity in 1986. Then, in 1995, D. Aaker's book *Creating Strong Brands* focused on it as its central idea. A detailed grasp of the company's clients, rivals, and industry is the foundation of brand identification. For a brand to fulfill its consumer promise, its identity must represent its business plan and the company's commitment to fund the necessary initiatives (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000 in Ghodeswar, 2008). According to D. Aaker, a brand's identity is a distinct collection of connections that the brand's creator aims to establish or preserve. These connections stand for the worth of the brand and the assurances that company representatives provide to customers. (In Ianenko et al., 2020, Kosteljik and Alsem, 2019). Brand identity, according to J.-N. Kapferer, "specifies the facets of brands' uniqueness and value." L. de Chernatoni emphasizes the role that difference plays. "The character, goals, and values that represent the unique differentiation of a brand" is what he defines as brand identity. According to D. Aaker and a few other writers, a brand's identity is a distinct collection of connections that the brand's creator aims to establish or preserve. These connections stand for the worth of the brand and the assurances that consumers receive from company representatives. (2019 in Kosteljik and Alsem; Ianenko et al., 2020). Brand identity "specifies the facets of brands' uniqueness and value," according to J.-N. Kapferer. L. de Chernatoni draws attention to differentiation's role. As far as he is concerned, "the character, goals and values that represent the unique differentiation of a brand" constitute brand identity.

Jean-Noël Kapferer is one author who has examined the topic of brand identity in depth. He developed a model called the Brand Identity prism, which defines six dimensions of brand identity: body, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image.

- Body: represents a collection of the brand's physical characteristics that come to mind when the brand name is stated.
- Personality: customers might be given the impression that all brand-related communication is truly a person with unique personality qualities speaking to them.
- Culture: the set of values and fundamental principles around which a brand must build its behavior.
- Relationship: this component necessitates a brand manager expressing the relationship for which his/her brand stands.

- Consumer reflection: this component refers to the archetypal user of the brand and serves as the basis of identity.
- Self-image: the mirror in which the target group looks at itself.

These six factors are grouped into two categories: the created source vs. the constructed receiver and externalization vs internalization. The first one means that to be a well-presented brand must be viewed as both a person (constructed source: physique and personality) and the stereotyped user (constructed receiver: reflection and self-image). The second explains that a brand contains social characteristics that determine its external manifestation (externalization: physicality, relationship, and reflection) as well as features that are integrated into the brand itself (internalization: personality, culture, and self-image).

Jean-Noel Kapferer's brand identity prism is useful in brand management and marketing. It offers a thorough framework for comprehending and developing a brand's identity. It is essential for establishing and managing a brand's identity, encouraging customer interaction, and assisting in strategic decision-making for effective brand development and communication.

Understanding how to construct a brand identity - knowing what the brand stands for and effectively expressing that identity - is one element to successful brand-building (Aaker, 1996 in Ghodeswar, 2008), and Kapferer's prism of brand identity can help with this aspect.

A company must build a clear and consistent brand identity by connecting brand qualities with how they are expressed in a way that customers can understand. A brand identity must resonate with customers, separate the brand from rivals, and reflect what the firm can and will accomplish throughout time in order to be effective (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000 in Ghodeswar, 2008). Companies that portray a unified, unique, and relevant brand identity may build market preference, provide value to their products and services, and command a price premium (Schmitt and Simonson, 1997 in Ghodeswar, 2008). When a business is up against stiff competition in the marketplace, its brand personality and reputation may help it stand out. This can lead to increased client loyalty and growth. A strong brand identity that is fully understood and experienced by customers aids in the development of trust, which results in the brand being distinguished from the competitors.

Strong brands have the ability to charge higher prices, win over devoted customers, and exert significant brand power to promote the introduction of new goods and services. For these reasons, businesses must have a deep awareness of the attitudes, actions, and characteristics of their target market as well as that of their rivals. Managers may find ways to reduce incongruence and create stronger brands by assessing the discrepancies between brand identity and reputation.

While a brand's identity reflects how it wishes its audience to view it, the target audience's actual impression of the brand is known as its brand image. Customers' contacts and experiences with the brand, together with the associations and messages they learn from other sources, all contribute to its formation.

Brand image has been studied extensively since the 20th century due to its importance in building brand equity. In the increasingly competitive world marketplace, companies need to have a deeper insight into consumer behavior and educate consumers about the brand in order to develop effective marketing strategies. Researchers have defined brand image from four key angles in previous literature: personification, meanings and messages, cognitive or psychological components, and other broad definitions (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990 in Zhang, 2015).

The concept was first mentioned in the 1950s, according to Gardner and Levy (1955), who also discussed its social and psychological aspects. "An attitude about a given brand" is how Bird et al. (1970) described it (Bird, Channon, and Ehrenberg 1970 Malik et al., 2012). It was subsequently discovered to be playing a crucial part in marketing management, and marketing managers were interested in it after empirical study confirmed its significance during purchasing choices (Dolich 1969). For example, Gensch (1978) discovered a strong correlation between brand preference and brand image in his research on brand image. Then, in the 1980s, attitude-based image research took center stage in studies and generated greater buzz about the connection between consumer behavior and marketing management and brand image (Zinkhan and Hirschheim 1992 Malik).

"Perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" is how Keller (1993) defines brand image, and according to Aaker, brand image is "how a brand is perceived by consumers" (Aaker, 1996, p. 71), and it originates in the minds

of consumers, while brand identity is "a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain" (Aaker, 1996, p. 68). According to these two definitions, a consumer's perception of a brand may include a variety of abstract elements, both subjective and objective. "The set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person holds regarding an object" is how Kotler (2001) defined image (p. 273). Low and Lamb (2000) define brand image as "the reasoned and emotional perceptions of consumers attached to specific brands."

In a world where the internet has become so important, an online brand image has emerged. Keller's study in 1993 used four online brand attitude items (bad-good, unpleasant-pleasant, unfavorable-favorable, dislike-like) adapted from the literature (e.g., Anand and Sternthal, 1990) and the online brand belief scale consisting of 15 items from Kwon and Lennon (2006) that address four dimensions of perceived attributes of apparel specialty (aesthetic appeal, navigation convenience, transaction convenience, and web site content). All online brand image elements were scored on a 7-point scale, with higher scores suggesting a more favorable image.

We can claim that brand image takes on a strategic role for marketers. Thanks to it, they are able to oversee marketing initiatives aimed at establishing a favorable brand image and setting it apart from rivals (Javalgi et al., 1992 Malik et al., 2012). It has been demonstrated that brand image plays a strategic function in marketing management (Keller 1993; Park and Srinivasan 1994; Aaker 1996; Malik et al., 2012). and creating the product's marketing mix includes a specific step for brand image management. Effective communication by the company aids customers in determining the needs that the product may fulfill (Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis 1986 Malik et al., 2012). It has the potential to be articulated in a way that sets it apart from the market's rivals (DiMingo 1988; Reynolds and Gutman 1984 Malik et al., 2012). According to Roth (1995), it's essential to a product's success.

In conclusion, the extensive exploration of scholarly literature on brand identity and brand image has revealed the intricate relationship between these two fundamental components of branding. Scholars across various disciplines, from marketing to psychology,

have contributed valuable insights, theories, and empirical evidence that enrich our understanding of how brands are perceived and positioned in the minds of consumers.

The body of research continuously highlights how important a clearly defined brand identity is as the cornerstone upon which a strong brand image is constructed. According to Aaker (1996) and Kapferer (2012), a brand's identity acts as a compass, impacting communication tactics, strategic choices, and the whole brand experience. Furthermore, as Keller (1993) pointed out, customer perceptions are dynamic, which emphasizes the necessity of ongoing efforts to manage and modify brand identity in order to conform to changing consumer expectations.

Even with the abundance of information amassed, there are still opportunities for further study. A potential field of research is the effects of emerging technologies on brand identity and image construction, such as social media and artificial intelligence. Furthermore, cross-cultural research may clarify how cultural subtleties influence how a brand is perceived in various international marketplaces.

This literature analysis essentially establishes the foundation for comprehending the complex relationships that exist between brand identity and brand image. It is critical for marketers and brand strategists to understand the mutually beneficial link between these ideas as they work to build and sustain brands that really connect with customers and build brand equity over time.

Chapter 2 - Clean beauty branding

2.1 Clean beauty

The term "clean beauty" is a skincare and cosmetic concept that places an emphasis on using products that are safe, non-toxic, and favorable to the environment. "Clean" in the sense of clean beauty refers to the lack of artificial perfumes, synthetic additives, and possibly hazardous substances. Clean beauty products frequently highlight cruelty-free procedures, ethical ingredient sourcing, open labeling, and a dedication to sustainability. The objective is to provide customers with skincare and cosmetics products that enhance general wellbeing while reducing negative impacts on one's own health and the environment.

In the beauty and skincare sector, the importance of clean beauty has increased significantly in recent years due to changing consumer tastes and increased awareness of environmental and health dangers. However, because "clean beauty" products are not subject to international rules, customers are unable to distinguish between legitimate, natural, and safe beauty products and those that are closer to marketing gimmicks.

Many academics and researchers have taken an interest in the emerging subject of clean beauty, and they have all added their own special perspectives to the knowledge of this paradigm shift in skincare and beauty. It is clear from exploring the literature on clean beauty that a variety of voices have influenced the conversation by providing nuanced viewpoints on definitions, traits, and consequences. This section introduces and briefly examines the writings of a number of well-known authors who have significantly influenced the developing narrative surrounding clean beauty.

According to Santoro (2022), "Clean beauty products are personal care products that are formulated without potentially harmful ingredients that can be toxic to the human body and harm human health. Clean beauty products are safe, non-toxic, and feature transparent labeling regarding their compositions and sourcing of ingredients. Typically, clean items must meet two criteria:

1. Ingredients should be safe for both human health and the environment.
2. Transparent labels allow consumers to readily examine product information and avoid misleading phrases and marketing gimmicks.

Due to its characteristics, clean beauty is often associated with concepts such as natural ingredients, sustainable practices, vegan and cruelty-free products, and more" (Santoro, 2022). On the other hand, Marta Gonçalves asserts that "The most commonly adopted definition for "clean beauty" stands for products formulated without toxic ingredients, eco-friendly, sustainable, and cruelty-free. However, more holistic approaches can also be pursued, such as biodynamic and natural products, that opt for the usage of natural ingredients harvested with respect to the rhythms of nature". NielsenIQ defines genuine beauty products as those devoid of parabens, sulfates, phthalates, artificial colors, and scents, among 600 other substances. These clean items have over \$400 million in sales and are growing faster than the whole category (Lee, 2021). The various definitions and terms

associated with clean beauty are unique to each author and company, which helps to explain the close relationship between clean beauty and terms like "organically sourced," "eco-friendly," "sustainable," "cruelty free," "vegan," "eco-friendly packaging," "environmentally friendly source," and "zero waste". (The Times of India, 2022).

Along with clean beauty, transparency is a highly popular issue these days. In the cosmetics sector, transparency is defined as giving customers comprehensive information about the contents and manufacturing procedures of the goods. Businesses in the industry typically disclose information about their products, including their contents, all ingredient information, concise descriptions of the ingredients and their uses, business procedures, product processes, product testing, including the method and cruelty-free status of the testing, social and environmental impacts, and product tests. (Brown 2019; The Provenance Team 2020 in Shamburger, 2021; Beauty Packaging 2019). Clean beauty businesses must be open and honest with their customers about their procedures, including how they get their components and provide an extensive description of all the substances that are used in their products. Businesses in the clean beauty industry risk severe consequences to their image if they fail to be transparent and truthful with their clients about their processes, including where they source their ingredients and how they describe each one in detail.

Fonseca-Santos, Corrêa, and Chorili's research report focuses on some additional characteristics associated with clean beauty products. Clean items must be able to replace non-clean products in stores, thus they must be helpful, inexpensive, and of excellent quality (Ottman, 1993). Absolute clean items are ones that have been created from conception to production to be environmentally beneficial. The relatively clean goods are ones that were designed without the primary goal of being greener, but were later proven to be environmentally friendly. Another crucial consideration is how clean things are packaged. Aside from reducing wrapping, green packaging should be reusable or recyclable without requiring much disposal. Green packaging materials include glass, aluminum, and paper (Chick, 1992; Fonseca-Santos et al., 2015). Clean beauty products have the same characteristics and functions as regular products; however, they cause less environmental damage over the course of their life cycle, and they have characteristics that reduce their environmental impact, such as biodegradable packaging (Ottman, 1993; Fonseca-Santos et al., 2015). The product with a "green" characteristic may be regarded as a separate product.

The phrase "eco-friendly" refers to concerns about the manufacturing process, the life cycle, and other variables such as the use of clean technology, the rational use of natural resources, product certifications, and biodegradable packaging (Blair, 1992; Fonseca-Santos et al., 2015).

As of right now, the industry as a whole accepts that "clean" goods are those that use synthetic materials that have been approved as safe for both the environment and humans, but also give priority to natural components. Put differently, "clean" does not always mean "chemical-free," which sets it apart from goods that make the claim to be "natural." Clean does not always equate to natural; clean can be natural as well; it just lacks contentious man-made ingredients like formaldehyde-releasing chemicals and parabens (ElBoghady, 2020).

While "clean beauty" has been bandied about a lot in the last few years, it's important to take a historical view of the expression to see how and where it originated.

Long before the specific term was used, numerous concerns had emerged in the past. For example, in the 1970s, the use of aluminum in certain deodorants, and in the 2000s, when concerns arose about parabens mimicking estrogen hormones. Although few studies have been carried out on these ingredients, and consumers have little evidence that they are dangerous, suspicions remain and consumer habits have changed to such an extent that cosmetics companies have had to start producing products labeled "aluminum-free" or "paraben-free" (Gonçalves, 2023).

In the 1970s, the term first appeared in the 1970s with CoverGirl's "Clean Make-up" ad, which referred to the fresh-faced, makeup-free image. In the same decade, a number of cosmetics brands began to develop, inspired by this growing trend. The Marta Gonçalves' research paper "The Evolution of "Clean Beauty - Exploring the Past, Present, and Future" identifies numerous clean beauty businesses that were pioneers in the creation of this movement. Aveda and Origins pioneered the path for other firms that promised to offer healthy and environmentally friendly beauty products in 1978 and 1990, respectively. Fast forward to the 2000s, and the term gained fresh meaning with the introduction of skin-care brands like the British brand Ren — the Swedish word for clean. Ren was inspired by the co-founder's wife, who experienced skin irritation from conventional cosmetics while

pregnant and despised all-natural options due to their unpleasant texture and poor efficacy. According to Ren's CEO, Arnaud Meyselle, the range was designed to be "free of harmful ingredients" (ElBoghdady, 2020). The clean beauty boom began in 2010 with the launch of the Tata Harper Skincare brand, which is today regarded as the pioneer of the "clean beauty" trend. Harper wasn't pleased with many of the cosmetic products on the market, which was one of the reasons she founded her own company (Salle, 2022). She desired very effective treatments that were devoid of the synthetic chemicals and poisons that she had been using on her face for years. Tata Harper Skincare emerged at a period when many customers were unfamiliar with the concept of clean beauty, and the business faced some initial problems. When it first began developing its goods, it had to learn as it went while also addressing long-held industry prejudices about the efficacy of completely natural treatments. "We addressed the misinformation through education as well as our dedication to transparency and this is how we were able to build a wonderful following of avid supporters who truly value the effort we put into creating each and every one of our products," Harper said (Salle, 2022).

The general public has begun to learn about clean beauty as a result of the increased emphasis on creating brands with natural products that are safe for the environment and human health. Thanks to social networks, even more so: "The biggest reason behind this evolution is mass reach via a social platform, every other brand whether selling chemical or non-chemical products reaching customers through social media. Even on the OTT platform, many documentaries are stating the harmful effects of chemical-based cosmetics." (S. Acharya et al., 2021). In fact, a lot of productions on the risks associated with chemicals found in cosmetics have been published in recent years. A 2015 documentary titled "Stink" explores the health effects of chemicals used in cosmetic items. 2018 "Cover-Up" detailing the negative effects and the use of chemicals in cosmetics companies that are outlawed in Europe. The 2019 documentary "The Dark Secret Behind Your Favorite Makeup Products" explores the practice of businesses concealing their product lines.

Since 2020 and the COVID-19 viral pandemic, most businesses have prioritized sustainability and are paying ever-closer attention to the chemicals that go into making their beauty goods. Greener cosmetics options that safeguard customers' health and the environment are being promoted by several beauty blogs and influencers, as social networks continue to see growth. The proliferation of social media-marketing has made it easier for

customers to obtain information, regardless of its accuracy, which has increased awareness of trend diffusion. The younger generations, in particular, are growing up in a society where there is a strong push for consumers to adopt more sustainable lifestyles and to live healthier, greener lives. This is a shift in thinking that is evident in the practices of the beauty business (Gonçalves, 2023). As a result, customers are seeking goods that don't hurt their skin or the environment and are growing more conscious of their health and wellness. This is why the way that products function environmentally and how raw materials are manufactured are becoming important factors for businesses (S. Acharya et al., 2021).

As we saw in the previous section, the last few years have been critical in the growth of clean beauty, and customers are becoming more interested in it, particularly since 2020. To fulfill rising market demand, businesses must adapt their offerings to market dynamics and changing customer preferences.

The shift in consumer beliefs and objectives in recent years has pushed health and environmental consciousness to the forefront. On one hand, consumers became more health-conscious and began to question the safety of the ingredients in beauty products, which increased the importance of ingredient transparency in labeling, allowing customers to make more educated decisions about what they put on their skin. On the other hand, as consumers became more conscious of environmental concerns, they began to examine the environmental effect of beauty products, as well as the use of animal experimentation in the beauty business, which became a serious ethical concern for them. Regulatory organizations in many nations began scrutinizing certain components in beauty products. As customers became more aware of possible health dangers, they sought safer formulas for the products they buy. (Gui et al., 2023).

Clara Santoro explored the clean beauty movement and consumers' consciousness in 2022 and states about the COVID-19 pandemic: "Instead of buying make-up, people started investing more in skincare products, but in a slightly different way than before. A "less is more" approach is now predominant in skincare in terms of the number of products used and the steps to be included in beauty routines, with the result of a more minimal approach based on quality over quantity." Consumers are seeking products that can improve their skin's health and address difficulties caused by sun exposure, mask usage, and pollution. Many cosmetics

are now integrated with skincare ingredients, resulting in hybrid products that provide a non-makeup makeup appearance while also caring for your skin. Probiotics and fermented substances are now also used in new products to preserve the skin barrier.

Consumers are changing their shopping habits as they are becoming more mindful of natural and environmentally-friendly products (Thurmer et al., 2022; Nielsen, 2019); today they aim to maintain a "green" skincare routine, this is called conscious consumerism. They become increasingly concerned with health and well-being in the items they use and are paying more attention to how a product is manufactured rather than what it is. Nowadays, customers are even willing to pay extra for sustainable beauty companies because they believe sustainability is an individual responsibility. This trend is making companies increasingly concerned about what drives customer purchasing decisions in terms of sustainability (The Times of India, 2022). Indeed, companies throughout the world are embracing the sustainability movement and implementing green strategies to reduce their emissions and product waste. The recent pandemic has increased consumers' societal expectations of firms' activities, and now, more than ever, people want to invest in brands that actively address societal and environmental concerns that are important to them. With trust playing such an important role in customer purchasing choices, businesses must adapt to these new dynamics in order to gain a competitive edge and keep customers (S. Acharya et al., 2021). In our case, skincare manufacturers must fulfill ever-changing conceptions of clean ingredients, produce diverse and inclusive products, and maintain authenticity (The Times of India, 2022). The challenge in the cosmetics industry is to eliminate toxic chemicals that harm human health and to begin working on transparent labeling by excluding the umbrella term "fragrance," which can contain a variety of harmful, unregulated chemicals and misleading labels with words like "natural," "organic," and "eco" (McDonald et al., 2022).

As a result, established makeup corporations are introducing clean versions of classic products and purchasing smaller organic brands in the cosmetics sector. According to a NielsenIQ research from 2021, half of all PCPs sold in the United States are now paraben-free, while additional products devoid of sulfates and phthalates are experiencing significant increase. NielsenIQ defines clean goods as those that are devoid of parabens, sulfates, phthalates, artificial scents and colors, as well as other 600 components. They have sold over \$400 million and are growing faster than the whole beauty category. A classic

example is Kiehl's Ultra Facial Cream, a bestseller that was reformulated without parabens, resulting in a \$5 million increase in sales (Santoro, 2022).

Furthermore, sustainable practices include the use of renewable resources, sustainable raw materials, and ethically obtained products, which provide ethical working conditions while simultaneously lowering the environmental effect of corporate operations (Santoro, 2022). Naturally, clean customers are interested in minimizing waste and plastic use; so, corporations have begun to experiment with innovative packaging that may suit these needs (Santoro, 2022). Refillable packaging options, such as glass and biodegradable containers, are becoming increasingly popular. NIVEA launched some years ago their new Wonderbar, a solid face cleanser in the shape of a bar made from 99% natural components (Santoro, 2022).

Sales of beauty and personal care products with environmental advantages, such as vegan, cruelty-free, reusable packaging, and plastic-free, are increasing faster than sales of products with only clean components. Consumers prioritize natural ingredients (40.2%), environmental responsibility (17.6%), and reusable/recyclable packaging (7.9% and 15.8%, respectively) when purchasing beauty and personal care products. Younger customers are more interested in sustainable products, with Gen Z consumers 1.3 times more likely to try environmentally friendly items (Lee, 2021). Indeed, the factors driving the present boom of "clean beauty" are undoubtedly Millennials and Generation Z. Social media platforms like Instagram and Tik Tok provide constant access to information about products, leading to increased interest in the beauty industry (Gonçalves, 2023).

In summary, the desire from consumers for safer, more transparent, and ecologically friendly goods has led to a revolution in the skincare and cosmetics sector with the notion of clean beauty. Clean beauty products prioritize natural ingredients, ethical sourcing, and eco-friendly packaging, with an emphasis on safety, transparency, and sustainability. This trend has a long history and developed in reaction to shifting consumer perceptions and market conditions. The COVID-19 epidemic hastened the market for clean cosmetic products, indicating a general trend toward more ecologically and health-conscious living. In order to gain confidence and loyalty in a cutthroat industry, clean beauty firms need to put sustainability and transparency first. Customers are becoming more conscientious about their purchases.

2.2 Foundational concepts of clean beauty branding strategies

Branding is a strategy for creating a long-term, differentiating advantage by capitalizing on human nature. The primary goal of branding is to improve the product's image among customers (Cleary, 1981; Singh, 2012). "Branding strategy for a firm reflects the number and nature of common and distinctive brand elements applied to the different products sold by the firm" (Keller, 2003, as cited in Singh, 2012). In other words, a branding strategy entails determining which brand names, logos, symbols, and so on should be applied to which products, as well as the nature of new and existing brand elements applied to the new products so that they can be uniquely and purposefully differentiated in the minds of consumers. Businesses must continually adapt their value offer in order to remain relevant in the face of ever-changing consumer expectations. Branding is the process of creating a unique name for products and services in the minds of consumers. Its goal is to establish a differentiated position in a market by communicating a consistent theme through all elements of the brand (such as its name, logo, and slogan), thereby gaining and retaining customer loyalty (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010 in Bempong, 2017). Another definition of branding is given in "Is it all for show?: Environmental brand identification on skin care and cosmetic websites": the framing of a brand or product's identity composed of visual and verbal attributes that embody that entity. It is the symbolic space that acts as an identifier in the consumer's mind for a certain brand, a mental representation of a concept or perspective of who a brand is and what they stand for.

Branding methods have been extensively studied in the marketing literature. According to research, branding has a strategic function by building connections and producing value for partners (Aaker, 1994 in Gabrielsson, 2005). According to Robinson, branding delivers practical benefits as well as extra qualities that some customers are willing to pay for. It directs the integration of the marketing mix and serves as an anchor for marketing techniques and strategy in a volatile environment. Companies use a variety of branding techniques to maintain their brands (Rao et al., 2004; Singh, 2012). Branding decisions have grown in importance in recent decades because they have a significant impact on a company's performance; however, they continue to be one of the most difficult challenges for marketers due to the long-term consequences and the fact that the resources involved are often enormous (Todor, 2014). Indeed, a number of universities have conducted official research into the relationship between branding strategy and financial performance of

the organization. Kerin and Sethuraman researched various companies on the list of the most valuable corporations and discovered a favorable relationship between branding tactics and financial values. Using standardized market values and dependent variables, they showed that brand strength, as determined by an assessment program, accounts for 25% of changes in a company's market value.

Throughout the 2000s till now, advertisers and marketers have constructed a green image employing compelling images of the natural world for environmental brand identification (Atkinson and Kim 2015; Biloslavo and Trnavčević 2009; Hansen 2015). This strategy is vital for clean beauty firms looking to establish a wellness brand identity by using natural ingredients that help both the environment and their consumers' skin.

Clean beauty businesses use branding tactics to build a distinct identity, differentiating themselves from rivals and shaping their market positioning. Because of the space accessible on the web, branding has been more important for influencing decision-making in recent years than conventional media (Da Silva and Alwi 2008; Ibeh, Luo, and Dinnie 2005; Kim, Eng, and Jade 2014; Müller et al. 2008). This allows marketers to positively regulate messaging and visibility while providing more detailed information on product components and advantages than other kinds of promotion. This is the outcome of technical innovations and growing market trends that have shifted the power balance from brands to customers, who extract information and influence buying decisions (Argyriou et al. 2006; Da Silva and Alwi 2008; Kim, Eng, and Jade 2014).

For example, the brand Westman Atelier is a luxury beauty brand founded by makeup artist Gucci Westman, known for its high-performance makeup products with an emphasis on natural and organic ingredients. The brand often communicates on its social media about their commitment to cruelty-free practices, also places a strong emphasis on educating consumers about its formulations, ensuring they feel empowered to make informed choices and transparent about the ingredients it uses, providing customers with the assurance that they can feel good about what they're applying to their skin (Desiree Design Studio, 2023). These types of communication can be seen as part of the branding strategies of Westman Atelier that enhance a transparent and committed brand to the audience.

Rose Inc., conceived by model and entrepreneur Rosie Huntington-Whiteley, is a leading lifestyle brand championing the clean beauty movement. Beyond skincare, the brand

advocates a holistic approach to beauty and wellness notably on social media as Instagram. Rose Inc.'s branding as a lifestyle brand that advocates for clean beauty shows its commitment to fostering a holistic approach to beauty and wellbeing. By emphasizing self-care, natural ingredients, and general skin health, the brand urges customers to reimagine their beauty regimens as moments of self-love and sustenance, positioning itself as a true well-being leader (Desiree Design Studio, 2023)

One of the fundamental elements of clean beauty branding is transparency, which leads to customer trust. The companies want to build and maintain great consumer trust with their target audience through honesty, transparency, and consistency. Indeed, trust among consumers in the clean beauty market is a significant aspect for brands. Clara Santoro examined the importance of building trust for companies (2022) and stated: "Today, more than ever, people want to invest in brands that actively take action in addressing societal and environmental issues they care about. With trust as a key factor influencing customers' buying decisions, brands have no choice but to adapt to these new dynamics to gain a competitive advantage and retain their consumers". In fact, according to the literature, trust is at the heart of the customer-brand connection and a necessary requirement for long-term loyalty. Consumers define trust as the assurance that a brand will stay effective and honest in its promises while also being respectful of its consumers and creating no negative side effects (Hess et al. (2011) in Claudon et al. (2021), Papista and Dimitriadis (2012) in Claudon et al. (2021)). "A positive and transparent communication could now be the most effective way to build green trust, customer loyalty and meet customers' new expectations" (Claudon et al. 2021). The notion of open and honest communication to prevent a bad impression from customers aligns with the perspective put forth by Luchs et al. (2010), who contend that a product's potential negative perception can be diminished and credibility in green claims increased through the skillful use of explicit cues about the product's strengths (Claudon et al. 2021). Previous studies have shown the influence of restricted information availability and ignorance on environmentally conscious purchasing practices (Alves et al., 2013 in Claudon et al. 2021). In 2020, Mintel stated that "Brands that demonstrate their dependability, transparency and willingness to take action to ensure product safety will be rewarded by consumers." This indicates that transparency is crucial (Global Cosmetic Industry, 2023). Additionally, brands have success demystifying particular clean claims by using TikTok and Instagram to educate consumers about ingredients and products (Global Cosmetic Industry, 2023). According to Kate Shepherd (2020), social media has rapidly emerged as a vital

resource for advice and assistance sharing. Through their increased availability, brands and beauty gurus have been able to win over customers and followers' trust. Aveda and Fenty Beauty have showcased the power of social media in building connections with customers and fostering trust. Aveda's instructional videos have seen a remarkable 200 percent surge in views, demonstrating the appetite for professional DIY assistance and virtual connections. Meanwhile, Fenty Beauty's strategic presence on TikTok, utilizing influencers to share makeup lessons, has garnered immense traction with 86.2 million views on the #fentybeautyhouse hashtag alone. These examples underscore how social media serves as a vital platform for brands to engage with their audience, provide valuable content, and ultimately strengthen customer relationships.

The customer's need to trust the brand they purchase is linked to their desire for openness about the items they consume. Indeed, if a company is transparent and open about the components they use or how they make their products, customer trust will undoubtedly grow. As stated by Suksham Goyal (2023), transparency within the cosmetics industry is more than a trend—it's a fundamental shift driven by consumer demand. Surprisingly, 72% of buyers expect brands to be forthright about their products and ingredients. Empty assurances and appealing packaging are no longer sufficient; consumers seek clarity regarding the contents of the products they purchase. When consumers are provided with comprehensive details about a product's sourcing, manufacturing process, and environmental footprint, they are empowered to make purchases aligned with their values. An essential aspect of this expectation is the call for transparency regarding cosmetic ingredients. Beauty enthusiasts no longer settle for obscure lists of chemicals on their favorite cream tubes; instead, they insist on understanding how these ingredients impact both the environment and their well-being. (Goyal, 2023). According to the "Consumer Attitudes Towards Clean Beauty" survey conducted by Clean Hub, 63% of consumers consider clean beauty 'extremely or very important' when purchasing cosmetics. Additionally, a significant majority of shoppers consider a beauty brand's environmental and social impact in their buying decisions. Another survey indicated that the clean beauty label most women (62%) prioritize is cruelty-free, followed by hypoallergenic (36%). However, 61% of women expressed concern that brands label products as clean without providing sufficient information (Culliney, 2020).

Transparent labeling is crucial for customers, as access to clear and reliable information directly influences purchasing decisions (Alves et al. 2013 in Claudon et al.

2021). In this regard, consumer trust and a lack of information serve as significant barriers to purchasing green products (Cervellon et al. 2010 Claudon et al. 2021). Brands may convey transparency, for example, by labeling their products. In a world where greenwashing is becoming more and more significant, consumers find that labels that are clear and informative—such as ingredient lists and certifications—are much more persuasive. However, not all beauty brands uphold honesty in their marketing claims. Some attempt to attract conscious consumers by incorporating terms related to sustainability and clean beauty on their labels (Santoro, 2022). Many beauty products flaunt labels like "vegan" or "eco-friendly" to attract conscious consumers, but these terms lack clear regulation. The absence of standardized green labels also exacerbates the lack of knowledge surrounding eco-friendly products. Manufacturers, suppliers, and advertisers often establish their own definitions of "green" or "natural," adding to consumer confusion (Cervellon et al., 2011 in Claudon et al., 2021). The multitude of national, European, and third-party labels, along with manufacturers' claims, further complicates matters, leading to information overload and diminishing consumer interest (Langer et al., 2008 and Verbeke and Ward, 2004 in Claudon et al., 2021). Indeed, Clara Santoro stated in 2022 that "More than half of respondents were not able to name at least one certification standard". This confusion not only erodes trust in the marketplace but also contributes to skepticism towards green claims (Chen, 2010 in Claudon et al., 2021). Exaggerated marketing tactics contribute to mistrust in green claims, as consumers perceive labeling products as "green" as merely a marketing strategy (Lyon and Maxwell, 2011 in Claudon et al., 2021). Despite this, only one-third of consumers claim to trust labels, with many expressing skepticism or confusion (Claudon et al., 2021). Overall, the prevalence of confusion and lack of education regarding labels and green certifications undermines trust in labeled products.

Clean beauty companies are using ingredient storytelling to engage with customers more deeply in the competitive beauty market of today. These businesses are cultivating trust and loyalty among their audience by highlighting transparency, authenticity, and the advantages of natural ingredients. Clean beauty businesses are not simply selling products; they are telling a story of purity, sustainability, and efficacy that appeals to socially aware consumers looking for healthier options. They accomplish this through aesthetically appealing narratives, instructional material, and strategic alliances. Ingredient storytelling is a drive toward greener, more sustainable cosmetic options, not merely a branding tactic.

Storytelling in marketing is the use of tales to convey a brand's message and connect with customers. It is an effective strategy for helping companies make an emotional connection with their target audience, generate trust, and differentiate themselves from competition (The Ingenium Space, 2023).

According to Padgett & Allen (1997) in Kang et al. (2020), storytelling is seen to be a successful advertising strategy for spreading messages and encouraging communication. In the words of Adaval and Wyer (1998), a narrative form of a message is easier to transmit than an informative one, because potential consumers visualize "the sequence of events" in which a product is utilized rather than calculating the utility of the product. Similar to a fictional tale, storytelling advertising is created using a variety of storylines that provide a "meaning or direction" (Brooks, 1992 in Kang et al. 2020).

Enhancing brand value requires emotional engagement through gripping stories (Mills and Robson, 2019 in Hong et al., 2021). Consumer participation in brand storytelling makes brand material more tangible, helps create cognitive memories, promotes positive brand attitudes, and evokes positive feelings (Denning, 2006 in Hong et al., 2021). Consumers who often exchange stories are better able to comprehend one another and compare their experiences (Delgadillo and Escalas, 2004 in Hong et al., 2021).

Customers that have unique consuming experiences are more likely to share brand-related tales, which strengthens their relationship with the brand. Self-generated narratives are seen by consumers as less prejudiced, which increases brand recognition and favorability (Lin et al., 2011; Simon et al., 1970 in Hong et al., 2021). Advertisers use strategies to elicit favorable emotional reactions while satisfying customers' cognitive demands because they understand the influence of emotion on consumers' decision-making (Taylor, 1999 in Kang et al., 2020).

Customers' brand experience, which is made up of all their thoughts, feelings, and behavioral reactions to a brand, is influenced by compelling and well-crafted brand stories (Brakus et al., 2009 in Hong et al. 2021). By leaving a favorable impression on consumers' memories, brand managers want to establish a strong brand through the deployment of compelling brand stories (Srivastava et al., 1998; Gensler et al., 2013 in Hong et al. 2021).

Storytelling may help your brand stand out in a crowded marketplace. By providing unique tales that set your company apart from the competition, you can attract potential

clients' attention and leave a lasting impression (The Ingenium Space, 2023). Lush is a cosmetics company noted for producing natural and ethical goods. Lush's marketing approach is mainly based on narrative, with the company emphasizing the tales behind its products and ingredients. For example, Lush's "Charity Pot" body lotion contains fair-trade cocoa butter sourced from the Peace Community in Colombia. By telling the tale of the Peace Community and its hardships, Lush portrays itself as a socially conscious brand while also creating an emotional connection with its audience (The Ingenium Space, 2023).

To conclude, the fundamental principles of clean beauty branding strategies emphasize the significance of developing a unique brand identity, cultivating customer confidence, and capturing attention via ingredient storytelling. Branding is a strategic technique that emphasizes consistency and distinctiveness across numerous brand features to help differentiate items in the eyes of customers. Customers increasingly look on companies for honesty and openness, therefore transparency is essential to establishing trust. Brands may improve their reputation in the market and solve customer issues by communicating clearly and providing information. By weaving tales of purity, sustainability, and efficacy, ingredient storytelling enhances customer engagement even further and speaks to socially conscious consumers looking for better options. Brands may stand out in a crowded market, create emotional connections with consumers, and set themselves apart by utilizing narrative tactics. Generally speaking, clean beauty firms follow these fundamental ideas as they navigate the intricacies of customer preferences and market dynamics, working towards a future in the beauty sector that is more transparent, reliable, and sustainable.

2.3 Strategic elements of clean beauty branding

Clean beauty brands use a variety of strategies to convey purity and honesty through their visual language. Through their branding, they communicate a dedication to using healthy ingredients along with a deeper attitude of wellness, environmental responsibility, and conscious living. This may be achieved by using their general web marketing methods, as well as using eco-friendly packaging materials, and using colors that complement the brand's minimalist aesthetic and appeal to environmentally conscious consumers. By dissecting these fundamental components, this chapter aims to provide deeper understanding of the intricate interplay of design, sustainability, and consumer psychology within the framework of clean beauty.

One of the most essential aspects of branding for clean beauty products is the development of a minimalist, natural identity, which is communicated through a variety of branding activities, including social media, websites, physical places of sale, and, more broadly, the discourse of founders and ambassadors. In “The Aesthetic Turn in Green Marketing: Environmental Consumer Ethics of Natural Personal Care Products” (2004), the author analyzed the promotional materials of three companies that advertise their environmental consciousness: Burt's Bees, Tom's of Maine, and The Body Shop. According to the author, these companies use two distinct strategies to market their products: first, they enhance aesthetic impressions by emphasizing the value of their natural products, thus combining consumerism with environmental awareness. This article explores the wider effects of a consumer-driven green aesthetic on environmental awareness, as well as the ethical issues surrounding the promotion of natural personal care in eco-marketing strategies: “As discussed earlier, personal products generally promise self-improvement, and in this way, these products perform. They enhance the health and appearance of the consumer as well as the well-being of the environment”. This research paper analyzes the aesthetics of these three brands in the following part. For example, in the case of The Body Shop: “The Body Shop urges visitors to its website to “feel good, naturally” (Body Shop 2003)” (Todd, 2004). The idea combines ethics and aesthetics by associating natural integrity with human attractiveness, and it also ties natural components with efficacy. The Body Shop redefines beauty through its cosmetics range, which uses conventional advertising techniques. Their performance claims highlight a comprehensive approach and broaden the cosmetics industry's definition of beauty. The Body Shop represents the expanding trend of green consumerism by showcasing the beauty of nature through eco-marketing. Furthermore, the brand blends traditional cosmetic femininity with ideas of natural beauty, including self-esteem into its beauty product advertisements (Todd, 2004).

On the other hand, some studies have been conducted on the use of eco-friendly packaging materials, sustainable design principles, and color psychology to affect customer perceptions of naturalness and trustworthiness. The impact of green packaging techniques in increasing customer preference is discussed in the study article “Innovation in eco-packaging in private labels” (Jiménez-Guerrero et al., 2015; Wandosell et al., 2021). Maziriri's 2020 study found that green packaging and advertising improve a company's competitive edge and commercial success. Companies must promote their efforts in sustainable packaging through marketing strategies that leverage information and communication technology (Juwaheer et

al., 2012; Maziriri, 2020). As the market becomes more competitive, environmental claims are being incorporated into the packaging design and manufacturing process. As a result, brands are breaking into major markets by drawing consumer attention to their packaging (Koenig-Lewis, Palmer, Dermody, & Urbye, 2014 in Yang and Zhao, 2019). Customers may identify a company with environmental dedication and care when the package design of the product complies with environmental rules and is ecologically friendly. Furthermore, Chen et al. (2017) have shown that customers may be more likely to trust green packaging aspects when they stand for ease and safety.

Marketers utilize a variety of signals, such as colors, packaging, brand names, and logos, to communicate the status of clean products (Lin and Chang 2012 in Seo and Scammon, 2017). Green has been used extensively in marketing to support environmentally conscious companies or actions (Labrecque et al. 2013; Lin and Chang 2012 in Seo and Scammon, 2017). Whittlesea (1993) asserts that because consumers conceptually associate the hue of a packaging with nature, they are likely to infer that a product is better for the environment when they see a green container. More positive environmental impressions of the brand will result from conceptual fluency in evaluating environmental claims provided with green. Seo and Scammon's 2017 study reveals that green packaging positively influences environmental perceptions when coupled with an environmental claim. However, to optimize the effectiveness of green packaging, marketers representing environmentally superior brands should pair the color green with a clear environmental assertion.

Effective marketing strategies are crucial for positioning a brand in the right market and reaching the intended audience, essential for the brand's survival. In recent years, clean beauty brands have had to strategically position themselves to distinguish from conventional beauty industry practices. Emphasizing transparency, ingredient integrity, and commitment to ethical standards is vital for communicating their unique value proposition.

First, it is important to analyze the differences between the positioning of clean beauty brands and the ones from more conventional brands. The beauty industry has been under criticism in recent years for a number of unethical activities, including making exaggerated claims, using hazardous substances, using child labor, testing on animals, and using excessive packaging (Gould, 2017). For example, even if a lot of customers are aware of the previous use of animal testing, they might not be aware that, unless a product is labeled as cruelty-free, animal testing is still permitted in the US (Kangas, 2017 in Gould, 2017). The fact that other

nations have different rules only serves to exacerbate this problem. Companies must abstain from animal experimentation at every level of the product's development and distribution to be considered fully cruelty-free. Paige Gould also states in “Making a Difference: the Impact of Corporate Ethical Behavior on Consumers in the Beauty Industry” that the safety of product ingredients and the packaging's influence on the environment are two more unethical practices in the industry. Indeed, “there are over 10,000 ingredients which are commonly used in beauty products, and of those only 10% have any safety data” (Devereaux, 2016 in Gould, 2017). For instance, the FDA reports that it has detected traces of lead in lipsticks from companies including L'Oreal, Maybelline, and NARS (Devereaux, 2016 in Gould, 2017). In addition to having toxic components, the majority of items come in bulky packaging made of non-recyclable materials including thick plastics and other materials that fill landfills (Ford, 2007 in Gould, 2017).

Brands have been much more sensitive to their environmental impact these days and have taken significant steps to improve it. A Fast Company article features interviews with some of the pioneers of clean beauty firms, who discuss their aspirations to keep pushing the boundaries of the industry in order to improve the world. First and foremost, numerous companies have concentrated their marketing messaging on the absence of certain components from their formulae, such as phthalates, which are categorized as endocrine disruptors, or allergies like perfumes (Segal, 2022). Glow Recipe, a skin care line, collaborated with Climate Neutral, a charity, in 2022. Asserting that their long-term objective is to become a carbon positive firm, co-founder Christine Chang said: "Through their certification program, we measured our 2021 carbon footprint and put together a plan to offset and reduce our emissions now and in the future". Sharareh Siadat, the founder of TooD Beauty, has always prioritized environmental protection: "From our inception, clean formulas without sustainable packaging meant not 'clean,'" she says (Segal, 2022).

Clean beauty firms do, in fact, set themselves apart through open sourcing, cruelty-free procedures, and a dedication to moral principles. These practices are communicated mainly through green marketing. Ethical green marketing entails balancing product performance with environmental sustainability. Instead of concealing production processes and solely promoting final products, advertisements for natural products celebrate the entire process (Todd, 2004). Customers that care about the environment expect companies to have a strong commitment to and degree of ecological responsibility. Thus, green business

owners need to market their company's environmental ethics in addition to the eco-friendliness of their products (Todd, 2004). Companies convey their commitment to values like community, honesty, and integrity through persuasive methods in advertising and brand image, with the goal of cultivating brand loyalty (Todd, 2004). This consciousness, conveyed through advertisements and products themselves, resonates with consumer values, which are expressed through their purchasing decisions (Sparks and Sheperd, 1992 in Todd, 2004). Consumer mistrust of businesses can be reduced by ethical marketing strategies (Kumar et al., 2016). According to research, women are more likely to have favorable opinions of companies that they believe to be moral (Lämsä et al., 2008 in Kumar et al., 2016). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that brand perception and product knowledge have a big impact on consumers' inclinations to buy cosmetics (Eze, Tan, and Yeo, 2012).

The emergence of social media platforms has significantly altered the ways in which clean beauty firms interact with their customers, disseminate informative materials, and cultivate communities that prioritize sustainability and well-being. With an emphasis on influencer marketing, this section examines how companies use social media. We can understand the complex link between social media and the clean beauty movement and how it influences consumer behavior and industry trends by looking at these strategies.

The study paper "Social media goes green—The impact of social media on green cosmetics purchase motivation and intention" (2020) emphasizes the significance of social media for companies. As the writers point out, Rauniar asserts that since people view social media as reliable and helpful, it has a significant impact on their attitudes, perceptions, and purchase decisions (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). We may even argue that social media messages influence people's propensity to purchase (Li et al., 2012). According to Suprpto et al. (2020), social media commercials' visual impact can also significantly increase customers' propensity to make a purchase.

According to Săplăcan and Márton (2019), social media has a significant impact on consumers' adoption of eco-friendly practices including reducing, reusing, and recycling unnecessary resources. Social media use has a favorable effect on customers' intentions to make green purchases as well as their actual green purchasing behavior, claim Bedard and Tolmie (Bedard and Tolmie, 2018). (Biswas, 2016). Customers are more inclined to trust firms with good environmental corporate social responsibility (CSR) if they have pleasant experiences that are often shared on social media (Kang and Hur, 2012).

Consumers are analyzing product components, origins, production processes, and their effects on the environment and ethics more and more as education levels grow and information becomes more accessible (Sahota, 2013 in Mrso, 2022). Decision-making processes are greatly influenced by accurate product feature knowledge, reliable information, and intentional consumer education (Amberg and Fogarassy, 2019). Because social media platforms are easily accessible and provide a convenient means of contact, they are useful tools for educating customers and spreading information. In order for consumers to get and understand information, which in turn affects their behavior, communication is essential (Hwang & Kim, 2015 in Tajurahim et al., 2020). Social media influences shifts in consumer attitudes, behaviors, and ways of thinking in addition to being a source of information for people, groups, companies, and society. Furthermore, Tajurahim et al. (2020) found a correlation between increased involvement intent in the market and active social media interaction.

Regarding engagement, we can define it by “a customer’s emotional commitment to a brand due to regular encounters with it (Bansal & Chaudhary, 2016), the degree of individual participation in the company’s activities, and the amount of individual motivation towards the brand (Tuti & Sulistia, 2022)”. Increasing client purchase intent on social media is a crucial factor (Gani et al., 2023). In fact, through social media platforms, consumers build emotional connections with a variety of companies, and these connections ultimately result in their engagement with the brand (Bansal & Chaudhary, 2016 in Gani et al., 2023). As a means of staying involved and connected to the companies they choose, individuals are increasingly using Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020 in Gani et al., 2023). According to Forbes in 2018, brands are spending millions of dollars on social media in order to improve consumer involvement, which may be explained by this effect.

In the context of environmental or green marketing, consumer education is very important (Ozanne and Murray, 1991 in Burton, 2002). With a \$100 million annual income, The Body Shop is a prime example of success, having attained this status by thorough education on the provenance of products, production techniques, ingredient transparency, testing protocols, and the advantages of consumption (Burlingham, 1990 in Burton, 2002). With the skillful use of comedy, films, tales, and visual aids, this method gently transfers knowledge without giving the impression that the audience is in a classroom. Even though The Body Shop didn't have a traditional marketing staff and didn't spend money on

advertising until the early 1990s, they succeeded by putting customer education first as a proactive marketing tactic. According to Frankel (1992), consumer education is crucial to clear up uncertainty and deceptive labeling associated with certain green products.

On social media, brands can count on the help of influencer marketing in order to shape consumer perceptions and drive adoption of their products by the consumers.

Finding and choosing digital influencers to use in social media campaigns to sell goods or services is known as influencer marketing (Santiago & Castelo, 2020 in Huss, 2022). Because they are seen as reliable information sources and possess the interpersonal communication abilities to affect others' decisions, these influencers serve as opinion leaders (Carpenter & Sherbino, 2010 in Huss, 2022). Studies reveal that when it comes to product research, over half of American women rely on online evaluations and suggestions from social media influencers (Tran et al., 2022 in Tran et al., 2022). Consumers frequently view online sharing of ideas, experiences, and views as more trustworthy than corporate marketing messages, a phenomena known as Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) (Santiago & Castelo, 2020 in Huss, 2022).

In summary, the clean beauty sector appeals to customers who are interested in sustainability and well-being by fusing beautiful design with ideals of purity and environmental awareness. Brands seek to inspire authenticity and trust by utilizing color psychology, eco-friendly packaging, and ethical marketing strategies. They stand apart from traditional beauty products thanks to their emphasis on transparency, ingredient purity, and ethical standards, which appeals to consumers who are ethical. With influencer endorsements influencing customer views, social media is essential for educating consumers and encouraging community involvement. This confluence of social media, positioning, and design highlights the fashion industry's move toward sustainability and authenticity and points the way towards a more morally conscious future for the beauty business.

Chapter 3 - Consumer perception in clean beauty

3.1 Consumer perception

Over the past few years, there has been a notable growth in customer demand for natural and safe products. According to Statista, the clean beauty industry's worldwide market share value is expected to rise to USD 15.3 billion in 2028 compared to 6 billion in

2021. In the meanwhile, it is predicted that the average annual growth rate would be 12% between 2023 and 2028 (Haryono and Lestari, 2024). Concerns about health and the environment, as well as social media impact and shifting cultural trends that affected consumers' lifestyles, were the primary drivers of this desire. To begin with, discussing the rising need for safer, more natural cosmetics would be incomplete without addressing the COVID-19 epidemic, which completely changed the way people shop and behave. In fact, demand for safe and preventive beauty products increased beginning in the summer of 2020. This boost helped natural beauty products since people were looking for new methods to improve their health due to the pandemic's anxiety and worry (Profound, 2021). Concerns over the dangerous chemicals included in many conventional beauty products have led to an increase in the popularity of "clean" beauty". These substances have the potential to result in a broad variety of health issues, from minor skin irritations to more significant long-term health impacts (Haryono and Lestari, 2024). A worthy step toward a more sustainable and health-conscious approach to personal care is the rise of clean beauty. For this reason, the need for clean beauty products is growing; "consumers can enjoy effective beauty products without compromising their health by choosing clean beauty brands" (Haryono and Lestari, 2024).

Naturally, the rising concern for the environment and our planet is another factor contributing to the growth of clean beauty. The market for natural and safe ingredients is primarily driven by customer demand for goods that are seen to be healthier, more ecologically friendly, and organic. Consumers are becoming more picky about the contents in personal care products looking for goods with certified organic components, natural extracts, and ethical sourcing (Bergfeld, 2005). Haryono and Lestari (2024) wrote about "one trend that is increasingly prominent is the tendency to shift from conventional beauty (skin care) products to clean beauty cosmetic products that are more environmentally friendly and free from animal testing (cruelty free)". There is a growing trend of millennials (Gen Y) and post-millennials (Gen Z) working to promote environmental sustainability. As per a Nielsen analysis from 2021, "Sustainable Shoppers: Buy the Change They Wish to See in the World," 81% of consumers anticipate that businesses will make a positive impact on the environment. Younger generations are especially aware of this with 41% of customers indicating a preference for natural and organic components and over 73% of them eager to switch to more sustainable goods. According to Kollmuss et al. (2002), environmental knowledge is essentially any information that promotes community engagement in sustainable behavior

and attitudes toward the environment. According to an earlier study by A.T. Haryono (2021), environmental knowledge has a favorable and considerable impact on pro-environmental purchasing behavior, also known as sustainable consumption behavior. Stated differently, consumers with more environmental awareness are more inclined to purchase clean beauty products, which has led to an increase in the demand for safe and natural ingredients in skincare products.

The extreme demand for clean beauty products that has been present in the market for the past few years is also influenced by cultural and lifestyle trends. According to Haryono and Lestari (2024), customers who value formulations that are chemical-free, ethically created, and ecologically friendly tend to select clean beauty products. Increased usage and compliance to consumption rules contribute to consumer interest in these products. Increased knowledge of components and moral principles has a favorable impact on consumer choices and satisfaction levels. Key factors influencing customer decisions include product preferences, perceptions of sustainability, ethical beliefs, perceived dangers, and ingredient understanding. These customers now lead lifestyles that are more conscious of their personal health and the environment.

Advocacy to use clean, eco-friendly cosmetic products is especially important on social media and online. In fact, according to Tran et al. (2022), about half of American women would look up things online before choosing, using suggestions from social media influencers and online review ratings as their main sources.

Lack of established standards is the primary reason why customers rely so much on internet recommendations and influencers before making a personal care product purchase. As stated by Tran et al. (2022), "the general public perceives that "natural" products are sourced from ingredients found in nature, whereas "clean" products are typically free of ingredients deemed harmful." Actually, terms like "natural" and "clean" are not well defined. The absence of governmental supervision over these criteria enables the beauty industry and influencers to define clean and natural beauty, sometimes relying on consumer views of what is considered "clean" rather than scientific evidence. For example, strong warnings from celebrities like Gwyneth Paltrow, who asks readers of her site Goop, "Do you want antifreeze (propylene glycol) in your moisturizer? Customers are increasingly desperate for safe, nontoxic skin care products, yet statements like "We're going to guess no" have incited anxiety in them.

Traditional beauty products have long been contentious and generally viewed as unhealthy because the majority of them included "parabens, phthalates, chemical sunscreens, and formaldehyde" (Faber, 2020 in Gui et. al, 2023). As Khan and Alam stated in 2019, "The cosmetic products may present health risks and recurrent adverse effects are attributed to the toxic substances commonly found in their formulations". In fact, prior to the 1960s, cosmetics had a generally solid safety record, although there were several outliers. Lead, mercury, and cadmium oxides, for example, were hazardous heavy metals that were once included in cosmetics pigments. Thallium-containing depilatory products were responsible for severe and occasionally fatal intoxications in the 1930s (Malkey and Oehme, 1993 in Nohynek et. al, 2010). While zirconium-containing deodorants in the 1950s and 1960s caused long-lasting allergic skin reactions in consumers in Europe and the US, halogenated salicylanilide-containing cosmetics in 1958/1959 caused a widespread epidemic of photo-allergic reactions (Horio, 1976 in Nohynek et. al, 2010).

Since then, consumers' perceptions of safety about the contents in the personal care products they use on a daily basis have grown increasingly important, and ingredient transparency has been essential when making cosmetics purchases: "For instance, consumers who are highly concerned with health and safety may place a high evaluation on the product ingredients before making any consumption as compared to those with low health consciousness" (Doval et. al, 2013 in Ahmad and Omar, 2018). Accordingly, the external cue impact of brand loyalty is comparatively weaker, and consumers' loyalty and trust to well-known and large brands of cosmetics in terms of safety have decreased over time. The research paper of Choi and Lee written in 2019 alludes to apps for smartphones are starting to surface as a way to ease these customer concerns. For instance, "Hwahae" and "Glowpick" show the danger ratings of cosmetic components and highlight those that can be poisonous or irritating to the skin, are typical examples. These applications provide a complete component list for each product along with a skin-harmingness indicator on a one to ten scale. With the aid of these applications, users may learn how to understand strange chemical components, grow more astute, and decide to depend less on subjective judgments (Choi and Lee, 2019). In order to obtain cosmetic safety information—information that allows customers to verify the stability of the product they are trying to purchase or the product they are using (So et al., 2020)—these apps can be very helpful in checking products of brands that are opaque about their ingredients or that consumers don't trust.

Pan (2014 in Shamburger, 2021) defines product transparency as the complete disclosure of a product's ingredients, attributes, and production process. Pan's research investigated the impact of product transparency on consumer loyalty towards cosmetics brands. Their findings suggest that greater transparency in cosmetic products led to increased trust in the brand among participants. As trust in the brand strengthened, so did consumer loyalty. The strong correlation between product transparency, brand trust, and brand loyalty underscores the significant influence of transparency on consumer behavior. Consequently, consumers are more inclined to repurchase products from transparent brands and advocate for them (Pan 2014 in Shamburger, 2021). Customers do, in fact, want beauty companies to be more open about the ingredients in their products and how they do business (Shamburger, 2021). Transparency was thrust into the marketing sphere by social media and digital distribution, making previously hidden information visible to customers (Brown 2019 in Shamburger, 2021). Now more than before, a business has to be transparent in order to win over stakeholders' trust. Consumers and stakeholders who collaborate with marketers to develop their marketing strategies now possess more influence than marketers who once persuaded and entice customers to purchase things, Leitch (2017) as cited in Shamburger (2021). Customers cherish an organization's human side and its narrative more than its technical features. As Berlin (2019) noted, "people buy from people, not companies," transparent storytelling in marketing builds customer trust and increases the possibility that a consumer would make a purchase from the company (Berlin 2019; Congdon 2018 in Shamburger, 2021).

Transparency in operations depends on building and sustaining confidence with the public, stakeholders, and the organization (Leitch, 2017 in Shamburger, 2021). To develop trust, businesses should prioritize integrity and use an open, people-based marketing strategy (Claytor, 2016 in Shamburger, 2021). According to research from Label Insight, which Karapetian published, customers place a high value on companies' openness. According to the report, 94% of customers are more inclined to stick with totally transparent brands, and 56% of them are likely to do so for the rest of their lives. Additionally, 73% of respondents indicated they would be prepared to pay a higher price for a transparent product, and 39% of customers said they would move to a company that offered greater openness (Karapetian, 2016 in Shamburger, 2021). Additionally, 73% of customers said they would be more prepared to pay more for a clear product. (Shamburger, 2021; Karapetian, 2016).

An illustration of a brand that has effectively garnered and sustained consumer trust and loyalty is Aveda, which has adopted a slogan emphasizing product safety in relation to health concerns. The slogan, as highlighted by Muise and Desmarais (2010 in Ahmad and Omar, 2018), prompts consumers to contemplate their choices: “Would you moisturize with petroleum? What you put on your body should be as healthy and natural as what you’d put into it.” This message underscores the significance of considering the topical application of products with the same care as one would with ingestible items. Natural beauty products, characterized by the exclusion of harmful chemical ingredients such as sodium laureth sulfate, diethanolamine, preservatives derived from formaldehyde, mineral oil, and other unsustainable elements known to contribute to dermatitis and cancer (Norudin et al., 2010 in Ahmad and Omar, 2018), are associated with consumer health consciousness. As a result, it is argued that consumer attitudes toward purchasing organic skin/hair care products are positively influenced.

To summarize, the increased demand for clean beauty products reflects a significant shift in consumer priorities toward health, sustainability, and transparency. This trend, fueled by the COVID-19 epidemic and reinforced by social media, represents a rising awareness of the importance of personal care products on both individual well-being and environmental sustainability. Millennials and Generation Z, in particular, value ethical consumerism, fueling the need for natural, safe, and ethically made cosmetics. Transparency emerges as an important aspect in establishing customer confidence, with companies such as Aveda providing a strong example by stressing product safety and integrity. As consumers become more demanding about materials and manufacturing processes, firms must prioritize openness to build long-term customer relationships. In essence, the clean beauty movement represents a wider shift toward conscious consumerism, in which ethical and environmental considerations influence purchase decisions. Brands that embrace openness and identify with customer values will prosper in this changing world.

3.2 Consumer purchasing behavior

To effectively engage with consumers and customize their marketing efforts, companies must have a thorough understanding of the elements that drive purchase behavior. The elements that mold and impact customer perceptions will be examined in this section, beginning with the impact of marketing messages including branding, advertising, and product positioning. Yeo et al.'s study article from 2020 investigates how viral marketing

messages affect customers' propensity to make purchases. In order to generate attention and brand recognition, Barth (2016) states that "viral marketing is a technique that relies on social networks marketing and the exponential spread of marketing messages, in which an individual will further share the marketing message to a new audience." Viral marketing is the practice of disseminating information about products and services via social media, text messaging, and videos in an effort to pique consumers' interest and maybe make sales.

Faster Capital asserts that advertising has a big impact on consumer behavior and purchasing choices. Companies are always looking for methods to draw in and keep consumers in the competitive market of today, and advertising is a powerful instrument to help them achieve these goals (Faster Capital). Advertising has the power to change people's opinions about companies or goods. Through persuasive stories and impactful messaging, marketers shape consumers' perceptions of certain products or services. Furthermore, advertising has a direct impact on how people make decisions. Advertisers influence customer behavior via persuasive strategies including endorsements, testimonials, and time-limited deals. For instance, celebrity endorsements have a big influence on customers by building trust and encouraging people to select endorsed goods (Faster Capital).

When done right, advertising has a significant influence on what consumers decide to buy. Nike's well-known "Just Do It" ad is a prime example of its impact. Since its 1988 launch, it continues to serve as a model for effective advertising. When people are searching for sports gear, Nike creates a desire for their items by associating their brand with attributes like athleticism and drive. Nike's emotional connection and strong language struck a deep chord with customers. The campaign's athletes inspired others to reach beyond their comfort zones and follow their dreams. This emotional connection increased sales and brand loyalty, establishing the campaign as a model of successful advertising. Essentially, advertising has a significant influence on how consumers behave. It shapes feelings, strengthens ties between people, and directs how decisions are made. Advertisers shape consumers' perceptions of their goods and eventually impact buying decisions by emphasizing particular characteristics or advantages.

Advertising also uses a variety of psychological tricks, such as cognitive biases, persuasion tactics, and the psychology of color and image, to influence the purchase decisions of consumers. Consumer choices are significantly influenced by cognitive biases that lead to hurried selections. These biases are used by advertisements to arouse feelings and

set off reflexive reactions. For instance, the familiarity effect encourages customers to choose well-known brands, which is reinforced by continuous exposure and builds confidence. Crucial is the persuading impact as well. Commercials adapt their strategies to the needs of their target audience by showcasing testimonials or data through social proof, which raises opinions about the popularity and caliber of the product. Furthermore, visuals and colors have a big impact. Emotions are communicated by colors; for example, red denotes hurry and blue, confidence. Positive imagery helps consumers associate items with good things. In the cutthroat world of advertising, marketers use persuasive techniques including urgency, social evidence, and reciprocity. Consumer obligation is fostered by reciprocity, trust is established by social proof, and fear of losing out forces hasty purchases.

Indeed, social media, user reviews, and testimonials are used via processes such as the social proof one to sway customer perceptions, which in turn affects their behavior. This strategy emphasizes the significance of adhering to a social group's standards and is utilized in a wide range of marketing methods to influence customer purchases on e-commerce platforms (Park, S., & McCallister, J, 2023). Although many types of social proof-based messages are used in digital marketing, such as testimonials, influencer endorsements, and social media shares, the inclusion of positive product reviews and pop-up messages about previous buyer purchases are common marketing tactics used to persuade shoppers to purchase advertised goods and services (Park, S., & McCallister, J, 2023). According to Abdul Talib and Mat Saat (2017), social proof is a psychological and social phenomena in which people mimic the conduct of others in order to comply with acceptable behavior (p. 3). It acts as a guide for acceptable conduct in situations with ambiguity. Social proof is the process by which people in social environments use other people's behavior to guide them through unclear situations. Similar to this, social proof in marketing raises customers' perceptions of a seller's or product's dependability (Cialdini, 2008). Similar to peer pressure, this idea of conformity is especially important for teenagers who are trying to fit in and be accepted by their classmates (Crosnoe, R., 2011; Eccles and Roeser, 2011). For example, teenagers who spend more time with friends in social situations are more likely to follow social standards in an effort to be accepted and liked by others. Indeed, social proof, which is common on social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, is essential in influencing what people buy. According to a 2014 Nielsen market poll, 92% of participants globally said they would trust recommendations from friends and family, while 70% said they would strongly trust online customer evaluations. The importance of electronic

word-of-mouth (eWOM) in social communities—such as online ratings and reviews—as a trustworthy measure of product reputation was emphasized by Amblee and Bui (2012, quoted in Talib and Saat, 2017). Furthermore, customers' trust and purchasing intent are enhanced by social media's participatory character (T.P. Liang, 2011; Hajli, 2013, quoted in Talib and Saat, 2017). Dzisah and Ocloo (2013) noted that customer purchasing behavior is influenced by celebrity endorsements in addition to marketing campaigns. Studies conducted on Pepsi Cola advertisements revealed that the purchase intentions of students were greatly impacted by celebrity endorsements (Apejoye, 2013, quoted in Talib and Saat, 2017).

On the other hand, there are certain elements that influence purchase behavior that are not directly related to marketing but rather are inherent in the product or customers. Indeed, Kaufmann, Panni, and Orphanidou's (2012) study report states that "general purchase behavior is driven by an assessment of its benefits and costs that are of immediate relevance solely to the individual consumer performing the behavior." Environmentally conscious conduct, on the other hand, is unlikely to provide immediate personal gain or enjoyment, but rather a long-term consequence (for example, a cleaner environment) that frequently benefits society as a whole (Mc Carty and Shrum, 2001; Kim and Choi, 2005 in Kaufmann et al., 2012). Indeed, Kaufmann, Panni, and Orphanidou's (2012) study report states that "general purchase behavior is driven by an assessment of its benefits and costs that are of immediate relevance solely to the individual consumer performing the behavior." Environmentally conscious conduct, on the other hand, is unlikely to provide immediate personal gain or enjoyment, but rather a long-term consequence (for example, a cleaner environment) that frequently benefits society as a whole (Mc Carty and Shrum, 2001; Kim and Choi, 2005 in Kaufmann et al., 2012). A number of researchers have investigated the aspects that influence customers' choices for environmentally friendly products, which are more or less applicable to the context of clean and safe cosmetics. Mostafa (2009) identifies compassion, environmental concern, knowledge, skepticism of environmental claims, and attitudes as major influences on green purchasing behavior. Similarly, Ahmad and Juhdi (2008) underline the importance of opinions regarding organic food, government backing, attitudes about product safety, environmental friendliness, product availability, and information accessibility in motivating consumer pro-environmental action. Echoing similar findings, Panni (2006) and Ismail and Panni (2008) emphasize the importance of information availability and the accessibility of green products in influencing customers' pro-environmental behavior (Kaufman et al., 2012).

When evaluating consumer purchasing behavior, we must also analyze the decision-making process and the factors that influence it. In 2016, Maniatis investigated which factors influence consumer decision-making regarding the choice of green products. He states in his research paper that several main aspects impact consumer decision-making when purchasing green products, including purchase price advantages, operational savings, green promotions, product characteristics, and environmental awareness (Boztepe, 2012; Thøgersen et al., 2012; Maniatis, 2016). Trust in green labeling is an important indication for customers, highlighting ecologically favorable aspects they may not have been aware of (Thøgersen et al., 2012; Maniatis, 2016). Consumers are willing to pay a premium for items with credible green labeling if they understand the economic and environmental advantages and can link them to actual proof (Owusu and Anifori, 2013; Xia and Zeng, 2006; Xu et al., 2012; Maniatis, 2016). However, due to a lack of understanding regarding the sources of green advantages, customers frequently make purchase decisions based on their own environmental consciousness and product certifications (Kai et al., 2013; Maniatis, 2016). As a result, while purchasing green products, customers consider their environmental knowledge, attitudes, and brand awareness (Matthes et al., 2013; Zhao et al., 2014; Maniatis, 2016).

Another aspect of customer behavior in choosing green items takes into account larger society benefits as well as individual advantages. According to research conducted in Denmark, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Germany, consumers appreciate both the common and personal advantages of green products (Thøgersen, 2011 in Maniatis, 2016). Consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by issues such as resource depletion, pollution, and health dangers, yet spending may vary depending on devotion to green commitment (Banyte, Brazioniene, and Gadeikiene, 2010a; Schlegelmilch et al., 1996; Young et al., 2010 in Maniatis, 2016).

Understanding decision-making models is crucial because it sheds light on the elements affecting consumers' decisions and offers insightful information about the complex processes that underlie their choosing behavior. By understanding them, marketers can tailor their strategies to appeal to consumers' rational evaluations, emotional connections, and post-purchase perceptions, ultimately influencing their purchasing decisions.

One of the decision-making models that makes sense in this research concerning safe and clean cosmetics products is The Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT), proposed by Festinger in 1957 (as cited in Hinojosa et al., 2017), explaining that individuals experiencing

conflicting cognitions undergo a state of discomfort, known as dissonance, until they reconcile these contradictions by modifying their beliefs or attitudes. Although the Cognitive Dissonance Theory was first developed in the field of social psychology, management research has also taken an interest in it. Festinger and Carlsmith's 1959 fundamental study illustrated the theory's broad application outside of psychology by showing that people who received less incentives for completing an unpleasant activity were more likely to modify their views in favor of the assignment. In addition to having a big impact on social psychology, this early study gave management academics a better grasp of important workplace dynamics (Hinojosa et al., 2017). This hypothesis, when applied to our research issue, would take into account a customer who chooses to switch to clean beauty products out of concern for the potentially harmful components in conventional beauty products. But they also find that several of their most popular items are either not accessible in clean versions or are less effective. Consequently, a cognitive conflict arises between the safety and product effectiveness values. To combat it, people may seek information demonstrating the safety of hygienic products, defend the trade-off between efficacy and safety, or alter their behavior by seeking suitable alternatives.

In his 2007 study "Emotion and rationality," Michel Tuan Pham delves into the ways that emotions affect judgment and throws light on how they affect results. Emotions frequently take precedence over reason when determining conduct and forming perceptions. Pham also talks about the ways that emotions influence choices and work with the brain. It is essential to know this interaction in order to understand human behavior. Consumer choices in the field of clean beauty products are influenced by pragmatic considerations, ethical principles, and self-perception. Making sustainability and cruelty-free methods a priority displays one's principles and builds self-assurance. But difficulties like scarce supply or increased costs can cause annoyance, which makes people reevaluate their options. Effective brand-consumer communication requires an understanding of these emotional variables and how to handle them. This example illustrates how customers' emotions affect their decisions in the clean beauty sector, which is consistent with the emotional decision-making model. Consumers prioritize purchasing items that are in line with sustainability and cruelty-free methods due to ethical concerns, which arouse pleasant emotions like pride and satisfaction. Likewise, identity and self-image matter because they provide customers a sense of power when their decisions align with their principles. On the other hand, obstacles like scarcity or increased costs can cause unpleasant feelings like annoyance, which makes customers rethink

their choices. In general, feelings have a big role in what customers choose in the clean beauty industry.

To summarize, a variety of variables impact customer behavior in the clean beauty sector, including marketing strategies, product features, and personal preferences. Effective branding, advertising, and product positioning are critical for molding consumer perceptions and motivating purchases. Furthermore, methods such as viral marketing and celebrity endorsements have a big impact on customer decisions. In addition to commercial effects, customer decisions are influenced by environmental awareness, social proof, and faith in green labeling. Understanding decision-making theories like the Cognitive Dissonance Theory and the role of emotions in customer behavior may help marketers gain useful insights. Finally, by aligning marketing tactics with consumer values, eliminating cognitive dissonance, and appealing to emotional drives, firms may better engage their target audience and increase sales of clean and sustainable beauty goods.

3.3 Marketing claims and consumer expectations

This section will explore the many approaches used by companies to shape customer attitudes and actions. It will also explore the wide range of reactions and actions that consumers exhibit in response to these marketing claims and the expectations that go along with them. Considerable changes in the way people see and use personal care products have resulted from the recent spike in consumer choice for healthier and ecologically friendly goods (Rossi et al., 2007; Faber, 2019 in Grappe et al., 2022). A growing number of users of personal care products consciously avoid potentially dangerous substances, materials, or procedures in favor of those that have good attributes and yield positive results (Lee, 2011 in Grappe et al., 2022).

Indeed, in recent years, a distrust of the cosmetic industry, fueled by the media, grew more and more amongst the consumers. Conventional media outlets including The Washington Post and The New York Times have reported on possible health dangers associated with specific cosmetic compounds (The New York Times, 2019; Decaille, 2020 in Chandon, 2020). These kinds of reports and unscientific press coverage have increased public suspicion about the cosmetics business and contributed to the assumption that natural compounds are safer than synthetic chemicals (Francl, 2013 in Chandon, 2020). Interest in "clean" or "natural" beauty, which substitutes natural chemicals for synthetic ones, has

increased as a result of this criticism. It makes sense that worries over the safety of cosmetics would arise, as most adults use them on a regular basis. According to Raphael (2018), American women use an average of twelve skincare products per day. Health issues are becoming more and more important in the beauty industry, and natural solutions are preferred over ones that are only somewhat effective. Over the past 12 years, searches for "natural" and "health" in the "beauty & fitness" category have significantly increased, according to Google Trends data, indicating a general belief that natural substances are healthier (Chandon, 2020).

Now more than ever, customers are gravitating toward companies with positive reputations and avoiding those linked to controversy as they make an effort to match their views and values with their purchases (GNT Group, 2015 in Grappe et al., 2022). The growing popularity of "clean beauty" is mostly a result of consumer demand for products seen as being healthier, more environmentally friendly, and organic. Consumers are paying greater attention to the ingredient lists of personal care products and are increasingly seeking formulations with natural extracts as well as ethical and certified organic ingredients (Antignac et al., 2011). Due to this, a large number of suppliers and companies have entered the market, creating and promoting cosmetic products that highlight their eco-friendly qualities and supposed advantages for consumers and the environment (Green Choices, 2012 in Lin et al., 2018). This has resulted in an increase in claims, messages, logos, and labels that specify which ingredients are present or absent, with implications for both environmental and health concerns (Grappe et al., 2022).

In-depth linguistic study of scientific language within a corpus of cosmetics advertising was carried out in Ringrow's research paper (2014). 495 advertisements for cosmetics were taken from the May through September 2011 issues of *Elle* and *Cosmopolitan*, the British English and Metropolitan French magazines. There were four main approaches that kept coming up: using scientific ingredients; scientific names; adding numbers and statistics to validate claims; and emphasizing the features and design of the product.

First product compositions in advertising often mentioned one or two particular scientific compounds, such as "Le Super Acide Hyaluronique-Bio" (Shiseido WrinkleResist 24, *Elle* France, July 17, 2011). In order to tell customers about the effectiveness of these components, the body copy of the advertisement frequently explained how they worked. The use of these components in beauty advertisements was a compelling strategy to increase

consumers' impression of the efficacy of the products, even in the face of possible drawbacks like low concentrations or storage problems (Ringrow, 2014).

Secondly, many of the commercials in the corpus had product names that had scientific implications in addition to the usage of chemicals that sounded scientific. Brands are taking a calculated risk by strategically associating science with their goods in an effort to boost legitimacy and build links to cosmetic research. Examples of this strategy include "L'Oréal Revitalift Total Repair 10" (Elle France, August 16, 2011). These product names with scientific themes are very common among high-end skincare products. They fit nicely with larger marketing narratives that constantly emphasize the brands' connections to science and general health. Companies like Clinique, Eucerin, and Vichy place a high priority on combining science and cosmetics as a key element of their marketing plans. Notably, Eucerin's most recent tagline, "skin science that shows," highlights this dedication to skincare innovation based on science.

Thirdly, figures and statistics—typically linked to a scientific or technical tone—were often used in the ads under examination to emphasize the product's active ingredient's concentration. Examples of this usage are statements such as "10x more concentrated in Pro-Gen®" (L'Oréal Youth Code face cream and serum, Cosmopolitan UK, May 2011). Moreover, figures like "94% of women would recommend this product to their friends" (Lierac Body-Slim slimming cream, Elle France, May 20, 2011) were frequently used to highlight the satisfaction levels of women taking part in brand trials or testing.

To finish, another facet of scientific discourse in the examination of cosmetics commercials is the emphasis placed on the qualities and design of the products. These examples highlight creative packaging and design, implying that they allow users to get the most out of the products. As a result, items without these characteristics might be seen as being less effective, difficult to use, and poorly made. Product characteristics and design were frequently described in a technical way with references to science and medicine. Examples of this include "Our 1st pen applicator" (Maybelline ColorSensational Lipstain, Cosmopolitan UK, September 2011) and "Application gets easy: non-drip mousse." These noun phrases often conveyed better design and simplicity of application. Applying this hair color is as simple as using a shampoo (Casting Crème Sublime Mousse, Cosmopolitan UK, July 2011).

This study highlights the wide range of tactics used by companies to promote and package their goods in order to claim different kinds of advantages. A close study of cosmetics ads reveals that companies use a variety of strategies, from creative product design and packaging to scientific language and data, all of which are intended to highlight the perceived benefits of their offerings. However, it has been proven that there is suspicion about the legitimacy of "scientific discourse" in advertising for beauty items, particularly assertions that were viewed as scientific or pseudoscientific. Many people found the use of technical jargon unconvincing, which aligns with the Economics of Information theory's premise that assertions based on science or pseudoscience are treated with mistrust. (Dodds, Tseelon, and Weitkamp, 2008 in Ringrow, 2014).

Another type of claim largely used on cosmetics products packaging are absence and presence messages. According to Grappe et al. in 2022, "both absence and presence messages are progressing; 65% of all cosmetics sold in the US had a "paraben free" claim in 2017 (Statista, 2017 in Grappe et al., 2022), and "free-from" personal care achieved 13% growth in 2020 (NielsenIQ, 2021 in Grappe et al., 2022)". Environmental factors emphasize this tendency even more; in 2020, internet searches for cosmetics made without plastic increased by 897% over the previous year (NielsenIQ, 2021 in Grappe et al., 2022). As a result, this study emphasizes how, when it comes to environmental and health-related claims, it is more beneficial to emphasize the lack of particular chemicals or processes than their presence. This deliberate focus is critical in influencing customer perceptions of and purchase patterns for personal hygiene products.

As we have seen, the beauty industry and its various manufacturers are increasingly relying on clean promises when selling their cosmetic products. However, consumers' behavioral responses are increasingly associated with distrust. The use of claims like "natural," "sustainable," and "environmentally friendly" in company marketing materials has made assertions of this kind less credible (Charter et al., 2002; Lampe & Gazda, 1995 in Kirssi, 2017). In an effort to sway shifts in consumer perception, brand managers frequently use a variety of eco-friendly statements to further their eco-innovation narrative. For example, Express Cleansing Wipes were launched by Sephora in 2011 and marketed as biodegradable, petrochemical-free, natural, paraben-free, and colorless artificially. Even when these statements are true, people are becoming less trusting of them because of the phenomena known as "greenwashing." As a result, brands that are sincere about

environmental causes run the danger of losing their competitive advantage since customers will see through these promises.

Furthermore, overuse of green claims may result in a point at which customers no longer see value in such features (Furlow, 2010 in Kirssi, 2017). Since consumers are not qualified to confirm the veracity of these claims, it is necessary to make explicit, quantifiable, and pertinent statements in order to preserve credibility (Ottman et al., 2006; Shrum et al., 1995 in Kirssi, 2017). Less green claims are anticipated to result in an effective shift in brand attitude for a number of reasons. First, too many claims may be more than a consumer's ability to digest information, which will reduce their capacity to take in new information (Malhotra, 1982 in Olsen et al., 2014). Second, fewer claims mean less opportunity for misunderstanding, which can lessen the impact of brand identity on attitude (Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis, 1986 in Olsen et al., 2014). Last but not least, making a lot of claims tends to make customers more skeptical, which reduces efficacy (Friestad and Wright, 1994 in Olsen et al., 2014).

Despite consumers' mistrust of numerous claims about the cleanliness and safety of cosmetic items, some constraints might impact their behavior and situation evaluation throughout the purchasing decision-making process.

First, according to a survey conducted by Zhang and Zhou (2019) and quoted in Borges and Paananen (2020), 59.3% of respondents were unfamiliar with any certifications used in green cosmetics. This unfamiliarity with certificates may suggest a vulnerability to opportunistic greenwashing techniques. Indeed, The expansion of natural and organic materials and goods, along with the lack of a clear certification procedure or internationally standardized criteria, may result in the introduction of items to the market that do not meet acceptable quality and safety requirements (Antignac, 2011). Furthermore, customers with little expertise or awareness of green cosmetics frequently express worries about being deceived by product promises, thus they prefer eco-labels with approved information. Greenwashing can take the shape of sustainability claims that lack readily available information or third-party certification (Dahl, 2010, quoted in Borges & Paananen, 2020). Despite this, the survey found a lack of consistent confidence in green product promises, with customer trust typically based on the company or unique product.

Secondly, the media and other important groups foster the misconception that natural means safe (Ernst, 1998, 2002 in Antignac et al., 2011), which raises serious concerns.

Despite this, natural components do not ensure safety, with an increase in poisonings associated with plant-derived supplements and herbal medications (Nortier et al., 2000; Ernst, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004; Fu et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2010 in Antignac et al., 2011). This confusion encompasses a larger belief in the superiority of natural versus manufactured alternatives. For example, people frequently see organic products as safer and more desired (Pearson et al., 2014; Apoalaza, 2014 in Chandon, 2020). Furthermore, there is a widespread aversion to human involvement in nature, with human-caused catastrophes perceived as more severe and eliciting larger negative emotions (Siegrist and Sutterlin, 2014; Kahneman, 1993 in Chandon, 2020). Despite these perceptions, statements such as "natural" and "clean beauty" lack legal meanings, leading to consumer misunderstanding (Wallack, 2019; Chandon, 2020). Furthermore, laws in the United States are less strict than in Europe, with just 11 prohibited cosmetics components in the United States vs 1300 in the EU (Foley, 2019; Chandon, 2020). Both consumer activists and the cosmetics industry call for more regulation to restore consumer trust. In conclusion, while consumers frequently regard natural components in cosmetics as safer, this notion is not always correct. Seeking knowledgeable viewpoints beyond surface-level media depictions is critical for making sound judgments concerning cosmetic safety.

As a conclusion, the rise of clean beauty products reflects consumers' growing demand for safer, more environmentally friendly options. However, this trend comes with challenges, including skepticism towards marketing claims and the risk of greenwashing. Companies use various strategies, but consumer trust is hindered by factors like unfamiliar certifications and misconceptions about natural ingredients. Achieving transparency and clarity in marketing is crucial for building trust and navigating the complexities of consumer decision-making. Overall, while the clean beauty movement offers positive changes, it underscores the need for education, regulation, and transparent communication to ensure genuine progress in the beauty industry.

PART II - EMPIRICAL METHODOLOGY

Chapter 4 - Internship descriptive memory

This internship descriptive memory intends to offer a complete summary of my 6-month internship at Benamôr 1925, which took place from November 13, 2023 to May 13, 2024. This curricular internship was an essential component of my Master's degree program in Communication, Marketing, and Advertising at Universidade Catolica Portuguesa. This report describes my tasks and responsibilities, the skills I gained, the difficulties I encountered, and the contributions I made during this time.

4.1 Company overview



Benamôr was founded in Lisbon in 1925 by a pharmacist who created unique skincare recipes that blended natural ingredients with perfumes. The products quickly acquired popularity due to their efficiency and interesting fragrances. Nowadays, the heritage of these original formulas remains a key component of Benamôr's identity, blending tradition and modernity.

The brand emphasizes natural ingredients and exploits high-quality botanicals from its native country, to offer botanical beauty recipes with great benefits, while reducing their ecological impact and highlighting the beauty of Portugal. Benamôr 1925's main characteristic is its strong desire to showcase Portuguese beauty and craftsmanship, with a strong focus on quality and sustainability.

4.2 Internship objectives

The main objective of my internship was to enhance my practical experience and sharpen my marketing abilities. Actually, before starting my internship at Benamôr 1925, my only knowledge of the communication industry was a one-month internship at a digital marketing firm. Even though I had taken some communications classes in my bachelor's program in languages and literature at the time, it was insufficient for me to complete some of the internship's obligations. At the end of 2023, when I began my internship at Benamôr, I was feeling more enthusiastic and confident in learning more about this field now that I had completed one year of coursework for a Master's in Communication, Marketing, and Advertising at Universidade Catolica Portuguesa. I was also able to apply theoretical knowledge from my courses to real-world situations.

My objectives for my internship at Benamôr were centered around developing and expanding my marketing-related skills. In addition to the broad field of marketing, I was particularly interested in the digital side of things, such as social media, website management and strategy implementation. I was also quite interested in learning about the typical tasks performed by a marketing team at a cosmetic firm in order to determine whether this is the field I want to work in in the future. In fact, I would really like to work in the cosmetic industry, and the chance I had to intern at a company as well-known and respected as Benamôr 1925 will undoubtedly help me in my future career endeavors. This is especially true when we consider the professional network I was able to build within the company.

4.3 Description of tasks and responsibilities

4.3.1 Introductory period

My internship at Benamôr 1925 began with an introductory period that laid the foundations for my experience within the brand. From the very first days, I had the opportunity to take part in meetings focused on the brand's core values, its unique identity and the diverse range of products it offers.

These meetings were essential to understand the identity of Benamôr 1925. We explored the brand's history, its origins in 1925, and how it has managed to preserve its heritage while adapting to contemporary demands. I discovered that Benamôr's core values

are based on authenticity, artisanal quality and a commitment to safe, natural ingredients. This immersion in the brand's universe was crucial in aligning my perception and work with Benamôr's vision and mission.

Next, we had detailed presentation sessions on the different Benamôr products. Each product has a specific story and inspiration, often linked to the rich culture of Portugal. I learned about the unique characteristics of each range, their main ingredients and the benefits they provide. This not only enabled me to familiarize myself with the products, but also to understand consumer expectations and how the brand responds to these needs

These early days enabled me to settle in and adapt to the working environment at Benamôr. I began by observing and understanding the internal dynamics, which helped me to integrate quickly into the team.

A large part of this initial period was spent assisting Inês Henriques, the digital marketing manager. Under her supervision, I was able to immerse myself in the strategic and operational aspects of digital marketing at Benamôr. Inês explained to me the crucial issues of marketing in the beauty industry, in particular the importance of digital communication to promote the brand's values and strengthen its online presence.

Working alongside Inês enabled me to understand the specific challenges Benamôr faces in the highly competitive beauty sector. I was able to observe how she develops strategies to reach and engage customers across different digital channels, while remaining true to the brand's values. It also enabled me to see the importance of consistency between the brand's image and its online communications.

4.3.2 Social media management and digital content creation

During my internship at Benamôr 1925, I was responsible for managing social media accounts and developing content for digital marketing efforts. In particular, I produced numerous videos and visual content for the brand's Facebook and Instagram accounts. These creations were aimed at promoting products, boosting follower engagement and maintaining an online presence consistent with Benamôr's identity.

At the start of the internship, the marketing managers had discussed the possibility of creating a TikTok account to extend the brand's reach and reach a younger audience.

However, despite initial enthusiasm for the project, the team has yet to put this initiative into practice. Consequently, the videos I co-produced with fellow intern Ana Medeiros were published as reels on the brand's Instagram account. We received many positive reactions to these videos, including more likes and comments than usual.

As far as the static visuals were concerned, I was in charge of creating innovative content for the Instagram and Facebook posts, as well as for the stories. While the purpose of the posts was to galvanize the social networks and participate in the creation of the brand's visual identity on these channels, the stories were more promotional in nature, highlighting products and current promotions on the Benamôr 1925 website.

4.3.3 Involvement in the creation and implementation of newsletters

I also helped develop and implement Benamôr 1925 newsletters, which played an important part in expanding the brand's email marketing strategy. Initially, newsletters were sent out once a week, but this soon escalated to three to six times each week. At the start of each month, we would discuss interesting topics for newsletters with the digital marketing manager, then submit our recommendations to the global brand manager during a meeting. After the subjects were approved, I was in charge of designing the layout, selecting pictures, constructing the design, and writing the newsletter text. This assignment required tight cooperation and ongoing creativity to ensure that each newsletter was engaging and in line with the brand's image. This work was a big element of my internship, allowing me to make a real contribution to the brand's communication efforts while also developing my digital marketing abilities.

4.3.4 Assistance in the production and analysis of competitor reports

I was involved in the production and analysis of competitor reports, a crucial task in guiding Benamôr 1925's strategies. For example, as part of the development of a customer loyalty program, I carried out extensive research into different loyalty programs, not only in the cosmetics sector, but also in other sectors such as food, in order to identify the best options and possibilities for this new project. This task was rather substantial, since we had to start from scratch, choose how many tiers our loyalty program would contain, choose the names of the tiers, the corresponding number of points, all the advantages each tier presented and a whole host of other details that were important in order to offer a credible service to our

customers. For the newsletters, it was also essential to monitor the actions of competitors, including the frequency of their publications and the types of content used. This enabled us to align ourselves with market trends and find the best solutions for optimizing our email marketing strategy. These analyses enabled me to provide informed recommendations and make a significant contribution to the company's strategic projects.

4.3.4 Conducting market research and collecting data for ongoing projects

I conducted market research and collected data for various ongoing projects, playing a key role in their success. For example, the launch of the new Iris Suprema perfume and hand cream was a major event during my internship. To ensure the success of this launch, we analyzed the market to determine the best options for the launch event. I was also tasked with collecting data on event attendees and assessing whether their presence had translated into sales. This task involved not only an in-depth analysis of market trends and launch strategies, but also the ability to measure the direct impact of events on sales, providing valuable information for future product launches.

4.4 Conclusion

My internship at Benamôr 1925 was an enriching experience, both professionally and personally. Thanks to this internship, I significantly improved my skills with industry-specific software such as MailChimp, Shopify, Excel, and Meta Business. I gained a better understanding of marketing strategies and developed exceptional project management and organizational skills. Working on joint projects also improved my communication and teamwork skills. I learned to adapt to a fast-paced, dynamic work environment, and developed problem-solving skills by facing real-life challenges.

However, this internship was not without its challenges. Navigating in an environment where a different language is spoken was particularly difficult for me. Although I understand Portuguese, I still find it difficult to speak it fluently, and all meetings and discussions with my colleagues were held in a mixture of two languages. It was the most trying experience I've had so far. In addition, juggling various responsibilities while managing my time effectively, adapting to the company's processes and culture, receiving and incorporating constructive feedback, and coping with the stress of tight deadlines were constant challenges.

Nevertheless, these obstacles have contributed to my personal and professional development, and I now feel better prepared to face future opportunities in the digital marketing field.

Chapter 5 - Methodology

5.1 Research relevance

The topic of this research is about the effects of safe and natural ingredient claims on brand reputation in clean beauty branding. Indeed, with the growing importance of the “clean beauty” movement, consumers and society are increasingly looking to consume products that are effective without having a negative impact on their bodies and health. Consequently, cosmetics companies have been forced to change with the times and replace their outdated and questionable formulas with new ones that are more considerate of the environment and human health in recent years.

The study of the consequences of claims for safe and natural ingredients in the field of clean beauty is of paramount importance for cosmetics brands. It adds a new dimension to our understanding of communication strategies and brand perceptions. For companies, it offers insights to improve their marketing strategies, prevent greenwashing, boost customer confidence and strengthen their competitive edge. More generally, it steers brands towards formulas that are more respectful of the environment and human health, strengthening their reputation and long-term success.

Various research studies have already examined the effect of claims for safe and natural ingredients in the cosmetics sector. However, they frequently focus on consumers' opinions or companies' business practices. This study sets itself apart by opting for a brand-focused approach, examining in detail the communication strategies and difficulties faced by companies in the sector in the face of demands for safer, more natural products. By adopting this particular vision, it will make a significant contribution to our understanding of business practices and reputation management, making an important contribution to academic research on marketing, responsible consumption and brand reputation management.

5.2 Research question

In the context of clean beauty expansion, this study aims to investigate in detail the influence of safety and natural ingredient claims on the reputation of the Benamôr brand,

posing the following primary research question: "How do safe and natural ingredient claims influence the brand reputation of Benamôr in the context of clean beauty branding?". To go deeper into this issue, the study will address two sub-research questions: "How do employees perceive the claims of safe and natural ingredients in Benamôr products within the context of clean beauty branding?" or "What is the impact of safe and natural ingredient claims on the overall brand reputation of Benamôr in the beauty industry?" The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of these statements on customers' and employees' views of the brand, consequently affecting the company's brand reputation.

Furthermore, this study will evaluate the difficulties Benamôr had in putting these assertions into practice and conveying them, in addition to the opportunities presented by the expanding trend of responsible consumption. This study will provide a global and nuanced perspective on branding dynamics in the clean beauty sector using a combination of qualitative methods, like in-depth interviews with the marketing team, the brand CEO, and the Global Brand Director, and quantitative methods, like a consumer questionnaire. Additionally, it will provide useful advice for companies looking to boost their brand recognition and satisfy customers' expectations regarding the safety and naturalness of their products.

5.3 Research objectives

This internship report's goals are divided into two sections. The first goal is to examine Benamôr employee views of safe and natural ingredient claims in their products, in relation to the clean beauty brand image. This study will look at how staff members perceive these claims and their function in promoting the brand's image.

The second goal is to assess the influence of these claims on the general reputation of the Benamôr brand in the cosmetics sector. To this goal, consumers will be given a questionnaire to gather their thoughts and views on the safety and naturalness of the components utilized by Benamôr. This research will assess how much effect these statements have on customer perception and loyalty, offering useful data for Benamôr's clean beauty branding strategy.

5.4 Research design

The present research uses a mixed explanatory method, which includes primary data through semi-structured individual interviews and a consumer questionnaire with a cross-sectional time horizon. The mixed-methods approach combines qualitative and quantitative data, providing a more thorough and nuanced view of how claims for safe and natural ingredients influence the Benamôr 1925 brand's reputation. By beginning with a qualitative section, the findings of the interviews give important internal viewpoints, while the quantitative phase, through the questionnaire, allows for the collection of larger, generalizable data from customers.

Semi-structured individual interviews of 12 questions were conducted with five Benamôr 1925 employees: the CEO, Global Brand Director, Marketing Manager, Digital Manager and Marketing Intern. The questions were aimed at gathering detailed internal perspectives and tactics about the brand's promises about using safe and natural components. The interviews revealed useful information on how these statements are incorporated into the broader brand strategy and viewed inside the organization.

After the interviews, a questionnaire was developed and delivered to Benamôr 1925 customers. This questionnaire was created to get their feedback on the brand's reputation, particularly in regard to its promises about safe and natural components. The questionnaire questions are intended to examine customers' views, trust in the brand, and how these claims influence their purchase decisions. The data obtained will allow us to measure the effect of safety and naturalness claims on customers' overall perceptions of the brand.

5.5 Data collection techniques

5.5.1 Interviews

To fully study the research questions, Benamôr employees were interviewed using a semi-structured format with 12 questions. These interviews intended to acquire in-depth insights into staff thoughts and attitudes around the claims of safe and natural ingredients in Benamôr products in the context of clean beauty branding. The major goal was to investigate how these assertions affect the overall brand reputation and internal views of the company.

The following script served as a framework for the interviews, ensuring consistency throughout all sessions while allowing for the examination of additional relevant topics raised during the discussions.

Interview script

1- What particular strategies does Benamôr use to communicate the safety and naturalness of its ingredients to customers?

2- Which base does Benamôr use to support its claims of employing safe and natural ingredients?

3- How does Benamôr differentiate itself from competitors in terms of its approach to natural branding and ingredient transparency?

4- In your opinion, how do safe and natural ingredient claims contribute to Benamôr's overall brand identity and perception in the clean beauty market?

5- Which marketing decisions are made to reinforce Benamôr's safe and natural ingredient claims? Can you talk about any efforts or collaborations Benamôr has launched to boost the credibility of its safe and natural ingredient claims?

6- How does Benamôr guarantee that its dedication to safe and natural ingredients has a positive impact on its brand reputation in the clean beauty market?

7- How does Benamôr address information asymmetry in the cosmetics sector, particularly when it comes to safe and natural ingredient claims, and what actions does it take to increase transparency and customer trust?

8- How does Benamôr incorporate consumer feedback and preferences into its product development process, notably the use of safe and natural ingredients?

9- Can you talk about any hurdles or obstacles Benamôr has experienced in preserving or improving its brand reputation based on safe and natural ingredient claims?

10- How does Benamôr manage customer skepticism or reservations about the efficacy of cosmetics products made with botanical ingredients?

11- Can you describe any methods or approaches Benamôr uses to combat customer

skepticism or worries about the safety and naturalness of its products?

12- Can you give examples of how Benamôr's marketing efforts highlight the benefits and advantages of purchasing products made with safe and natural ingredients?

Participants in the interviews were chosen based on my direct access and everyday contacts while interning at Benamôr 1925. Working directly with the marketing team, which consisted of four people including myself, gave an excellent chance to get insights from those who were intimately involved in the brand's communication initiatives. Due to time restrictions, the interviews with my colleagues were performed in written format. However, due to my position, I was able to have a face-to-face interview with the CEO of 38 minutes. This selection guaranteed that the opinions gathered were knowledgeable and representative of both the operational and strategic levels of the firm. The table below outlines the participants involved in the interviews for this study:

Table 1 - Participants involved in the interviews

Name	Nationality	Position	Interview format	Date
Pierre Stark	French	CEO	In-person	09/05/2024
Andreia Lança	Portuguese	Global Brand Director	Written	13/05/2024
Inês Henriques	Portuguese	Digital Manager	Written	13/05/2024

Joana Mauricio	Portuguese	Marketing Manager	Written	18/05/2024
Ana Medeiros	Portuguese	Marketing Intern	Written	27/05/2024

5.5.2 Questionnaire

The aim of the questionnaire was to gather opinions and experiences from potential customers of the Benamôr 1925 brand in order to find out what influence claims of safe and natural ingredients have on brand reputation.

The data was collected via a questionnaire created on the Google Forms platform and distributed to Benamôr brand customers via platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram and also by email.

A total of 34 responses were received. It comprised 5 distinct sections. The first dealt with the participant's relationship with the brand, the second with the naturalness of the ingredients, the third with the safety of the ingredients, the fourth with the perception of the brand, and the last with the respondents' demographic data.

5.6 Ethical considerations

Throughout the duration of this research, strict ethical rules were followed to protect the rights and well-being of all participants. There were no ethical problems discovered during the investigation. Participants were notified in advance that their replies, names, and personal information would be included in the study and used only for academic reasons. To achieve unbiased results, all efforts were taken to avoid influencing participants when developing interview questions. The questions were intended to be neutral and objective, allowing individuals to express themselves freely without any external influence. The study closely adhered to the principles of informed consent, with participants receiving detailed explanations of the goal, methods, and potential consequences of their participation. They had the option to ask questions and willingly agreed to participate in the interviews.

Chapter 6 - Results presentation and discussion

6.1 Interview

6.1.1 Results presentation

This section discusses the findings of the study, focusing on the analysis of themes that emerged from six in-depth interviews with employees of the Benamôr 1925 brand. These interviews gave a deep understanding of the employees' experiences and perspectives, allowing the identification of key themes that highlight their main contributions. The themes that emerged offer a clear view of the company's values, opportunities, and challenges, providing insight into the organizational dynamics at Benamôr 1925. Through these interviews, we gained a deeper understanding of the brand's reputation as perceived by its employees.

1. Communication and Marketing Strategies

1.1. Transparency in Ingredient Information

- Detailed ingredient information:

One of the most frequent topics was the need to communicate transparently about the ingredients used in the brand's products and give detailed ingredient information: "As far as the natural aspect of our ingredients is concerned, there are many different strategies, but we have chosen to communicate a lot through percentages that are quite progressive." (Pierre

Stark) Participants often insisted that the ingredients used were clearly detailed on the products themselves, but also on the internet: “Benamôr emphasizes transparency and communicates the safety and naturalness of its ingredients through clear ingredient information on product packaging and on our website.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro) or “Benamôr communicates its ingredients and formulation aspects on its packaging and on the product pages of its website.” (Inês Henriques)”. For the Global Brand Director and the Digital Manager, Benamôr 1925 is really committed to provide clear details about their ingredient: ““We pay meticulous attention to transparency by using clear and comprehensive labeling of ingredients as it reinforces trust, demonstrating the brand's commitment to openness and honesty.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro).”, “We are committed to transparent communication, highlighting the list of ingredients used. We think that consumers have the right to know the ingredients they are applying to their skin and the production processes behind the products they choose.” (Inês Henriques). Even the Marketing Intern that spent little time working in the company emphasized multiple times this commitment radiating from the brand: “Benamôr uses clear labeling, detailed ingredient lists and emphasizes the percentage of natural ingredients in each product.”.

- *Natural components highlight:*

Benamôr 1925 strives to demonstrate its values and brand identity by emphasizing the naturalness of its formulas. For the brand, this is their DNA: “What we try to do, again, in our stores, on our social networks, is to tell the truth and say what we really do. It's a kind of guarantee for us.” (Pierre Stark). “Benamôr emphasizes transparency and communicates the safety and naturalness of its ingredients. We highlight natural components in marketing communications through website, newsletters, articles, social media content, collaborations and even partnerships.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro). Inês Henriques, the Digital Manager, is making sure that the naturality is highlighted in all the brand's communication: “We communicate openly with consumers about the ingredients used in our products, highlighting natural ingredients and explaining their benefits. We emphasize the use of "botanical extracts" in all communications, highlighting the importance of the natural ingredients present in the products and clear, visual messages that communicate the benefits of these ingredients for the skin. We also pass on these messages of naturality through its digital communications, via newsletters, social networks and also through personalized in-store service, where these details are passed on to customers.” (Inês Henriques)

1.2 Documentation and communication

- *Educational content:*

Benamôr 1925 tries to educate its consumers as much as possible through its various communications: “I believe that reinforcing the naturalness and local sourcing of the brand and its ingredients in our educational communications helps to consolidate this brand platform on naturalness.” (Pierre Stark). They communicate about the ingredients’ benefits: “Benamôr from times to times may run marketing campaigns that spotlight specific natural ingredients used in a launch or star product, emphasizing their benefits for skin and overall well-being (example : Elixir and Bakuchiol in April 2023, Ginja and sour cherry extracts in November 2023) through social media.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro). “We also use educational content through blog posts, social media content, and newsletters, Benamôr educates consumers about having natural ingredients and its portuguese botany inspiration. We also explain how certain botanical extracts nourish and revitalize the skin, or how natural oils provide hydration for instance and the benefits of specific fragrances.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro). It is also important for them to talk about the safety of their products and the production processes: “We disseminate educational content about our products and curiosities about the production process in the factory. Benamôr uses the following communication strategies to get across the messages inherent in its values: content marketing educational communications on social networks and newsletters, through press releases and influencer marketing, through occasional partnerships with influencers who highlight the brand's key values.” (Inês Henriques)

- *Highlighting product benefits with pictograms:*

Pictograms are widely used by the brand to communicate their products in a simple and appealing way: “The main strategy we use to communicate the naturalness of our ingredients is through our product packaging. We use pictograms to communicate the benefits to consumers, and we intend to make even greater use of them in the future.” (Pierre Stark). “Benamôr uses clear labeling, detailed ingredient lists and emphasizes the percentage of natural ingredients in each product. It uses pictograms relating to the high percentages of natural ingredients, both in its products and in some other communication elements, such as the website.” (Ana Medeiros)

- *Botanical store decor:*

The CEO of Benamôr 1925, Pierre Stark, emphasized the brand's limited financial resources during our interview. He has chosen to put more effort into creating and improving or decorating new physical stores rather than digital marketing to promote the brand: “In the stores, our decoration conveys the values of "Portugalidade", local and traditional values, art-deco design for example. Since our first stores were less effective in conveying these aspects, we've tried to transmit more of these values in our more recent stores. For example, at Benamôr Loreto, next to Praça Luis de Camoes, the naturalness and botanical dimension of our ingredients is evident from the moment you enter the store. The ceiling is decorated with natural elements, the paint is green, the brand text claims botanical ingredients and so is the logo.” (Pierre Stark)

1.3 Partnerships and collaborations

- *Collaborations with eco-conscious personalities:*

By partnering with individuals that have similar values about the environment, the company further highlights its dedication to naturalness and safe ingredients: “Partnerships with people (artists, influencers) with similar values to Benamôr that advocate for our products and its natural ingredients benefits.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro). “Benamôr uses influencer marketing, through occasional partnerships with influencers who highlight the brand's key values.” (Inês Henriques). “We reinforce our claims through collaborations with influencers. There is a strategy in choosing the influencers with whom we collaborate, for example, using mainly people who use a more natural image and who, above all, share the same values as the brand.” (Ana Medeiros)

1.4 Showcasing Reviews and Testimonials

- *Leveraging positive reviews:*

The company seeks to capitalize on the positive experiences that clients have: “Sharing testimonials and reviews from satisfied customers who have experienced positive results with Benamôr's products reinforces the benefits of choosing safe and natural ingredients. Hearing about real-life experiences can inspire confidence and encourage others to try the products.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro). “Benamôr pays meticulous attention to customer satisfaction. Indeed, positive experiences and testimonials from satisfied customers

serve as endorsements of Benamôr's commitment to safe and natural ingredients, bolstering its reputation through word-of-mouth and online reviews.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro).

2. Supporting Claims of Safety and Naturalness

2.1 Formula changes

- Removal of harmful and non-natural ingredients:

The brand's new director has worked to update the outdated formulas: “Benamôr was founded in 1925 and the formulas were no longer current when I bought the company in 2015. That's why we made a lot of changes at that time. Even if some ingredients were legal, we removed them, like parabens, kerosene and mineral oils.” (Pierre Stark). “In the beginning, our approach was based on eliminating certain ingredients that we felt were no longer up to date, in terms of European laws and regulations, but also in terms of natural ethics. For example, we decided to remove parabens entirely, but European regulations allow us to use them even though they are considered endocrine disruptors. We removed them a long time ago, but many brands continue to use them because they are very effective ingredients in terms of microbiology and guaranteeing formula stability. Our approach has been to remove a certain number of ingredients that we no longer felt corresponded to the brand's values.” (Pierre Stark). As the Marketing Manager stated: “Benamôr’s philosophy stands to avoid using petroleum-based raw materials. An example of this is the usage of paraffin and vegetable vaseline. We also do not include parabens as preservatives in its formulas.” (Joana Mauricio).

- Commitment to natural origins:

The main characteristic of the new formulas has been their correspondence to a specific level of naturalness: “It is Benamôr’s policy to use, whenever it is possible, 100% plant extracts, which include, for example sweet almond oil, coconut oil, peanut oil, argan oil, shea butter, aloe vera extract and rose damascena oil.” (Joana Mauricio). Indeed, Pierre Stark indicates “On formulas that were created decades ago and had a low naturalness rate, we decided to reformulate the product to increase the percentage. We have added ingredients that are interesting for increasing the naturalness rate, such as organic ingredients, for example. The brand's charter and spirit is never to launch products with a formula of less than 90%. Today, on our latest formulas, we always achieve a minimum naturalness rate of 90%, and it's not uncommon for this rate to rise to 95%. Secondly, we tried, formula by formula, to

document the percentage of natural ingredients we had. For example, formulas that were created decades ago will be 70-80% natural, but the new formulas we've just developed will never be launched with less than 90 or even 95% natural ingredients.”

2.2 Ingredient Testing and Quality Assurance

- *Ensuring product safety:*

Naturally, Benamôr submits to dermatological testing at its Carregado laboratory to guarantee the quality of its products: “All laboratory tests are carried out to ensure the safety of ingredients.” (Inês Henriques). “Safety is an aspect that is part of a legal dimension, but also part of a brand's responsibility to pass on and sell a product that complies with legal standards and does not endanger the consumer in terms of use on the skin. To demonstrate that our products represent no danger, we carry out internal and external tests to demonstrate the formula's stability, as well as dermatological tests to demonstrate its efficacy on the skin. This is the basis for our claim that our ingredients are safe.” (Pierre Stark)

- *Rigorous quality control measures:*

Andreia Lança Magarreiro, Global Brand Director talks about the quality control: “Benamôr pays meticulous attention to quality assurance with rigorous quality control measures to ensure that only safe and natural ingredients meet Benamôr's standards, reassuring customers of product safety and efficacy.”. For Joana Mauricio, “It is Benamôr’s policy to use, whenever it is possible, 100% plant extracts, which include, for example sweet almond oil, coconut oil, peanut oil, argan oil, shea butter, aloe vera extract and rose damascena oil.” which shows the quality ingredients used in Benamôr 1925 products.

- *Scientific validation of ingredient efficacy:*

Declaring that natural ingredients present less of a risk is one thing, but demonstrating their efficacy is quite difficult. Therefore, the brand conducts appropriate tests: "It's about doing tests that are aligned with what we claim; clinical tests or consumer tests. Ever since we developed the Rosto range, with Elixir for example, we've been testing efficacy and 24-hour hydration. To have the international claim of 24-hour hydration, we have to pay 1000 euros. We have a panel with a certain number of prerequisites for this test, we do it and if the results are proven we can put this claim on our product packaging. These are not very sophisticated clinical tests, but they work.” (Pierre Stark)

2.3 Ingredient Sourcing and Sustainability

- *Supplier relationships and quality assurance:*

The quality standards of the ingredients that Benamôr uses are independently verified by the suppliers that the brand collaborates with. “With regard to the safety of ingredients, we buy from suppliers who must demonstrate and guarantee the safety of their ingredients through their tests. This is an important aspect of our collaboration, because if a consumer trusts Benamôr and has a problem, it's Benamôr they'll turn to. Subsequently, we may also turn to our suppliers, depending on the nature of the problem.” (Pierre Stark). “The company pays great attention to the local suppliers from whom they buy the raw materials. Here, there is also the trust that is attributed to the local supplier with whom we work.” (Ana Medeiros). As stated by the Laboratory Director, Andreia Rodrigues: “At Benamôr, we work with the utmost clarity and transparency. We search for the best suppliers who meet the brand's pillars of naturalness, quality and nationality.”

3. Brand differentiation

3.1 Local identity

- *Traditionality:*

Benamôr 1925 is a traditional brand that was established about a century ago: “Benamôr distinguishes itself from competitors by its own legacy. It is a 100 years old brand.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro). The brand emphasizes and promotes Portuguese culture with its botanical beauty recipes: “We also emphasized the brand's heritage, as a solid and trusted brand for almost a century - highlighting the emotional and trusting connection with consumers.” (Inês Henriques). “Our recipes are based on the botanical diversity and the historical and cultural know-how of our country.” (Joana Mauricio).

- *Portugalidade:*

The primary differentiator is that the brand is Portuguese and proud of its heritage: “I think we differentiate ourselves from many brands in terms of our natural approach thanks to our "Portugalidade". Since naturalness is no longer a crucial point of differentiation, nor a key point in the USP (Unique Selling Proposition), we decided to differentiate ourselves through "Portugalidade”.” (Pierre Stark). “The emphasis on safe, portuguese and botanical ingredients not only defines Benamôr's brand identity but also enhances its credibility and

appeal to consumers seeking authentic and responsible skincare solutions.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro).

- *Recipes from Portugal's botanical and cultural heritage:*

Since its inception, the brand has highlighted national ingredients: “It is a 100 years old brand that always preferred to use natural ingredients, more sustainable packaging and promote the usage of the Portuguese botanics and ingredients.”. As the Digital and Marketing Managers said, “Some of the ingredients are ancient and well-known herbs from Portugal's botanical diversity.” (Inês Henriques) and “All of our formulas feature a minimum of one key plant-based ingredient sourced from Portugal and are composed of a minimum of 90% natural ingredients, emphasizing our commitment to natural origins.” (Joana Mauricio).

3.2 Local sourcing

- *Partnering with Portugal's finest suppliers:*

Additionally, Benamôr sources its ingredients locally. Pierre Stark insists: “What makes the difference is that we manage to source most of our ingredients locally. For example, we made a body scrub with Algarve salt.”. “Benamôr uses Portuguese botanical extracts, grown in Portugal.” (Inês Henriques). For the brand, having trustful relationships with their suppliers is crucial: “At Benamôr, we work with the utmost clarity and transparency. We search for the best suppliers who meet the brand's pillars of naturalness, quality and nationality.” (Andreia Rodrigues). “Benamor products are formulated with high quality cosmetic ingredients that are supplied by trustful providers, some of which have built a strong relationship with the brand since 1925.” (Joana Mauricio).

In addition to working together with a large number of Portuguese producers, several of the brand's product components have partnerships with other businesses to showcase the know-how of the country: “Benamôr always tries to use natural ingredients of Portuguese origin in its formulations, such as one of the most recent launches, the revitalizing Bruma, for example, a partnership with the Termas de São Pedro do Sul with Portuguese Mineral Water, directly from Portugal's main spa, an important point being the use of reference Portuguese ingredients.” (Inês Henriques).

- *Recipes with key plant-based Portuguese ingredient:*

The majority of Benamôr 1925's collections have a distinctive ingredient unique to Portugal: “We work with many local ingredients, such as the "Laranjinha" range made with Portuguese oranges, the "Jacaranda" range with the flowers of Lisbon's famous trees, or the Portuguese salt and sugar used to formulate our body scrubs.” (Pierre Stark). The Global Brand Director made it important that: “Benamôr from time to time may run marketing campaigns that spotlight specific natural ingredients used in a launch or star product. One example is the Ginja collection. During the launch, we educate our consumers about having natural ingredients and its Portuguese botany inspiration.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro).

3.3 Unique selling proposition

- Standing out with high natural index:

A product or service's distinctive benefit or characteristic that makes it stand out from the competition and appeal to potential customers in a different way is known as its unique selling proposition, or USP. The CEO of the brand asserts that their USP is supported by the high natural index of their products: “The main decision to reinforce our claims for safe and natural ingredients is the very precise brand charter we established when we redesigned the USP a year and a half ago. Upstream, we made decisions on formulations in relation to the percentage of naturalness. With the R&D department, we decided to exclude a certain number of ingredients from our products and to draw up a blacklist of products that we would never use in our formulas.” (Pierre Stark). For Ana Medeiros, intern in Digital Marketing: “The emphasis on safe and natural ingredients reinforces Benamôr's brand identity, positioning it as a reliable and clean beauty brand on the market, appealing to consumers who are concerned about their health and the environment.” “Using safe and natural ingredients are fundamental points that are part of the brand's DNA, and which should be communicated to customers, contributing to a more real and authentic perception of the brand. We opted for a transparent, educational and engaging approach, in order to raise Benamôr's profile and build a strong bond with customers and differentiate itself in the cosmetics market.” (Inês Henriques). “Benamôr has strived to uphold its brand reputation based on its legacy and naturality linked to Portuguese botany.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro)

4. Transparency and Trust

4.1 Building trust and loyalty

- *Catering to consumers seeking clean and ethical skincare:*

Andreia Lança Magarreiro and Inês Henriques explains Benamôr's strategy to build trust and loyalty amongst consumers: "Safe and natural ingredient claims play a pivotal role in shaping Benamôr's brand identity and perception in the whole cosmetics market and also in the clean beauty market. By prioritizing ingredient safety and naturalness, Benamôr aligns itself with the values of consumers seeking clean and ethical skincare options.", "On the marketing side we always adopt a transparent approach to consumer feedback in order to convey the necessary trust to our customers." Regarding skepticism, Pierre Stark admits: "If our consumers have any doubts about what we're saying, we try to document as much as possible, with facts and percentages, to reassure them and ensure that our values have a positive impact on our brand reputation."

- *Providing complete ingredient lists:*

Pierre Stark explains that the list of the products' ingredients is already really detailed and that in the future it will be even more, helping the consumers to trust the brand: "For example, we've known for some months now that a new European regulation on allergens is about to come into force. On the ingredients label, called INCI, we have fragrance ingredients at the end, followed by allergens. The new INCI allergen regulations will therefore evolve, and from now on any allergen present in a fragrance will have to be developed, claimed and identified very clearly on the INCI list. So our INCI list will be extended to give consumers even more information." (Pierre Stark)

- *Tailored responses to consumer inquiries:*

It's essential to the brand to speak up and respond to queries from customers on its ingredients and products: "As far as complaints and comments on formulas are concerned, we have a department within our R&D department which is managed by one person at legal level and another person at consumer response level. Feedback is internalized by us through this department." (Pierre Stark). "We respond in a personalized way to all the questions that come to us via customer support on the website and social networks about any specifics of our products, always with the necessary feedback from our laboratory." (Inês Henriques)

4.2 Scientific validation

- *Proof of product effectiveness:*

Scientific validation plays an important role in consumers' trust: "Benamôr tries to manage customer skepticism or reservations about the efficacy of cosmetics products made with botanical ingredients through scientific validation. The brand invests in research and development to scientifically validate the efficacy of the natural ingredients used." (Andreia Lança Magarreiro)

To fight skepticism about the natural ingredients' efficacy, the brand carries out tests: "It's about doing tests that are in line with what we claim; clinical tests or consumer tests. Since we developed the Rosto range, with the Elixir for example, we have tested effectiveness and 24-hour hydration." (Pierre Stark)

- *Compliance with regulations and associations:*

The Marketing Manager mentions: "All the claims and communication used in Benamôr are supported by regulation like Declaration of Quality, Declaration of naturalness of ingredients and Vegan products declaration."

"To increase transparency and customer confidence, we comply with regulations. Firstly, through Andreia Rodrigues, our laboratory director, who is very involved in associations such as Association Nationale de la Cosmétique, of which our company Nally is a member. We also have very strong links with FarmED through our role as producers, since we are subject to a certain number of rules at European level. In fact, we're not a brand that subcontracts its production, so as a producer we have far more responsibilities than another brand that buys in subcontracted products and only does branding." (Pierre Stark)

- *Calculation of the natural origin index:*

The Director of the Laboratory, Andreia Rodrigues, explains: "For all products we calculate the Natural Origin Index using the following normative documents:

- ISO 16128-1:2016 - Guidelines on technical definitions and criteria for natural and organic cosmetic ingredients and products

Part 1: Definitions for ingredients

ISO 16128-2:2017 Cosmetics — Guidelines on technical definitions and criteria for natural and organic cosmetic ingredients

Part 2: Criteria for ingredients and products”

- Requesting and utilizing documents from suppliers declaring the naturalness index of raw materials.

“We ask for each raw material supplier, a document declaring the naturalness index and carrying out the calculations. Here's an example:”

Figure 2 - Calculation of natural origin content by including formulation water

$$C_{+H_2O}^{no} = \sum_{\alpha=1}^n (P_{\alpha} \times I_{no\alpha})$$

where

$C_{+H_2O}^{no}$ is the natural origin content of a product, as calculated by including formulation water as an ingredient;

P_{α} is the percentage, by mass, of each ingredient, α , in the product and includes formulation water as an ingredient;

$I_{no\alpha}$ is the natural origin index corresponding to each ingredient, α , in the product.

MP	Matérias-Primas	% Natural Origin Index	LIP CREAM ROSE AMELIE
MP438	Água de produção	1	71,15%
MP590	Glycerin	1	5,00%
MP558	Microcare SB	0,55	1,00%
MP534	Sacarina	0	0,05%
MP645	Plurol Stearique WL 1009	1	5,00%
MP460	Tegin Pellets	1	2,00%
MP596	Lanette 16	1	2,00%
MP579	Shea Butter	1	2,00%
MP421	Coconut Oil	1	2,00%
MP401	Hydrargan	1	2,00%
MP597	INCA Omega Oil	1	1,00%
MP638	Rosa Moschata Oil	1	1,00%
MP641	Macadamia Oil	1	1,00%
MP642	Soy Oil	1	1,00%
MP454	Tocoferol	0	0,20%
MP646	Omega Butter	1	3,00%
MP572	Extrato Rosa Damascena	0,992	0,10%
MP539	Perfume Authentic Rose Lip 1626083	0,57	0,10%
MP295	Lactic Acid	1	0,40%
NATURAL ORIGIN INDEX - FLA			99,26

In this case, the Natural Origin Index is 99,26%.

- Meeting regulatory standards:

The brand has a strong coordination between Regulatory Affairs and Marketing departments to ensure claims meet regulatory standards: “We have a Regulatory Affairs and Marketing department that complement each other perfectly, knowing the limits of what can be mentioned in terms of claims. Before the product is launched onto the market, the Regulatory Department validates the product's claims, respecting the principles of regulation 655/2013 laying down common criteria for the justification of claims used in relation to cosmetic products.

- All products are subject to a safety assessment which includes the substantiation of the claims, for which we have all the supplier's certificates in terms of technical data sheet, naturalness, origin and description of the claims and their conditions of use.
- For all products, the substantiation of the claim is verified through a patch test (skin irritation test).
- For some products, we also carry out a consumer test to validate some key claims - we did this for Revitalizing Face Elixir.
- On our website we also list the naturalness index of all the products, by product, so that there is transparency for the consumer.
- *Collecting supplier certificates:*

The process to work with a certain supplier is long and complex, explains Pierre Stark. The brand has to make sure that it respects scientific validation :“When we find a supplier who produces interesting raw materials, we approach them to see if they meet our standards in terms of cosmetic specificity. If not, we then carry out tests to gradually source ingredients that meet cosmetics industry standards. This is not easy, and it takes time, because there are a certain number of specificities that the supplier has to develop in his production.”

5. Challenges and Obstacles

5.1 Supplier issues

- *Difficulties finding local suppliers:*

For specific ingredients, the CEO of Benamôr 1925 encounters problems: “We've been trying for years to collaborate with producers of specific ingredients, but it's not always easy. We have many good producers in Portugal, but in terms of ingredients for cosmetics it's more difficult. We have difficult access to Portuguese suppliers able to provide us with all the ingredients we would like. This is a real problem. For example, I've been looking for an organic Portuguese rose for years, so I can say that our Rosto range is organic. This is a real obstacle for us in terms of naturalness, and in the future it could harm our brand reputation. We would like to do more in terms of naturalness, but we're blocked in terms of suppliers in Portugal.” (Pierre Stark). For Andreia Lança Magarreiro: “Finding local and high-quality natural ingredients consistently and sustainably can be challenging due to factors such as environmental fluctuations, supply chain disruptions, and ethical considerations. Maintaining a reliable and ethical supply chain while meeting consumer demand for natural ingredients requires ongoing diligence and resource allocation.”

5.2 Consumer skepticism

- *Managing consumer expectations:*

Consumer expectations can be difficult to satisfy because of the blurred lines on effectiveness and safety of natural products: “First of all, what is efficiency? It's all about managing consumer expectations, and this differs greatly depending on the part of the body. For example, when it comes to the face, consumers have a lot of expectations linked to brand positioning and claims.” (Pierre Stark). The CEO talks also about skepticism: “Skepticism is quite common, normal and above all human in the cosmetics industry. People want results that are proven, so we either prove them through clinical tests or consumer tests. Consumer tests, like the one to reduce skin dullness. We send the product with a questionnaire to a certain number of people. For Elixir, we did this with 30 people. We ask them questions and then we can record the results on our products. When it comes to safety, it's dermatological tests and evidence that can reassure consumers. When products are dermatologically tested, consumers are much more reassured and therefore less skeptical.” (Pierre Stark)

For Andreia Lança Magarreiro, it is also complicated to find a right balance between using natural ingredients and making efficient products: “Meeting consumer expectations for product performance and efficacy while prioritizing safe and natural ingredients is always a delicate balancing act.”

5.3 Regulatory compliance

- *Navigating complex regulatory standards:*

In the clean beauty industry, regulatory standards are blurred and evolve rapidly: “Adhering to regulatory standards and compliance requirements for labeling and claims related to safe and natural ingredients can be complex and subject to scrutiny. Ensuring compliance with evolving regulations while maintaining transparency and consumer trust necessitates ongoing monitoring and adaptation.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro). “We try not to greenwash, even though it's very easy and tempting. But since there are no regulations in this area, it's quite complicated. Every brand talks about naturalness these days. In some cases, we might even wonder where the line is between greenwashing and reality.” (Pierre Stark)

5.4 Competitive landscape

- *Crowded market:*

The Global Brand Director insists on the difficulty of standing out in the market: “In a crowded marketplace, standing out among competitors that also have safe and natural ingredient claims requires continuous innovation and differentiation.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro)

- *Challenge to showcase Portuguese identity:*

“The further away we are from Portugal, the more difficult it is to convey our values. That's why it's important that our products reflect our values, and that's where the difficulty lies. When we're in an environment that isn't personalized abroad, it's difficult for an independent brand to convey that identity.” (Pierre Stark)

6. Innovation and product development

6.1 Consumer feedback

- *Active feedback collection:*

In order to keep an eye on the trends and consumers' tastes, the brand is using different strategies to collect feedback: “I feel like the brand actively seeks consumer feedback through surveys, social media interactions and product reviews. The goal is to influence product development and improvement and to ensure alignment with consumer preferences for safe and natural ingredients. I think not so much in relation to the use of

natural ingredients, as this is already standard practice for the brand, but above all with regard to packaging, product scents, etc.” (Ana Medeiros). “Part of the feedback we get from consumers is via social networks. We know quite a few consumers who respond to us on social networks.” (Pierre Stark). “Benamôr actively incorporates consumer feedback and preferences into its product development process with sporadic surveys and feedback requests through our email database.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro). Joana Mauricio specifies that: “There are some formulas that sometimes are adjusted and reformulated through real feedback.” (Joana Mauricio).

- *Listening in stores:*

More than collecting feedback through the internet, the salespeople in stores are really close from the consumers: “We maintain a close relation with stores and the retail manager, collecting insights directly from consumers through our stores teams.” (Joana Mauricio). “We feel that we are quite present in terms of feedback. We also have the stores who report the slightest piece of information. So as soon as there's a problem, we know about it very quickly. Consumers buy, come back, warn us and communicate. We have a very short information circuit.” (Pierre Stark). “Benamôr actively incorporates consumer feedback and preferences into its product development process with active listening in our stores : we actively listen to our customers feedback (in store or by email) about products they would like to see in our brand, questions or doubts about ingredients, etc, and this feedback is always shared with our marketing team.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro). As it is for incorporating feedback, Inês Henriques explains: ““To incorporate consumer feedback and preferences, research is carried out to understand consumer preferences regarding ingredients, textures, fragrances...”

6.2 Adapting to trends

- *Consumer demand for specific ingredients:*

“Benamôr conducts thorough market research to stay informed about evolving consumer preferences and trends in the beauty market. This helps them understand the demand for specific ingredients and formulations that align with our brand USP and our commitment to safety and naturalness.” (Andreia Lança Magarreiro). For example, one trend of the following year was products with a natural alternative to retinol, which is bakuchiol. The brand created their first Elixir made of this ingredient.

Some consumers also seek more technical products with a proven efficiency on skin problems: “L'Élixir is a more highly valued, more technical product with proven, more effective benefits. Efforts are being made at the product level, and therefore at the category level of our brand portfolio, to move products towards more technical aspects that deliver real benefits that consumers have a right to expect from products like skincare. “The brand is moving more and more in this direction, but not in a radical way, as this is not the spirit of the brand. Our values are not to make technical products, but to make products from natural ingredients.” (Pierre Stark)

- *Evolving wants and needs:*

The CEO of Benamôr explains that the clean beauty movement is growing more and more nowadays: “It's clear that when we talk about naturalness in terms of ingredients, we're talking about things that are fairly light in terms of active ingredients, compared to the imaginary image someone has of active ingredients in skincare. But this is changing a lot, because women are increasingly looking for natural products, not just for the body, but even more so for the face. On the body, they're looking for fairly classic benefits; for example, anti-aging in this area is much less sought-after. On the body, they're looking for intense hydration, and these elements are fairly easy to prove, as there are some well-known and effective active ingredients for hydration.”

6.1.2 Discussion

The aim of these interviews was to analyze Benamôr employees' opinions on the claims about safe and natural ingredients in their products, in relation to the clean beauty brand reputation.

To begin with, the participants explained that Benamôr 1925 respects the criteria of clean beauty brands regarding their communication and branding strategy. The first important point in their communication is transparency with regard to the information available on the ingredients used in product formulas. Indeed, according to Santoro (2022), the elements that define clean beauty are safety, non-toxicity and transparent labeling. Based on the author, clean beauty is frequently linked to ideas like using natural materials, adopting sustainable methods, purchasing vegan and cruelty-free goods, and more (2022). The choice of the marketing team of Benamôr is to communicate most of the time through naturalness indexes for each of their products. The brand's CEO, Pierre Stark, explained that the lists of

ingredients in the formulas were clearly detailed not only on the website, but also on the product packaging. For the employees, the brand is particularly careful to provide as much information as possible about the ingredients used in the products. As we have seen previously in the literature review: “Transparent labels allow consumers to readily examine product information and avoid misleading phrases and marketing gimmicks” (Santoro, 2022). Brands that use transparent labeling want to show consumers that they are worthy of trust and demonstrate their commitment to honesty. As the brand's DNA is based on naturalness, Benamôr 1925 wants to communicate what they really do and counter greenwashing. The natural components of their products are highlighted on the website, in newsletters, blog posts, or even on social networks through visuals, collaborations and partnerships with influential personalities. The idea is to communicate openly about natural ingredients and their benefits.

The second major element in the brand's communication strategy is educational content for potential consumers. Indeed, Benamôr tries to educate its customers as much as possible via various communication channels. In the context of environmental or green marketing, consumer education is very important (Ozanne and Murray, 1991 in Burton, 2002). Actually, the educational content marketing strategy adopted by cosmetics brands is known to be really efficient. According to Amberg and Fogarassy, accurate product feature knowledge, trustworthy information, and deliberate consumer education all have a significant impact on decision-making processes (2019). Pierre Stark believes that reinforcing the natural character of their brand through educational content enables the brand to consolidate its image in the clean beauty market. From time to time, the brand highlights certain collections via advertising campaigns to emphasize the benefits of certain ingredients. This was the case, for example, in November 2023 for the collection paying tribute to the famous Ginja, which is well known in Portugal. Production processes are also widely explained, and photos of the Carregado laboratory are featured on the brand's social networks. According to Frankel (1992), consumer education is crucial to clear up uncertainty and deceptive labeling associated with certain green products. By also depicting production processes and featuring pictures of the factory in Carregado on social media and their website, Benamôr ensures to build trust amongst its audience : “Instead of concealing production processes and solely promoting final products, advertisements for natural products celebrate the entire process” (Todd, 2004). Besides, pictograms are used by the marketing team to make educational

content appear more attractive to consumers. On the website, for example, visitors can see that Benamôr 1925 products are cruelty-free, 99% natural, 100% recyclable, made in Portugal and handmade. These elements match perfectly with what the general public thinks of clean beauty. As Marta Gonçalves says, "the most commonly adopted definition of 'clean beauty' corresponds to products formulated without toxic ingredients, which are environmentally friendly, sustainable and cruelty-free" (2023). In physical stores, the emphasis is on decoration. The brand's CEO insisted that economic resources are limited, so the strategy was to highlight the natural aspect in the new stores, with the aim of taking consumers into a real botanical garden in Portugal. Indeed, according to Atkinson and Kim (2015) Biloslavo and Trnavčević (2009) and Hansen (2015), marketing teams have created a green image by using eye-catching pictures of the natural world to identify their brands in an environmentally conscious manner, as Benamôr is doing in their physical stores. The walls, painted in green in Benamôr Loreto complements Labrecque's comments, which stated that green has been widely employed in marketing to highlight environmentally concerned businesses or initiatives (2013).

Collaborations and partnerships with personalities who care about the planet and the safety of ingredients in cosmetics is also a major asset for a brand in the clean beauty market. These influencers act as opinion leaders because they are seen as trustworthy information sources and have the interpersonal communication skills to have an impact on others' judgments (Carpenter & Sherbino, 2010 in Huss, 2022; Fogarassy, 2019). By teaming up with figures of this kind, the brand emphasizes its commitment to the planet and its dedication to naturalness and the use of safe ingredients. Influencer marketing serves to support the brand's core values, reinforces its claims and encourages potential consumers to buy. In fact, research indicates that more than half of American women depend on online reviews and recommendations from social media influencers when doing product research (Tran et al., 2022 in Tran et al., 2022).(Fogarassy, 2019).

The final element that the brand chooses to emphasize in its communications are the positive reviews of loyal customers. The brand tries to capitalize as much as possible on the positive experiences customers have with the brand, to encourage others to try natural products in their cosmetics. Given that "online exchanges of ideas, opinions, and experiences are usually seen by consumers as more reliable than corporate marketing messaging"

(Santiago & Castelo, 2020 in Huss, 2022), we can say that positive reviews serve as a kind of promotion for the brand.

This second part will show that Benamôr 1925 employees see the brand as a great supporter of safety and naturalness claims in the cosmetics market today. Firstly, the brand made a huge number of changes to its formulas when it changed ownership in 2015. In Pierre Stark's opinion, even though the spirit of the brand has always been to use natural ingredients since its creation, it was necessary to remove certain components from the formulas to make them up to date. In fact, most companies have made sustainability a top priority in the last few years and are becoming more conscious of the chemicals used in the production of their cosmetics, notably thanks to content that prevents the use of cosmetics items: "many documentaries are stating the harmful effects of chemical-based cosmetics." (S. Acharya et al., 2021). This is why parabens have been completely removed, as have mineral oils. Genuine beauty products were defined by NielsenIQ as those devoid of parabens, sulfates, phthalates and artificial colors. Moreover, the last few years have shown cosmetics producers that consumers are increasingly interested in natural products and are switching away from chemicals: "Customers are seeking goods that don't hurt their skin or the environment and are growing more conscious of their health and wellness. This is why the way that products function environmentally and how raw materials are manufactured are becoming important factors for businesses" (S. Acharya et al., 2021). Actually, Benamôr 1925's commitment to the naturalness of its products was always important, but it is even stronger nowadays. The main feature of the new formulas is that they contain a very high percentage of natural ingredients. In fact, new formulas are never launched on the market with less than 90% of natural ingredients and even reach 95%, whenever possible.

Benamôr 1925 cosmetics are also tested and certified to support claims for safe, natural ingredients. Of course, all the brand's products undergo dermatological testing in its laboratories in Portugal. The brand's CEO maintains that the brand's responsibility is paramount in the safety of the ingredients it brings to market. The brand's global director points out that the ingredients used in the formulas are subjected to regular and rigorous quality controls to ensure that the products are made only from top-quality ingredients and are as effective as possible. This guarantee of quality aligns with the vision of Ottman about clean items that must be of excellent quality (1993). Secondly, the formulas created by the

laboratory are of course tested to demonstrate their effectiveness for consumers. Tests are carried out in line with product claims. For example, the Rosto Elixir launched in early 2023 promises moisturized skin for 24 hours, as the formula has been tested to support this claim.

At the heart of Benamôr's product formulas are the quality standards of its raw material suppliers. The brand's suppliers must demonstrate and guarantee the safety of their ingredients through testing. If consumers encounter a problem with a product, they will turn to Benamôr, which is why the brand pays extreme attention to the quality of the raw materials used in its cosmetics. Laboratory director Andreia Rodrigues assures that the brand works with the best suppliers in the country who respect the three pillars of the brand: naturality, quality and nationality.

This section will focus on the aspects that Benamôr 1925's employees highlight in terms of brand differentiation in the cosmetics market. Benamôr 1925 stands out for its clean beauty commitment and strong Portuguese roots, setting it apart from other brands. While many clean beauty businesses use branding to create a unique identity, Benamôr 1925's pride in its origins makes its brand even more distinct. For global brand director Andreia Lança Magarreiro, the traditional element is decisive. From her point of view, the brand is unique because of its own history and heritage. The fact that since its creation in 1925, the brand has always preferred to use natural ingredients is very important, as it shows that the brand's roots are still present today, and that the desire to make natural cosmetics is not a marketing tactic. This storytelling emphasizes and promotes Portugal throughout the world, creating a strong emotional bond with consumers, even more so when they are Portuguese. Effectively, using storytelling to engage with consumers and spread a brand's message is a useful tactic for assisting businesses in building trust, creating an emotional connection with a target market, and setting a brand apart from rivals (The Ingenium Space, 2023). Furthermore, many of the collections are genuine tributes to Portugal. Rosemary collection, for example, pays tribute to an herb much used in Portuguese cuisine, and the Nata collection was also created as a nod to the famous Portuguese pastry. This is also what Pierre Stark means when he speaks of "portugalidade", which is part of their unique selling proposition today. In fact, since the brand was acquired in 2015, the emphasis of their communication has been more on "portugalidade" than on the clean composition of the products, since many brands are focusing on this criterion these days. Storytelling is crucial for brands to stand out, especially

in a crowded market. By highlighting its pride in its Portuguese heritage, Benamôr 1925 shares a unique story that distinguishes it from competitors. This specific story used by the brand attracts attention and reinforces its distinct identity in the beauty industry.

Another element of differentiation for the brand is the fact that they source the large majority of their ingredients locally. Benamôr has established long-standing partnerships with the best producers in the country, according to laboratory director Andreia Rodrigues. The relationship of trust with the supplier is all the more important for a brand like Benamôr 1925, which strives for ultimate quality. The brand also establishes many direct partnerships that promote certain producers, such as body scrubs developed with Portuguese salt and sugar, and a thermal water mist developed with water from Termas de São Pedro do Sul.

As we previously stated, the brand's USP now places more of an emphasis on Benamôr's Portuguese heritage than it does on safe and natural components. However, as using safe and natural components still constitutes a significant portion of the brand's identity, they decided to make their unique selling proposition more clear by talking about their high natural index in addition to employing just the use of safe and natural ingredients in their formulas. Benamôr 1925's commitment to increasing the naturalness of its products aligns perfectly with consumer priorities. The brand's decisions to exclude harmful ingredients, focus on natural elements like oils, and clearly display the naturalness index on packaging cater directly to the growing demand for natural ingredients, which 40.2% of consumers prioritize when purchasing beauty products (Lee, 2021). Additionally, Benamôr's emphasis on environmental responsibility resonates with consumers who value sustainable practices: "Consumers are changing their shopping habits as they are becoming more mindful of natural and environmentally-friendly products" (Thurmer et al., 2022; Nielsen, 2019).

The fourth element emphasized by Benamôr 1925 employees is the fact that the brand is very transparent in its communication and that consumers can trust it. In her analysis of the value of trust-building for businesses, Clara Santoro (2022) said that consumers nowadays are more interested in investing in companies that actively address social and environmental concerns that are important to them. In order to maintain their client base and obtain a competitive edge, businesses must adjust to these new dynamics, as trust is a crucial role in customers' purchasing decisions. In order to build a relationship of trust with its customers,

Benamôr 1925's ensures that its identity reflects the personality of target consumers who can feel close to and similar to Benamôr. Indeed, by prioritizing natural and safe ingredients, the brand aligns itself with the values of consumers seeking clean and ethical skincare options. To counter the skepticism of some target customers, Pierre Stark explains that the brand's communication makes sure to document as much evidence as possible to reassure skeptics, and that this has a positive impact on their brand reputation. This approach aligns with the perspective put forth by Luchs et al. (2010), who contend that a product's potential negative perception can be diminished and credibility in green claims increased through the skillful use of explicit cues about the product's strengths (Claudon et al. 2021). The emphasis on open and honest communication to prevent a bad impression from customers further reinforces the brand's commitment to transparency. Providing a very detailed list of ingredients in product formulations is also very important in the brand's alignment with transparency and honesty: "Brands that demonstrate their dependability, transparency and willingness to take action to ensure product safety will be rewarded by consumers." (Mintel, 2020). In addition, the brand ensures that it has a close relationship with its consumers by frequently responding to customer questions and comments, through the R&D department to incorporate consumer feedback into any new formulas. This proactive involvement coincides with Kate Shepherd's (2020) claim that social media has emerged as an indispensable medium for the exchange of guidance and support. Brands have effectively developed trust with their consumers and followers by being reachable and responsive on the internet.

As for the confidence that the brand tries to convey to its consumers, this is largely built up through the scientific validation of the Benamôr laboratory in Carregado. Various strategies are implemented at this level, such as validating the efficacy of ingredients through tests, or working closely with major associations pioneering natural cosmetics. As we mentioned earlier, calculating the naturalness index of Benamôr formulas is a very important factor in its unique selling proposition. Thanks to the interview I conducted with the laboratory's director, Andreia Rodrigues, we were able to get a more detailed explanation of how this index is calculated. For example, we can see that the lip cream in the Rose Amélie collection has a naturalness percentage of 99.26%. Prior to the launch of all Benamôr products, all products undergo a safety assessment, which includes verifying claims with supplier certificates on technical data, naturalness, origin, and usage conditions. Claim

substantiation is confirmed through a patch test, and for certain products, such as the Revitalizing Face Elixir, we conduct consumer tests. The final step is to display each product's naturalness index on our website for transparency.

As we saw earlier, Benamôr's employees are quite clear-cut when it comes to Benamôr 1925 image in the clean beauty sector. On the other hand, this cosmetics sector is highly competitive and difficult to reach, due to the many obstacles we'll discuss in this section. To begin with, Benamôr is widely recognized for its ingredients, most of which are sourced locally. However, Pierre Stark explained in our interview that finding Portuguese suppliers who meet these standards is very complicated these days. On another front, since the effectiveness of natural skincare products is still highly debatable, it is challenging to control and meet consumer expectations. As we previously said, conducting customer testing to validate certain outcomes for particular goods is one way to overcome this challenge. However, this obstacle is much more difficult because of the extremely complicated and rapidly evolving regulatory requirements pertaining to safe and natural components used in cosmetics. Furthermore, the absence of defined green labeling exacerbates the problem because many cosmetic products use phrases like "vegan" or "eco-friendly" to appeal to ethical customers, even though there is no clear regulation around these labels. Confusion among consumers is increased when manufacturers, suppliers, and advertisements define "green" or "natural" according to their own standards (Cervellon et al., 2011 in Claudon et al., 2021). In a crowded cosmetics market, it can be difficult to stand out from the crowd, which is why it is important for brands to take action in line with the values they promote, and not base their entire DNA on the composition of their products.

The final point to which Benamôr 1925 employees frequently returned was the brand's willingness to innovate. Firstly, the brand pays close attention to feedback from their consumers and tries to continually improve to meet demand. They collect consumer feedback and opinions mainly on social networks, through questionnaires, product reviews, private messages and also by email. In physical stores, sales staff is also very open and attentive to customers' needs, so as to provide the most effective feedback on any returns or problems they may encounter with Benamôr products. The aim of collecting this feedback is to influence the development of new products and the improvement of existing formulas. The idea is also to understand consumers' values and desires, so as to stay in line with their

preferences for safe and natural ingredients. Benamôr is also highly innovative when it comes to following new trends in the world of cosmetics. The brand continues to develop new products based on today's highly sought-after ingredients, and is also expanding in terms of the specificity and technique of certain products. As the clean beauty movement continues to grow, it is vital for the brand to offer more innovative and technical products for maximum effectiveness. On the other hand, Pierre Stark points out that this is not something they want to capitalize on, since more technical products are more expensive and one of the brand's values is to remain very affordable.

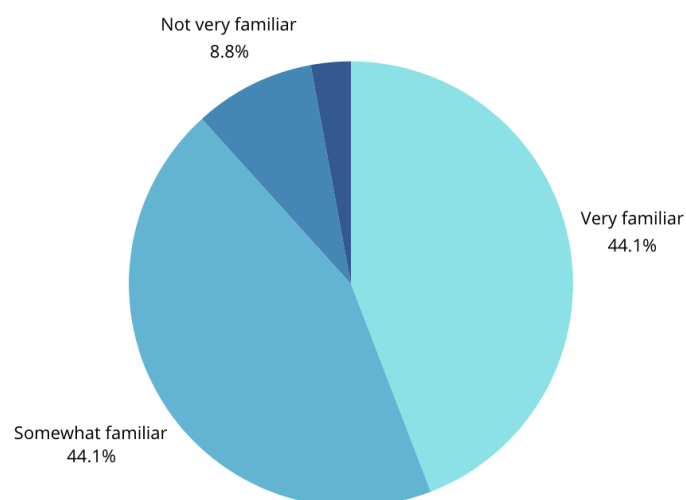
6.2 Questionnaire

6.2.1 Results presentation

1) Relationship with the brand

The first question on the questionnaire is “How familiar are you with the brand Benamôr 1925?”. 44.1% (15) of respondents answered that they were very familiar with Benamôr 1925, while the other 15 were somewhat familiar. On the other hand, 8.8% (3) of respondents didn't consider themselves very familiar with the brand, and one person didn't know the brand at all.

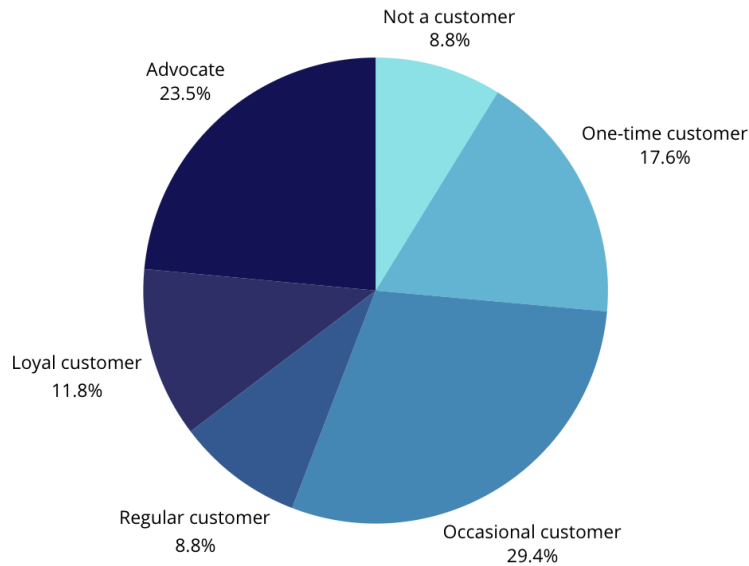
Graph 1 - Familiarity with the brand (n = 34)



The second question was about how participants felt about Benamôr 1925, whether or not they were customers. Three respondents did not consider themselves to be Benamôr

customers. Of the 31 others, 17.6% (6) had purchased a Benamôr product only once, 29.4% (10) considered themselves occasional customers, 8.8% (3) regular buyers, 11.8% (4) loyal customers, and 23.5% (8) often bought and actively recommended the brand to others (advocate).

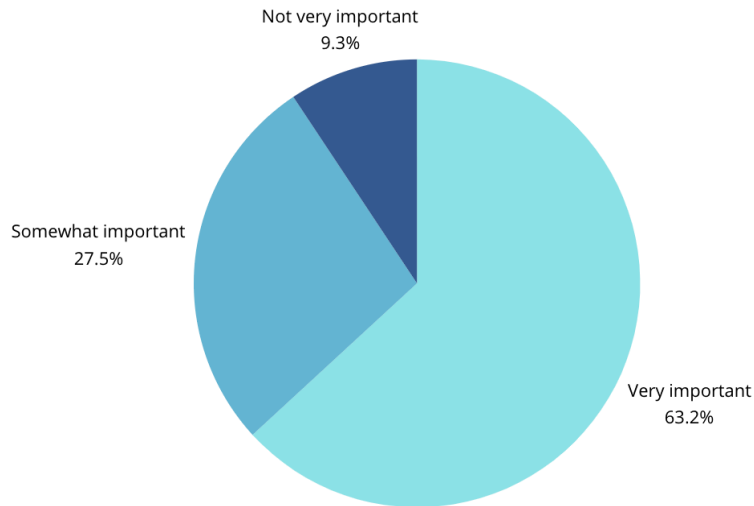
Graph 2 - Self perception in relation to the brand (n = 34)



2) Naturalness of ingredients

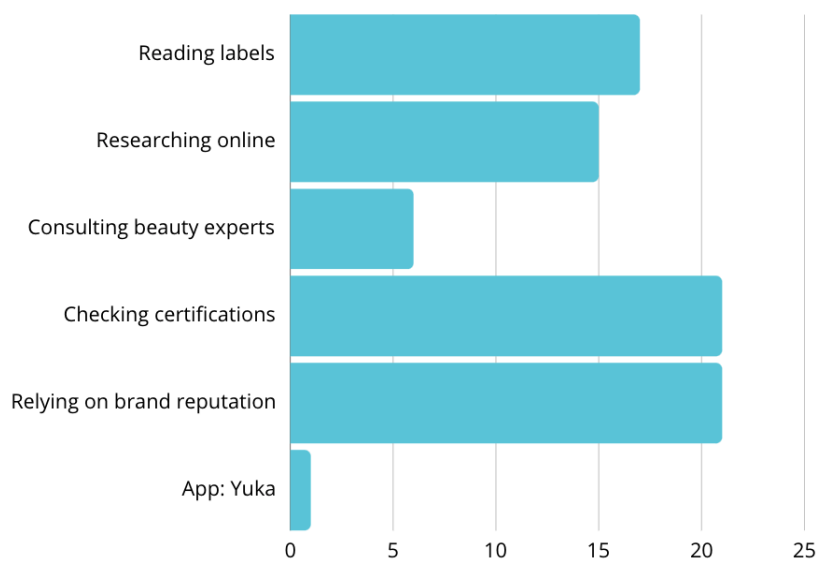
On the subject of natural ingredients, the first question concerns the importance of natural ingredients when choosing cosmetics. 67.6% or 23 people of questionnaire respondents consider the naturalness of ingredients in their beauty products to be very important. 29.4% (10) think it's rather important, and one person thinks it's not really important.

Graph 3 - Importance of natural ingredients in cosmetics (n = 34)



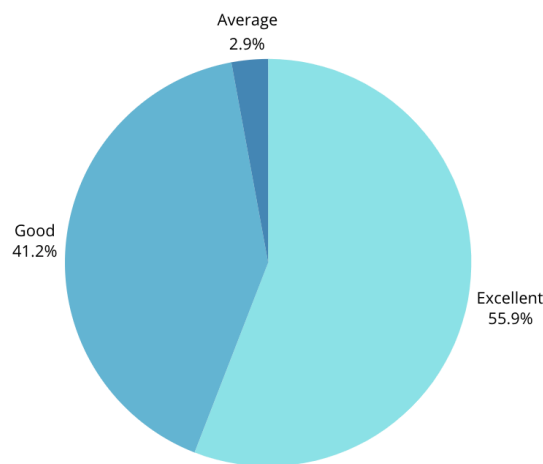
The second question is “How do you verify the naturalness of ingredients in beauty products? The majority (61.8%) of respondents prefer to check certifications (organic, cruelty-free, etc.) and trust brand reputation. 50% (17) read cosmetics labels. 44.1% (15) do online research, including one person on the Yuka app. Finally, 17.6% (6) consult beauty experts.

Graph 4 - Control of ingredients’ naturalness in cosmetics (n = 34)



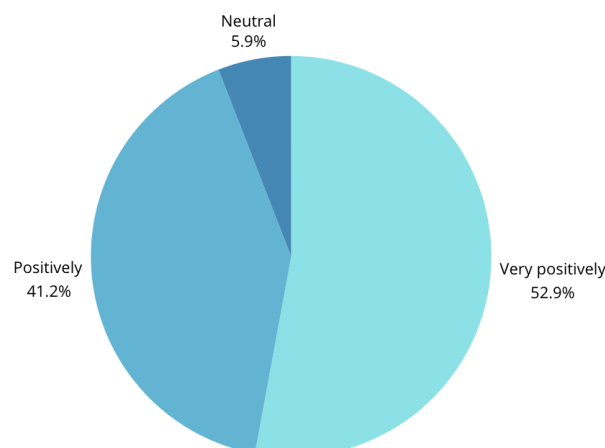
The next question deals with the evaluation of Benamôr 1925 as a user of natural ingredients. For 55.9% or 19 respondents to the questionnaire, Benamôr 1925 has an excellent use of natural ingredients. For 41.2% (14), the rating towards the use of natural ingredients is “good”. And finally, one person thought that the brand's use of natural ingredients was average.

Graph 5 - Natural ingredient usage by the brand (n = 34)



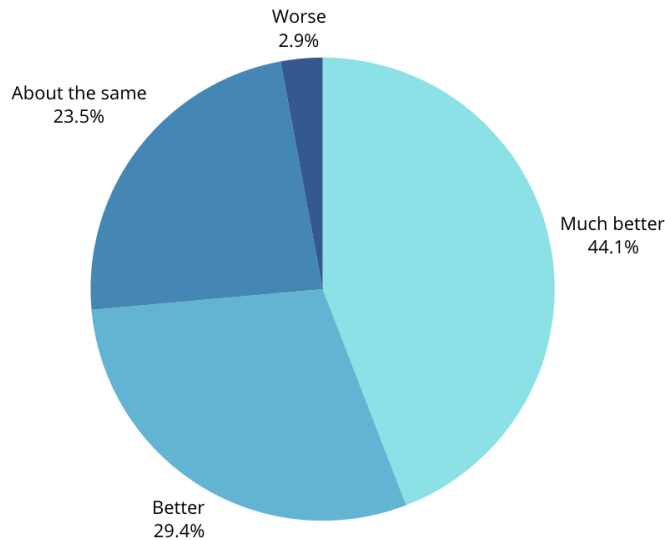
The fourth question in this section is “How do natural ingredient claims influence your perception of Benamôr 1925?”. 52.9% (18) of respondents said that their perception of the brand is influenced very positively by natural ingredients. 41.2% or 14 people said they were positively influenced, and 5.9% (2 people) were neutral.

Graph 6 - Impact of natural ingredient claims on brand’s perception (n = 34)



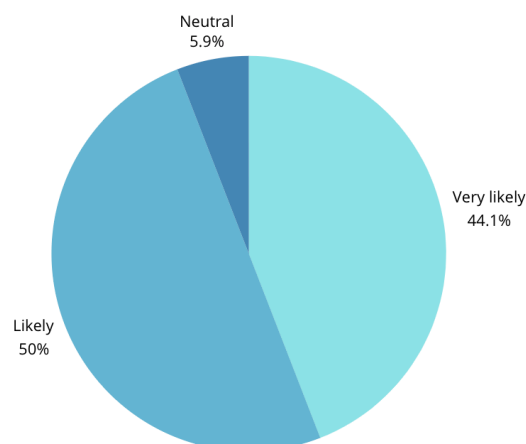
Respondents were then asked: “How do you compare Benamôr 1925 to other clean beauty brands in terms of naturalness? 44.1% or 15 people answered “much better”. 29.4% (10) said the brand was better in terms of naturalness. Finally, 23.5% (8) people said it was similar and one person chose worse.

Graph 7 - Comparison on the market in terms of naturalness (n = 34)



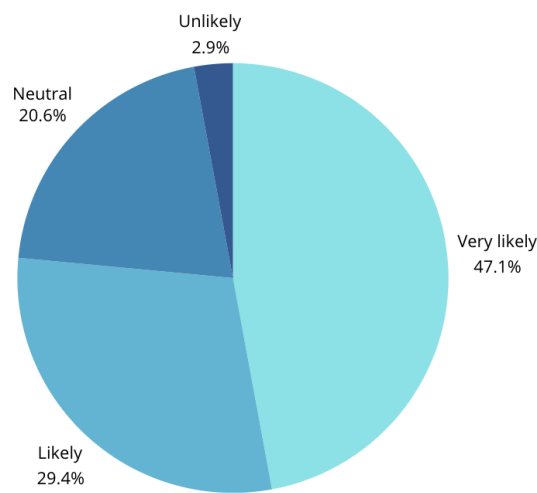
The next question asked participants whether they were likely to buy Benamôr 1925 brand products in the future based on the use of natural ingredients. The responses were 50% (17) “very likely”, 44.1% (15) “likely” and 5.9% “neutral”.

Graph 8 - Likelihood on buying Benamôr 1925 products based on naturalness claims (n = 34)



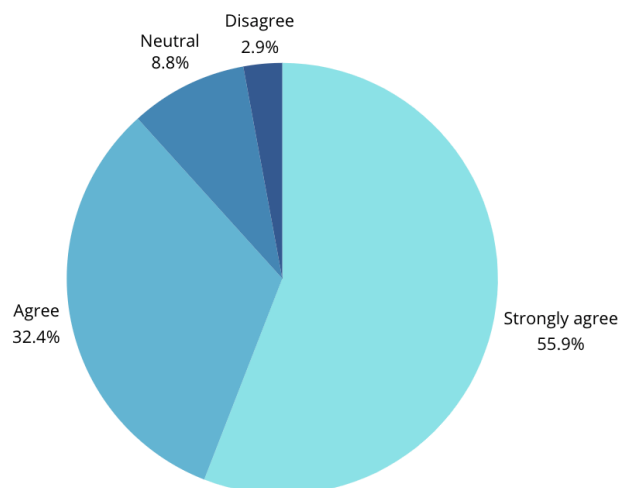
Next, the question corresponds to the likelihood of respondents recommending the brand to others on the basis of their natural ingredient claims. 47.1% or 16 people answered that it was very likely. 29.4% (10) said it was likely and 20.6% (7) remained neutral. Finally, one person said it was unlikely that they would recommend the brand to others with regard to their use of natural ingredients.

Graph 9 - Likelihood on recommending Benamôr 1925 products based on naturalness claims (n = 34)



The last question in this section concerns whether participants agree with the statement “Natural ingredients are safer than synthetic ingredients in beauty products”. 55.9% (19) strongly agreed with this statement and 32.4% (11) agreed. Three people (8.8%) were neutral and one person disagreed.

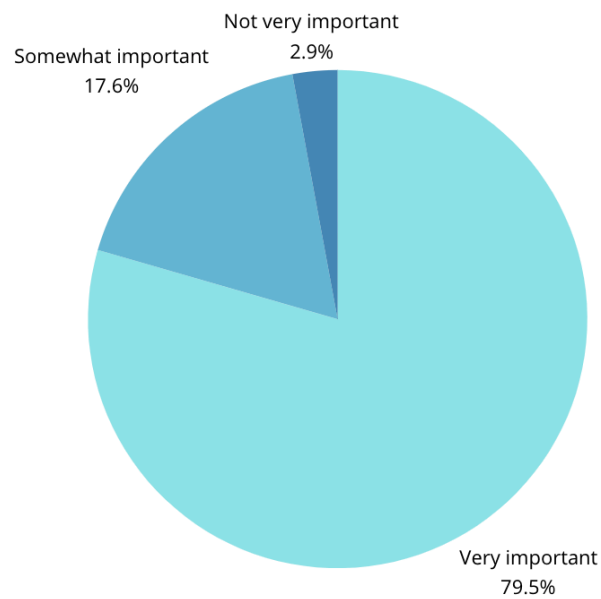
Graph 10 - Perceived safety of natural vs. synthetic ingredients in beauty products (n = 34)



3) Safety of ingredients

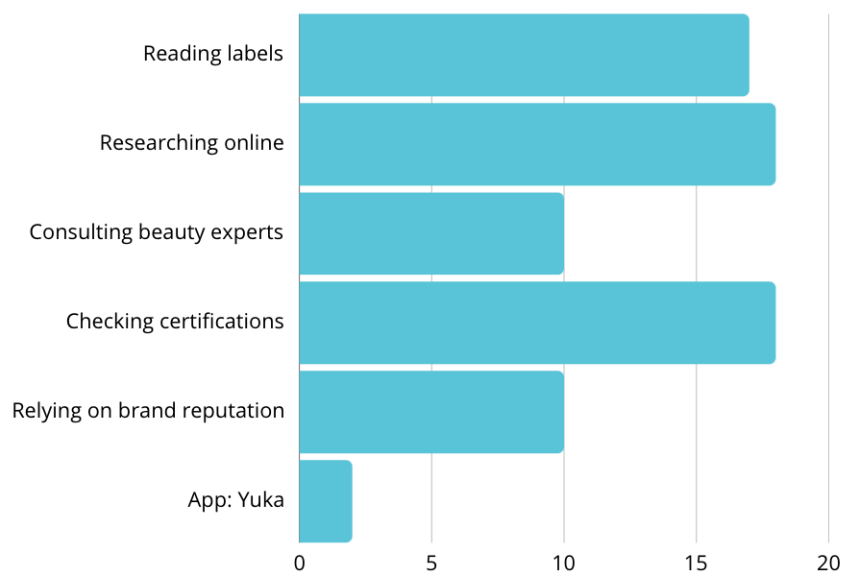
The participants were asked how important ingredient safety is to them while making cosmetic purchases. 27, or 79,4% of respondents, said that this was very important, while 6, or 17,6%, said that it was somewhat important. Someone responded that it didn't really matter to him/her.

Graph 11 - Importance of safe ingredients in cosmetics (n = 34)



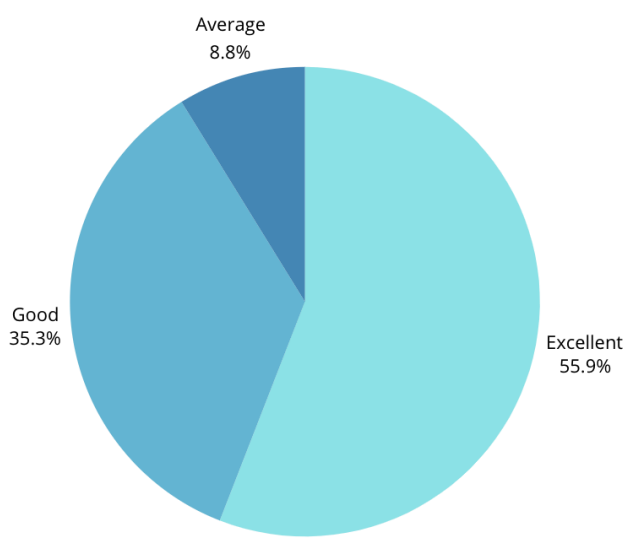
Responding to the question, "How do you verify the safety of ingredients in beauty products?", 18 people, or 52,9%, said they conducted online research and checked the product certificates. Out of the respondents, 17 percent, or 50%, said they had read the explanations. Based on the brand's reputation, 10 people, or 29.4%, responded by consulting specialists. Once again, two people mentioned the application "Yuka".

Graph 12 - Control of ingredients' safety in cosmetics (n = 34)



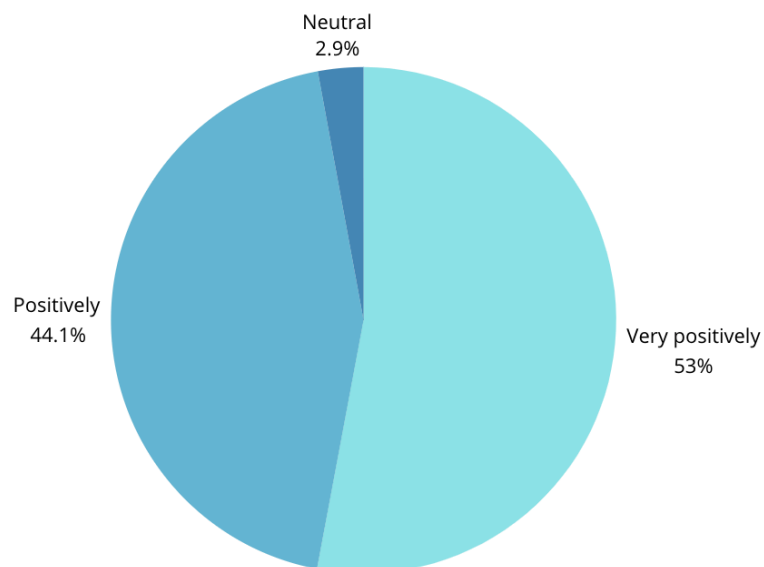
The following question asked, "How would you rate Benamôr 1925 on the use of safe ingredients?" and 19 out of 55 respondents said "excellent," followed by 35,3% (12) who said "good" and 8,8% (3) who said "average".

Graph 13 - Safe ingredients usage by the brand (n = 34)



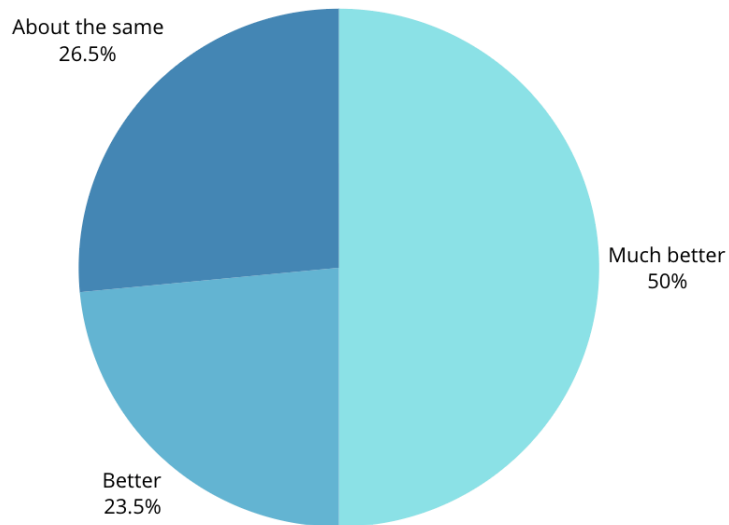
The participants were then questioned on the impact of ingredient safety allegations on cosmetic products. 52,9% or 18 people reported that they were greatly positively influenced by them, while 44,1% or 15 people reported a good influence. Finally, someone said they remained neutral toward these claims.

Graph 14 - Impact of safe ingredient claims on brand's perception (n = 34)



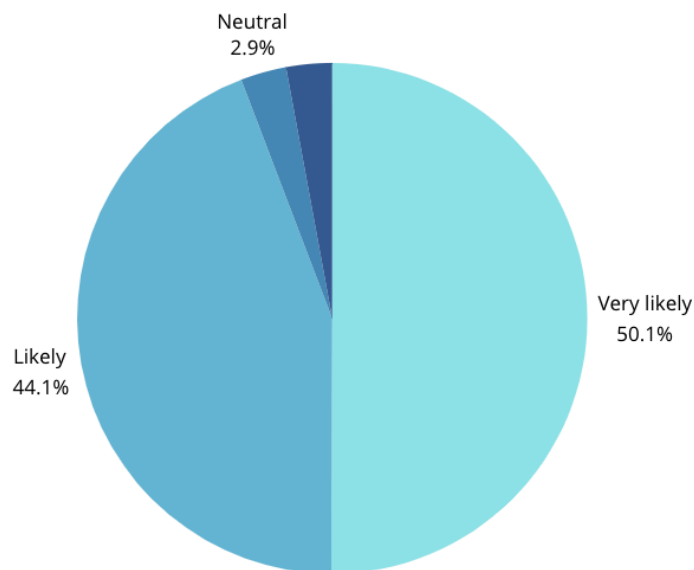
The following query concerns a comparison of Benamôr 1925's level of safety with that of other cosmetic brands. Of those questioned, 50% (17) said that Benamôr was much better and 23,5% (8) said it was better. On the contrary, 9 people or 26,5% of respondents said that Benamôr was equivalent to other brands on this side.

Graph 15 - Comparison on the market in terms of safety (n = 34)



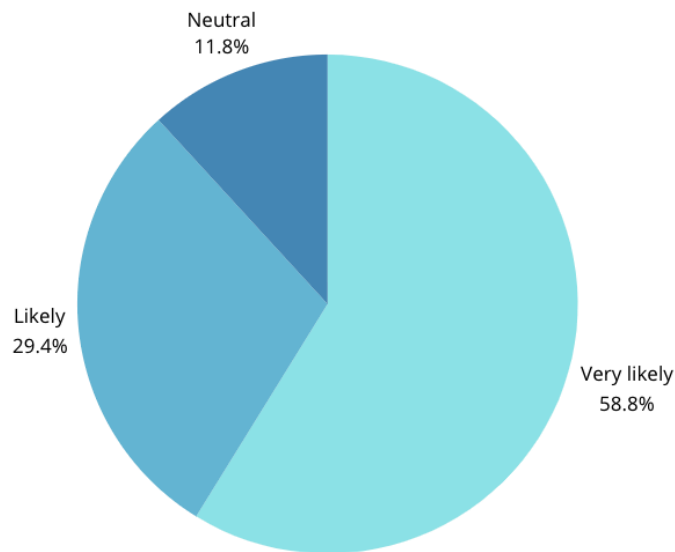
The next question concerns the likelihood of respondents purchasing Benamôr products in the future based on their safe ingredient claims. 50% (17) of participants answered “very likely”, 44.1% (15) “likely” while one person answered “neutral” and another one “unlikely”.

Graph 16 - Likelihood on buying Benamôr 1925 products based on safety claims (n = 34)



The last question in this section is “How likely would you be to recommend Benamôr 1925 products to others based on their safety claims?”. 58.8% (20) people answered “very likely”, 29.4% (10) answered “likely” and 11.8% (4) answered “neutral”.

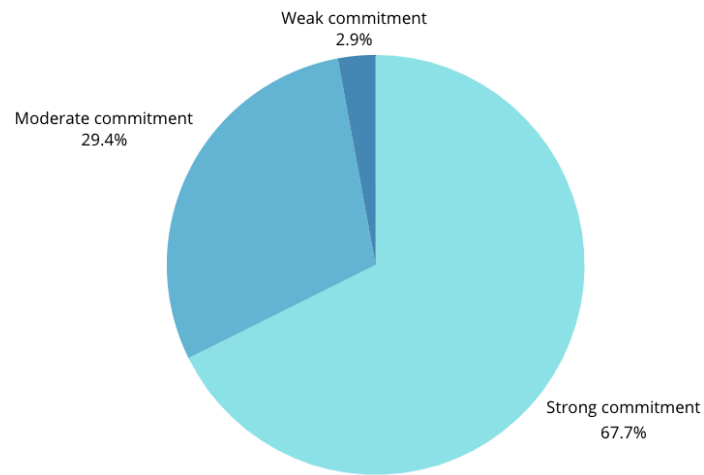
Graph 17 - Likelihood on recommending Benamôr 1925 products based on safety claims (n = 34)



4) Perception of the brand

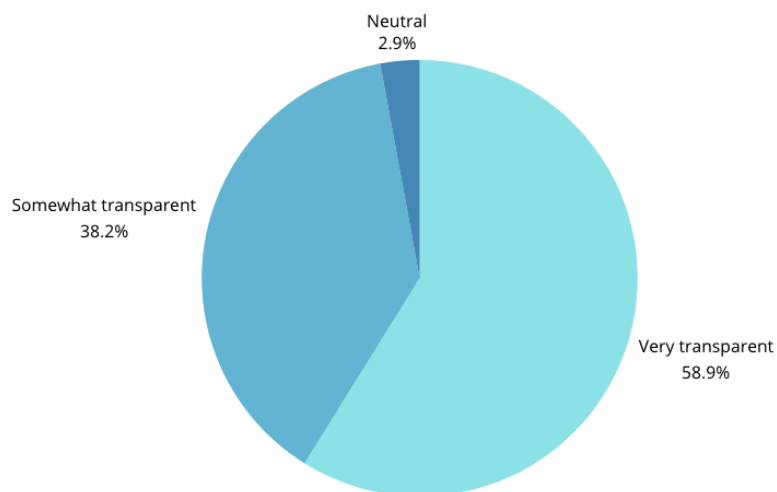
The first question in this section concerns Benamôr's 1925 involvement in the “clean beauty” movement. 67.6% (23) answered that the brand had a strong commitment to this movement and 29.4% (10) answered a moderate commitment. However, one person answered that the brand had a weak commitment.

Graph 18 - Involvement of Benamôr 1925 in the clean beauty movement (n = 34)



The second question is about the brand's transparency on the ingredients they use. 58.8% (20) of participants think the brand is very transparent, 38.2% (13) think it's somewhat transparent and one person is neutral on the subject.

Graph 19 - Transparency of Benamôr 1925 about their products' ingredients (n = 34)



Participants were asked to see Benamôr 1925 as a person and characterize his or her personality in terms of a variety of attributes in the last question of this section.

- Daring: Responses to the question of whether Benamôr 1925 would have a daring personality were mixed; three respondents strongly disagreed, eight disagreed, fifteen were indifferent, three slightly agreed, and five entirely agreed.
- Reliable: The majority of participants saw this feature as fitting; 1 rated it at slightly disagreeing, 6 as neutral, 9 as slightly agreeing, and 18 as completely agreeing.
- Snobby: Only one person somewhat agreed with this feature, while three were neutral, 24 strongly disapproved, and six somewhat agreed. The majority of respondents disagreed with this trait.
- Honest: This quality is highly regarded; 3 respondents gave it a score of 2, 5 were indifferent, 14 agreed slightly, and 12 agreed completely.
- Trendy: The responses were varied, with 8 respondents being indifferent, 6 slightly agreeing, 8 entirely agreeing, and 1 person completely disagreeing.
- Hardworking: Benamôr 1925 was considered hard-working by many; just one person disagreed fully, three disagreed slightly, eight were impartial, eleven agreed somewhat, and eleven agreed totally.
- Masculine: There was a general disagreement with this attribute; 23 respondents disagreed entirely, 7 disagreed slightly, and 4 were indifferent.
- Selfish: The majority of participants disapproved of this feature, with four disagreeing slightly and thirty disapproving totally.
- Casual: There was a tendency for disagreement; 5 respondents disagreed fully, 14 disagreed slightly, 12 were indifferent, 2 somewhat agreed, and 1 absolutely agreed.
- Exciting: There were differing opinions expressed in the responses: 1 person disagreed fully, 11 disagreed slightly, 11 were indifferent, 8 agreed somewhat, and 3 agreed absolutely.
- Secure: This attribute was highly rated; three respondents gave it a score of two, four were indifferent, ten agreed slightly, and seventeen agreed completely.

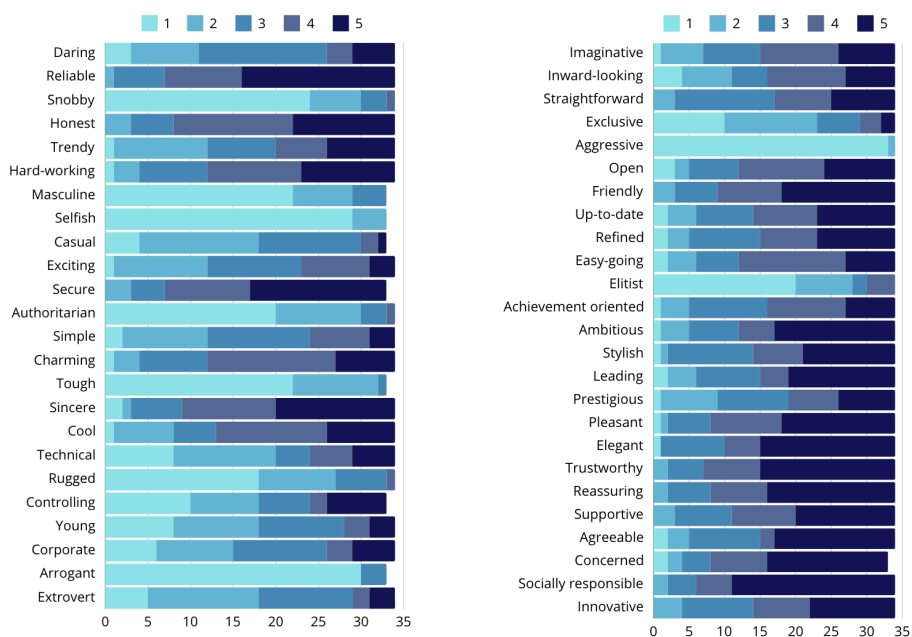
- Authoritarian: Generally disagreed with; twenty respondents disagreed fully, ten disagreed considerably, three disagreed moderately, and one partially agreed.
- Simple: There was a mixed bag of opinions: two persons strongly disagreed, ten disagreed slightly, twelve were indifferent, seven somewhat agreed, and three entirely agreed.
- Charming: A lot of people thought Benamôr 1925 was charming. Only a few disagreed fully, three disagreed slightly, eight were indifferent, fifteen agreed somewhat, and seven agreed entirely.
- Tough: The majority of respondents rejected this feature, with 23 opposing strongly, 10 disagreeing moderately, and 1 remaining neutral.
- Sincere: According to the survey, 14 respondents agreed that Benamôr 1925 was sincere, whereas 2 disagreed fully, 1 disagreed slightly, 6 were undecided, and 11 agreed somewhat.
- Cool: Views differed; 1 person disagreed fully, 7 disagreed slightly, 5 agreed somewhat, 13 agreed somewhat, and 8 agreed wholly.
- Technical: Opinions were divided: eight respondents disagreed strongly, twelve disagreed somewhat, four had no opinion, five expressed some agreement, and five expressed entire agreement.
- Rugged: Of the participants, the majority (18 totally disagree, 9 slightly disagree, 6 being indifferent, and 1 somewhat agreeing) did not link this attribute with Benamôr 1925.
- Controlling: Ten respondents disagreed fully, eight disagreed slightly, six expressed neutrality, two expressed some agreement, and seven expressed absolute agreement.
- Young: Opinions on this attribute were divided; nine respondents disagreed fully, ten disagreed slightly, ten expressed neutrality, three agreed somewhat, and three expressed absolute agreement.
- Corporate: Reactions differed; 6 respondents disagreed strongly, 9 disagreed slightly, 11 were indifferent, 3 somewhat agreed, and 5 entirely agreed.

- Arrogant: Thirty-one respondents disagreed fully, while three others had no opinion at all.
- Extrovert: Responses to this attribute were divided; five respondents disagreed entirely, thirteen disagreed slightly, eleven were indifferent, two agreed somewhat, and three agreed absolutely.
- Imaginative: Reactions differed; 6 respondents disagreed slightly, 8 were indifferent, 11 agreed somewhat, and 8 agreed entirely that Benamôr 1925 would be inventive.
- Inward-looking: There were differing views expressed for this attribute; four respondents disagreed fully, seven disagreed slightly, five were indifferent, eleven partly agreed, and seven totally agreed.
- Straightforward: Benamôr 1925 was viewed as straightforward by the majority of participants, with 3 strongly objecting, 14 remaining neutral, 8 slightly agreeing, and 9 entirely agreeing.
- Exclusive: Generally considered to be non-exclusive, 10 respondents strongly disagreed, 13 disagreed slightly, 6 disagreed, 3 agreed somewhat, and 2 agreed entirely.
- Aggressive: Only one person disagreed somewhat with this feature, out of the 33 who strongly disapproved of it.
- Open: Benamôr 1925 was seen by many as being open, with three respondents fully disagreeing, two disagreeing slightly, seven being indifferent, twelve somewhat agreeing, and ten totally agreeing.
- Friendly: The majority of respondents viewed the brand as friendly, with three somewhat disagreeing, six indifferent, nine somewhat agreeing, and sixteen entirely agreeing.
- Up-to-date: Many agreed that it was up-to-date; two disagreed entirely, four disagreed slightly, eight were indifferent, nine agreed somewhat, and eleven agreed absolutely.
- Refined: Ten respondents were indifferent, eight agreed slightly, eleven agreed absolutely, two disagreed completely, and three disagreed somewhat with the brand.

- Easy-going: Benamôr 1925 was perceived as being easy-going based on responses, with two respondents fully disagreeing, four somewhat disagreeing, six being neutral, fifteen slightly agreeing, and seven totally.
- Elitist: Twenty respondents strongly disagreed, eight disagreed, two were indifferent, and four somewhat agreed that Benamôr 1925 was not elitist. The majority of participants did not share this opinion.
- Achievement-oriented: Responses to this feature were divided; 1 person disagreed entirely, 4 disagreed slightly, 11 were indifferent, 11 agreed somewhat, and 7 agreed absolutely.
- Ambitious: The majority of respondents judged Benamôr 1925 to be ambitious; just a single person disagreed fully, four disagreed slightly, seven were indifferent, five partly agreed, and seventeen agreed completely.
- Stylish: Thirteen respondents agreed that the brand was stylish, while twelve disagreed slightly, one person disagreed fully, and twelve were neutral.
- Leading: Benamôr 1925 was viewed as a leader by many participants, with two persons utterly disapproving, four slightly disagreeing, nine being indifferent, four somewhat agreeing, and fifteen
- Prestigious: There was a difference in opinions: 10 people were indifferent, 7 people agreed slightly, 8 people agreed absolutely, and 1 person disagreed completely.
- Pleasant: Most people thought the brand was pleasant; just one person disagreed entirely, one person disagreed slightly, six people were indifferent, ten people agreed somewhat, and sixteen people agreed absolutely.
- Elegant: Benamôr 1925 was viewed as elegant by many participants; just one person disagreed fully, nine were indifferent, five agreed slightly, and nineteen agreed completely.
- Trustworthy: Two respondents disagreed slightly, five were indifferent, eight agreed somewhat, and nineteen agreed completely that the brand is reliable.

- Reassuring: Benamôr 1925 was viewed as secure by 2 respondents who disagreed slightly, 6 who were indifferent, 8 who agreed somewhat, and 18 who agreed completely.
- Supportive: A large majority of participants—three disagreed slightly, eight expressed neutrality, nine agreed somewhat, and fourteen completely—felt that the brand was supportive.
- Agreeable: Overall, people's perceptions of Benamôr 1925 were mostly positive, with just two strongly objecting, three slightly disagreeing, ten indifferent, two somewhat agreeing, and seventeen entirely agreeing.
- Concerned: Of the respondents, 2 disagreed fully, 2 disagreed slightly, 4 were indifferent, 8 partly agreed, and 18 absolutely agreed that the brand was concerning.
- Socially responsible: This quality was closely linked to the brand; two respondents disagreed considerably, four expressed neutrality, five expressed agreement, and twenty-three expressed entire agreement.
- Innovative: Views were divided; four respondents disagreed slightly, ten were indifferent, eight agreed somewhat, and twelve agreed completely that Benamôr 1925 would

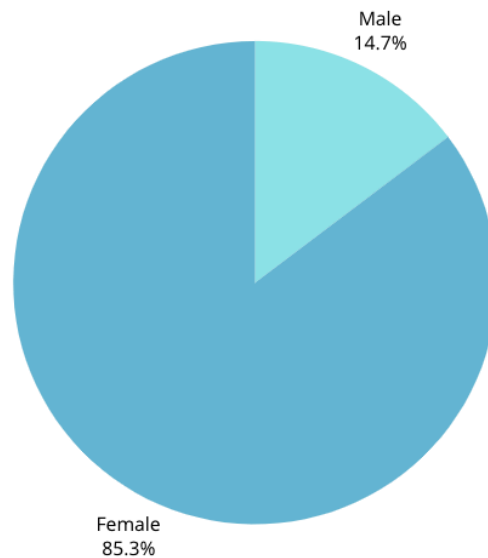
Graph 20 - Benamôr 1925's personality attributes (n = 34)



5) Demographic information

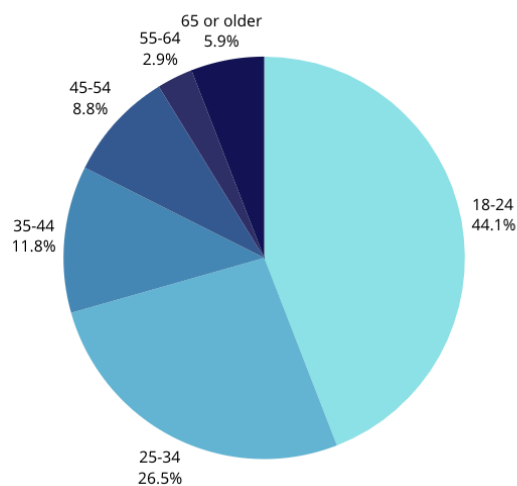
The final part of the questionnaire was dedicated to demographic data. When asked about gender, 85.3% (29) of respondents were women and 14.7 (5) were men.

Graph 21 - Gender of the participants (n = 34)



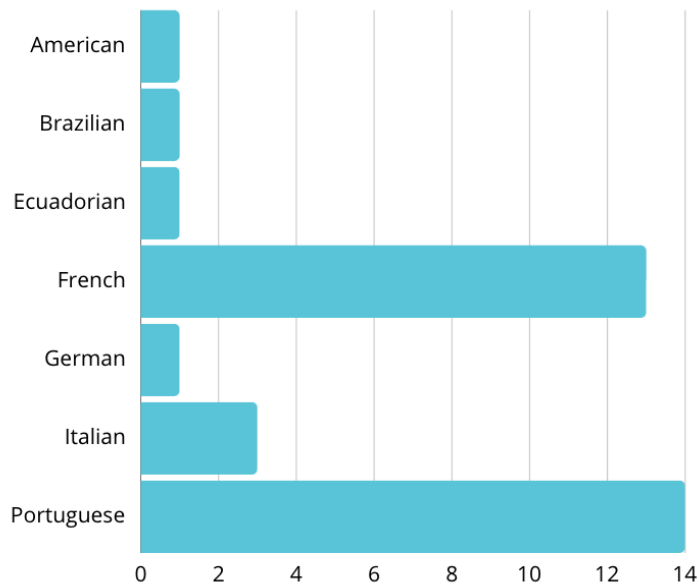
Regarding age, 44.1% (15) of participants were between 18 and 24, 26.5% (9) between 25 and 34, 11.8% (4) between 35 and 44, 8.8% (3) between 45 and 54, 2.9% (1) between 55 and 64 and 5.9% (2) over 65.

Graph 22 - Age of the participants (n = 34)



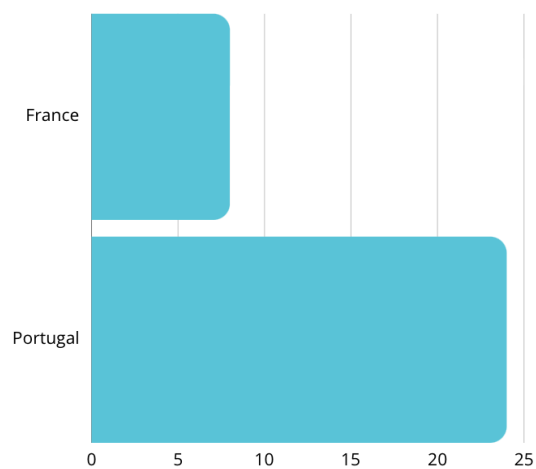
Participants were asked their nationality. In all, 14 Portuguese (41.18%) answered the questionnaire, 13 French (38.24%), 1 German (2.94%), 3 Italian (8.82%), 1 Brazilian (2.94%), 1 Ecuadorian (2.94%), and 1 American (2.94%).

Graph 23 - Nationality of the participants (n = 34)



In terms of country of residence, 76.4% (26) of participants live in Portugal and 23.5 (8) in France.

Graph 24 - Country of residence of the participants (n = 34)



6.2.2 Discussion

The aim of this questionnaire is to find out more about consumer perceptions of the brand, and more specifically what influence do claims about safe and natural ingredients have on the brand reputation of Benamôr 1925.

The second section of the questionnaire focused on the naturalness of ingredients used in cosmetic products. This section gave us a great deal of insight into the opinions of the 34 consumers who responded to the questionnaire.

To begin with, 90.7% of them told us they considered the naturalness of the ingredients in their cosmetics to be important or very important. This figure is in line with many of the comments we have earlier in the literature review. Indeed, in the past few years, customers' need for products that are healthier, more environmentally friendly, and organic is what drives the market for natural and safe ingredients. Customers have become more selective when it comes to the ingredients in personal care products, seeking for products with natural extracts, certified organic components, and ethical sourcing (Bergfeld, 2005). "40,2% of consumers prioritize natural ingredients when purchasing beauty and personal care products" (Lee, 2021). "The tendency to shift from conventional beauty products to clean beauty cosmetics that are more environmentally friendly and free from animal testing is one trend that is increasingly prominent," according to Haryono and Lestari (2024). In fact, the clean beauty movement is frequently linked to ideas like "natural ingredients" and "biodynamic and natural products, that opt for the usage of natural ingredients harvested in accordance with the rhythms of nature" (Gonçalves, 2023).

Given that consumers are increasingly switching to natural products, it is interesting to know how they verify the naturalness of the ingredients in the composition of the potential cosmetics they wish to buy. For the most part, 61.8% of consumers surveyed said they relied on the reputation of the brand concerned. It goes without saying that brand reputation is a key factor in the decision-making process. Indeed, a survey indicated that consumers lacked confidence in green product promises and prefer to typically trust a certain company (Dahl, 2010, quoted in Borges & Paananen, 2020). More than ever, consumers are trying to align their opinions and beliefs with the brands they buy, which means they are drawn to businesses with a good reputation and steer clear of those associated with controversy (GNT Group, 2015 in Grappe et al., 2022). Additionally, it can be challenging to determine a

business's true reputation. However, social media is a very useful tool to investigate what customers are saying about a certain brand. In fact, using procedures like the social proof one, social media, user reviews, and testimonials are utilized to influence consumers' perceptions, which in turn influences their behavior. This tactic, which highlights the value of upholding social group norms, is applied in a variety of marketing techniques to sway consumer decisions on e-commerce platforms (Park, S., & McCallister, J, 2023). At the same level as brand reputation, 61.8% of questionnaire respondents verify the naturalness of the products they buy by checking their certification. This response aligns with what Kai (2013) and Maniatis 2016) pointed out: “Customers frequently make purchase decisions based on their own environmental consciousness and product certifications”. Half of those questioned also said they read product labels to find out the composition of specific products. Customers' trust in green labeling is a crucial indicator since it highlights environmentally beneficial features that they would not have known about (Thogersen et al., 2012; Maniatis, 2016). Yet, companies must exercise caution when choosing terms for their product packaging, since the use of terms like "natural," "sustainable," and "environmentally friendly" in promotional materials has weakened the credibility of these kinds of claims (Charter et al., 2002; Lampe & Gazda, 1995 in Kirssi, 2017). Then, this question revealed that 44.1% of the persons polled conducted internet research on specific items to understand more about the naturalness of their formulations. Because recognized criteria for natural components are absent, buyers rely heavily on internet recommendations and influencers when purchasing personal care products (Tran et al., 2022). This is also why it is so important to promote the usage of clean and environmentally friendly cosmetic products on social media and online. In fact, Tran et al. (2022) found that around half of American women would look things up online before making a decision, with recommendations from social media influencers and online review ratings serving as the primary sources.

In order to find out more about consumers' perceptions of the Benamôr 1925 brand, certain questions directly related to the brand's products were asked. For example, it was interesting to know whether they think the brand uses enough natural ingredients in its product compositions. Unsurprisingly, 55.9% considered the use of natural ingredients “excellent” and 41.2% “good”. As we have seen in the literature review, advertising has a big impact on consumer behavior and purchasing choices (Faster Capital). Advertising is a powerful tool that companies use to attract and retain customers by shaping perceptions and influencing decisions through persuasive storytelling, endorsements, and time-limited offers

(Faster Capital). In the interviews conducted with the team of Benamôr 1925, they revealed that the brand has effectively employed these techniques, which may explain why many consumers surveyed were aware of the brand's use of natural ingredients.

Since natural ingredients are considered to be widely used by the Benamôr 1925 brand, it is important to know whether the use of this type of ingredient influences the perception of the brand in the minds of consumers. The questionnaire responses indicate that 32 out of 34 respondents (94.1%) have their perception positively influenced by Benamôr's use of natural ingredients. The literature analysis emphasizes that health concerns are becoming increasingly relevant in the beauty sector, and natural solutions are chosen over those that are just barely effective (Raphael, 2018). According to Google Trends statistics, searches for "natural" and "health" in the "beauty & fitness" category have grown dramatically over the previous 12 years, showing a widespread notion that organic substances are healthier (Chandon, 2020).

As we previously stated, customers are more and more interested in natural products nowadays. As demand increased, so did the number of brands available on the market. A huge number of suppliers and firms have recently joined the market, manufacturing and advertising cosmetic goods which emphasize their eco-friendliness and purported benefits to customers and the environment (Green Choices, 2012; Lin et al., 2018). This has led to a surge of claims, statements, logos, and labels indicating which components are present or missing, with repercussions for both the environment and health (Grappe et al., 2022). This might explain why 23.5% of respondents stated Benamôr performed similarly to other cosmetics brands.

The next question in the questionnaire shows that 94.1% of respondents are likely to buy Benamôr products based on their natural ingredient claims in the future. According to one research paper, several key factors influence consumer decision-making when purchasing green products, including purchase price advantages, operational savings, green promotions, product characteristics, and environmental awareness (Boztepe, 2012; Thogersen et al., 2012; Maniatis, 2016). As previously stated, in recent years, people have become more educated about the environmental situation, which has an impact on decision making because customers frequently base their purchasing decisions on their own environmental consciousness and product certifications (Kai et al., 2013; Maniatis, 2016). As a result, while choosing green products, consumers assess their environmental knowledge, attitudes, and

brand awareness (Matthes et al., 2013; Zhao et al., 2014; Maniatis, 2016). The Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT) by Festinger (1957) suggests that individuals feel discomfort when they hold conflicting beliefs, which they try to resolve by changing their attitudes. Applied to our research, this could explain why a customer might switch to clean beauty products over concerns about harmful ingredients but then experience conflict when their preferred products are less effective or unavailable in clean versions. To resolve this, they might seek information on the safety of clean products, justify the trade-off between safety and effectiveness, or find alternative options.

A significant principle in purchasing cosmetics with natural formulas is "social proof," which is crucial on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. According to a 2014 Nielsen study, 92% of worldwide participants believe recommendations from friends and family, while 70% trust online consumer evaluations. According to Amblee and Bui (2012), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) metrics, such as online ratings and reviews, are a reliable indicator of product reputation. This is comparable with the survey, where 76.5% of respondents stated they would recommend the Benamôr 1925 brand because of its use of natural ingredients.

One of the questionnaire questions revealed that 88.3% of respondents agree with the following statement: "Natural ingredients are more safe than synthetic ingredients in beauty products". Nonetheless, the reality is much more complex than that. As stated by Tran et al. (2022), "the general public perceives that "natural" products are sourced from ingredients found in nature, whereas "clean" products are typically free of ingredients deemed harmful." Actually, terms like "natural" and "clean" are not well defined. The rising skepticism of the cosmetic industry, fostered by the media, may have contributed to this misperception. Indeed, traditional media publications such as The Washington Post and The New York Times have reported on potential health risks linked with certain cosmetic ingredients (The New York Times, 2019; Decaille, 2020; Chandon, 2020). These types of reports and unscientific journalistic coverage have raised public skepticism of the cosmetics industry and contributed to the belief that natural ingredients are necessarily safer than synthetic chemicals (Francel, 2013; Chandon, 2020). This reinforced the notion that beauty products including "parabens, phthalates, chemical sunscreens, and formaldehyde" were always harmful (Faber, 2020; Gui et al, 2023). In 2019, Khan and Alam yet stated: "The cosmetic products may present health

risks and recurrent adverse effects are attributed to the toxic substances commonly found in their formulations" (Chandon, 2020).

The third section of the questionnaire refers to the safety of the ingredients used in cosmetic formulations and follows a similar structure to the previous section.

Along the same lines, 97% of the people surveyed indicated that safe ingredients were important when choosing personal care products. Actually, the COVID-19 epidemic has drastically altered the way people purchase and behave. In reality, demand for safe and preventative beauty products rose beginning in the summer of 2020. This surge aided the development of safe beauty products as individuals sought new ways to enhance their health as a result of the pandemic's concern and stress. Some studies Meanwhile, "clean beauty" products are expected to rise at an average annual rate of 12% between 2023 and 2028 (Haryono and Lestari, 2024).

Regarding the verification of allegations on safe ingredients used by brands, the results are slightly different from those gathered for the naturality of the ingredients; however, the reading of labels, online searches, and certification verification remain at similar levels. However, the feature of relying on the brand's reputation decreases by more than half. In fact, whereas 21 people rely on the brand's reputation to uphold its commitments to natural ingredients, just 10 would believe the brand's statements about safe ingredients. Unfortunately, we have no theoretical data on this difference, but it may be explained by the use of mobile applications. Indeed, two people mentioned using the French application "Yuka" to check whether the ingredients included in the formulation of a cosmetic product were hazardous to health. Indeed, Choi and Lee (2019) point out that smartphone applications are developing as methods for addressing client concerns regarding cosmetic safety. Apps such as "Hwahae" and "Glowpick" (which work similarly to Yuka) provide danger ratings for cosmetic substances and indicate those that may be harmful or irritating to the skin, providing a thorough list of components on a damage scale of one to ten. These applications assist users in better understanding novel chemical compounds, increasing their knowledge, and relying less on subjective judgments. As observed by So et al. (2020), such applications are useful for confirming the safety of products, particularly those from firms that lack information about their components or are not trusted by customers. Overall, some studies have shown that the evaluation phase before purchase is even more important regarding safe ingredients: Consumers' perceptions of safety regarding the ingredients in their daily personal care

products have become increasingly significant, making ingredient transparency crucial in cosmetics purchases. As Doval et al. (2013) noted, “consumers who are highly concerned with health and safety tend to prioritize product ingredients before making a purchase, unlike those with lower health consciousness” (in Ahmad and Omar, 2018).

Once again, consumers were asked what rating they would give to Benamôr 1925 based on their use of safe ingredients and whether this usage had a good impact on their opinion of the brand. While 91.2% ranked Benamôr as "good" or even "excellent" in terms of the usage of safe components, 97% stated that the use of these substances has a positive impact on their image of the brand. We can say that the various advertising and information strategies outlined in the interviews with the marketing team have a positive influence because nearly all of the consumers interviewed are aware of the use of safe ingredients. In terms of the favorable impact of these ingredients on the overall opinion of the brand, this finding is consistent with what we discovered in the literature review. Indeed, The recent rise in consumer preference for healthier products has significantly changed how people view and use personal care items (Rossi et al., 2007; Faber, 2019 in Grappe et al., 2022). More consumers are consciously avoiding potentially harmful substances in favor of those with safer, beneficial attributes (Lee, 2011 in Grappe et al., 2022). Products free of harmful chemicals like sodium laureth sulfate, diethanolamine, formaldehyde-based preservatives, and mineral oil—linked to dermatitis and cancer—are increasingly associated with health consciousness (Norudin et al., 2010 in Ahmad and Omar, 2018).

When asked to compare the use of safe ingredients by the brand, 73.5% say Benamôr has the best use, but 26.5% say it is similar to other brands. As we mentioned in the previous section, the number of brands capitalizing on safer and more natural products is increasing, indicating a high level of competition among the various brands, which might explain this result. However, the majority of respondents acknowledge that Benamôr pays special attention to safe ingredients. This might be explained by the following theory: According to Grappe et al. in 2022, “both absence and presence messages are progressing; 65% of all cosmetics sold in the US had a “paraben free” claim in 2017 (Statista, 2017 in Grappe et al., 2022), and “free-from” personal care achieved 13% growth in 2020 (NielsenIQ, 2021 in Grappe et al., 2022)”. As a result, this study shows how, when making environmental or health claims, emphasizing the absence of specific substances or processes is more helpful than emphasizing their presence. This purposeful emphasis is crucial in shaping client views

and purchasing habits for personal hygiene products. Actually, this strategy is used a lot by Benamôr on their packaging but also on the website, for example, with an emphasis on “0%” of potentially hazardous ingredients.

- 98% natural origin ingredients
- 0% Parabens
- 0% Petroleum
- 0% Phenoxyethanol
- Cruelty-free & Vegan
- Dermatologically tested

In terms of the likelihood of purchasing again or recommending the brand based on Benamôr's safe ingredient claims, no distinction was made between the analysis of responses for natural or safe ingredients. In both cases, consumers are influenced by Cognitive Dissonance Theory and social proof.

The fourth part of the questionnaire focuses more on how the brand is perceived by consumers.

Firstly, 97% of questionnaire respondents consider Benamôr 1925 to be committed to the “clean beauty” movement. Indeed, we saw earlier in our theory studies that concerns about dangerous chemicals in conventional beauty products have fostered the emergence of "clean beauty," which is driven by customer demand for healthier, more sustainable solutions (Haryono and Lestari, 2024; Antignac et al., 2011). These solutions, which eliminate chemicals associated to skin irritation and long-term health risks, provide a safer option without sacrificing efficacy. As a result, demand for clean beauty products is increasing, indicating a trend toward a more health-conscious and ecologically responsible approach to personal care.

A further question on the questionnaire discussing brand image is about transparency. 97% of the respondents stated that Benamôr 1925 is transparent according to them. We've already found that the majority of them believe the business is devoted to the "clean beauty" movement, and transparency is an important component in this trend. Pan (2014) and Shamburger (2021) describe product transparency as the complete disclosure of a product's ingredients, characteristics, and manufacturing techniques. Pan's study looked at the impact of transparency on consumer loyalty to cosmetics firms and discovered that more

transparency enhanced brand trust, which in turn increased consumer loyalty. According to the survey, 94% of customers are interested in staying with completely transparent brands, and 56% intend to do so for the rest of their life. Indeed, customers value an organization's human aspect and narrative more than its technological capabilities. According to Berlin (2019), "people buy from people, not companies," and honest storytelling in marketing boosts customer trust and the likelihood of a consumer making a purchase from the firm (Berlin 2019; Congdon 2018 in Shamburger, 2021).

We will examine the last question in this section using the Corporate Character Scale developed by Davies, Chun, Da Silva and Roper in 2001. This scale enables stakeholders to assess a company's personality as if it were a person, by evaluating not only consumers' perceptions, but also their emotional connection with the company. Composed of 49 adjectives divided into 7 different dimensions, the 34 respondents rated Benamôr 1925 according to 49 different adjectives, using a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with points indicating: totally disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and totally agree.

For a better understanding of the results, they will be classified according to the dimensions corresponding to the adjectives concerned.

Agreeableness (warmth, empathy, integrity):

- **Friendly:** Majority view the brand as friendly.
- **Pleasant:** Generally perceived as pleasant.
- **Open:** The perception of the brand as open is positive.
- **Straightforward:** Most perceive the brand as straightforward.
- **Concerned:** Mixed opinions on the brand being concerned.
- **Reassuring:** Majority find the brand reassuring.
- **Supportive:** The brand is seen as supportive by the majority.
- **Agreeable:** Most perceptions are positive regarding agreeableness.
- **Honest:** Majority find the brand honest.
- **Sincere:** Sincerity is valued, though with some neutral responses.
- **Trustworthy:** Largely positive perception of the brand as trustworthy.
- **Socially Responsible:** The brand is widely perceived as socially responsible.

Enterprise (modernity, adventure, boldness):

- **Cool:** Varied opinions on the brand being cool.
- **Trendy:** Responses are divided on this characteristic.
- **Young:** Mixed perceptions about the brand being young.
- **Imaginative:** Mixed views on the brand's imagination.
- **Up-to-date:** Largely positive perception of the brand as up-to-date.
- **Exciting:** Opinions are divided on the excitement attribute.
- **Innovative:** Mixed opinions on the brand being innovative.
- **Extrovert:** Varied responses regarding the brand being extroverted.
- **Daring:** Mixed perceptions of the brand being daring.

Competence (conscientiousness, drive, technocracy):

- **Reliable:** Strongly valued as a reliable trait.
- **Secure:** Very positive perception of the brand as secure.
- **Hardworking:** Majority perceive the brand as hardworking.
- **Ambitious:** Majority view the brand as ambitious.
- **Achievement-oriented:** Mixed perceptions about being achievement-oriented.
- **Leading:** Majority see the brand as a leader.
- **Technical:** Mixed responses regarding the technical aspect.
- **Corporate:** Mixed opinions on the brand's corporate nature.

Chic (elegance, prestige, snobbery):

- **Charming:** Generally perceived as charming.
- **Stylish:** Mixed opinions on the brand being stylish.
- **Elegant:** Majority view the brand as elegant.
- **Prestigious:** Mixed perceptions of the brand's prestige.
- **Exclusive:** Majority do not see the brand as exclusive.
- **Refined:** Mixed opinions on the brand being refined.
- **Snobby:** Majority reject the notion that the brand is snobby.
- **Elitist:** Majority do not perceive the brand as elitist.

Ruthlessness (egotism, dominance):

- **Arrogant:** Majority reject the idea that the brand is arrogant.
- **Aggressive:** Widely rejected as an aggressive trait.

- **Selfish:** Majority reject the idea that the brand is selfish.
- **Inward-looking:** Mixed opinions on the brand being inward-looking.
- **Authoritarian:** Majority disagree with the authoritarian perception.
- **Controlling:** General consensus against the idea that the brand is controlling.

Informality:

- **Casual:** Generally disapproved of as a casual trait.
- **Simple:** Mixed opinions on the brand being simple.
- **Easy-going:** Perceived as easy-going by some, though opinions vary.

Machismo:

- **Masculine:** Broad consensus against the brand being masculine.
- **Tough:** Majority reject the idea that the brand is tough.
- **Rugged:** Majority reject the idea that the brand is rugged.

To analyze the different adjectives according to Davies' corporate character scale, we'll first look at the general trends, where attributes have a strong consensus. On the side of adjectives that can be seen as strengths for the brand, we have: “reliable”, “sincere”, “secure”, “socially responsible” and “trustworthy” which stand out from the others and are largely perceived positively. These adjectives mean a lot for a brand like Benamôr 1925 which is transparent about their formulations and production practices to provide natural and safe products to their consumers. These results show that the people surveyed have a deep knowledge and understanding of the brand’s values and trust Benamôr 1925. On the side of adjectives that can be perceived as weaknesses for the brand we have “selfish”, “arrogant”, “aggressive”, “elitist” for which we have a strong consensus against. Indeed, because the brand is trying to act for the safety of their consumers and the planet, being perceived as “selfish” would be really threatening for Benamôr but we can see thanks to these results that it is not the case.

An interesting type of data to look at could also be the variability and adjectives for which opinions are divided. For example, this is the case for “trendy”, for which the results “disagree”, “neutral”, “agree” and “strongly agree” are fairly close. Indeed, the adjective trendy is defined as “very fashionable and up to date” (Oxford Languages). It's easy to see why opinions on the use of this adjective to describe the brand Benamôr are divided. Indeed,

on the one hand, the brand is very close to the “clean beauty” movement, which is very recent and very fashionable in today's cosmetics industry. But on the other hand, the brand was created in 1925 and, even today, sells cosmetics whose formulas have been adapted but which were conceived a hundred years ago, which could explain why some people think the brand is not up-to-date. The same explanation can be used for the adjective “innovative” as the brand is developing a lot of new products but the best-sellers are still old formulas such as the Jacaranda hand cream for instance.

If we consider the seven dimensions of the corporate character scale, we can provide a deep analysis of the 49 adjectives.

To begin with, we know that the agreeableness dimension has three facets: warmth, empathy and integrity. Benamôr obtained a positive result for the adjectives “honest”, “trustworthy” and “sincere”, indicating a high level of consumer trust and a positive perception in terms of integrity. Adjectives that may correspond to warmth and empathy, such as “friendly” and “supportive”, were generally well rated, but showed some variation, as for “concerned” and “reassuring”, for example. These results show that the brand's message seems to align with people's perception of its honesty and trustworthiness. To make the brand more appealing, it's important to highlight its key strengths in all communications. Positive feedback about being "socially responsible" and "supportive" shows that customers appreciate the brand's ethical values and its supportiveness. By focusing on these qualities, the brand can strengthen its connection with its audience. This approach not only boosts customer loyalty but also keeps satisfaction high. Continuing to emphasize these attributes will help maintain strong and positive relationships with consumers.

Let's look at the brand's modernity, adventure, and boldness. While the results for “innovative” and “up-to-date” are quite mixed, there's still a slight positive trend, indicating the brand is seen as modern and forward-thinking. The respondents' opinions on “cool” and “exciting” vary, suggesting different views on the brand's novelty appeal and dynamic qualities. The terms “trendy” and “young” suggest the brand has a youthful image, which can attract younger audiences or those looking for fresh products. However, the mixed responses about “cool” and “exciting” show there's room for improvement in making the brand seem more engaging and adventurous.

Looking at the competence dimension, which includes conscientiousness, drive, and

technocracy, we see some key points. Some high ratings for “reliable” and “secure” show that consumers trust the brand and see it as worthy of trust. This is a major strength and should be highlighted in brand messaging. Attributes like “ambitious” and “achievement-oriented” suggest that the brand is driven and focused on goals, fitting its market position. The perception of “technical” and “corporate” means the brand is recognized for its expertise and professionalism. Finally, being seen as “leading” matches the brand’s goal of industry leadership which is also a positive feature for a brand like Benamôr 1925.

The fourth dimension of the corporate character scale is chic, which includes elegance, prestige, and snobbery. Benamôr 1925 scores high on “elegant” and “refined,” showing a strong connection with sophistication. However, the brand should be careful about appearing “exclusive” or “snobby,” as this might displease some customers. The high ratings for “stylish” and “charming” boost the brand’s chic image, which can attract those looking for sophistication and quality.

The dimension of ruthlessness includes egotism and dominance. The strong negative response to “arrogant” and “aggressive” shows that consumers don’t like these traits. The brand should avoid coming across as domineering or egotistical and instead focus on a more collaborative and inclusive approach. The fact of addressing any tendencies towards “authoritarian” or “controlling” behaviors will help improve the brand’s image.

For informality, the brand is seen as “casual” and “easy-going,” which might appeal to those who prefer a relaxed approach. This should align with the brand’s overall messaging and service. Benamôr 1925 should ensure that this level of informality matches what their target market prefers.

Finally, the machismo dimension was strongly rejected by survey respondents. This suggests that these traits don’t fit the brand’s desired image. This means that maybe the brand should focus on being more inclusive and versatile to attract a broader audience. A less gender-specific and more balanced approach could improve its market appeal.

In summary, it can be concluded that the survey results highlight some interesting insights into consumer perception of the Benamôr 1925 brand, particularly in relation to claims about natural and safe ingredients. Consumers have a strong preference for natural and safe ingredients in the cosmetics sector, which is in line with current market trends regarding

the “clean beauty” movement and environmental awareness. The majority of our survey participants feel that Benamôr's use of safe and natural ingredients reinforces their positive opinion of the brand, demonstrating the importance of these elements in building and maintaining a strong brand reputation. Furthermore, the use of certifications, brand reputation and transparency regarding the products used demonstrate that customers take a considered and informed approach when selecting cosmetic products. These findings highlight the importance for Benamôr 1925 in maintaining its transparency and commitment to the use of safe, natural ingredients, as these elements play a crucial role in the trust and loyalty that consumers place in brands. In conclusion, it is undeniable that Benamôr's position based on values that match those of customers in terms of “clean beauty” is a major advantage in an increasingly competitive market.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion, limitations and future research suggestions

7.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find out *how do safe and natural ingredient claims influence the brand reputation of Benamôr in the context of clean beauty branding*. To answer this main question, two sub-research questions were developed: "How do employees perceive the claims of safe and natural ingredients in Benamôr products within the context of clean beauty branding?" and "What is the impact of safe and natural ingredient claims on the overall brand reputation of Benamôr in the beauty industry?". The objectives of these two sub-research questions was to know the influence of the safe and natural ingredients allegations on customers' and employees' views of the brand, consequently affecting the company's brand reputation.

In order to gain insight into the initial sub-research question, interviews were conducted with six people employed by the Portuguese cosmetics company Benamôr 1925, where I completed a six-month internship. These interviews allowed us to gain valuable information about how the employees of the brand perceive the brand's claims regarding safe and natural ingredients, especially when it comes to their positioning within the clean beauty market.

To summarize the key findings of these interviews, we can state that employees believe that Benamôr 1925 stands out in the cosmetics market due to its commitment to safe, natural ingredients, its Portuguese roots, focus on education, partnerships, and transparency. Employees of the brand think that Benamôr 1925 completely aligns with values of the clean beauty movement like the use of non-toxic ingredients, safety and transparency. For this matter they clearly list the ingredients of their products online and on their packaging in order to build trust with consumers who are seeking ethical and safe skincare products. The fact that the brand uses educational content strategy is very important in order to differentiate the brand from other competitors. For example, the brand uses social media, newsletters and blog articles to educate its customers on the benefits of botanical ingredients in cosmetics products. They eventually partner with influencers who prioritize sustainability and highlight the positive reviews about their product to bolster the brand's reputation, enhancing loyalty. The company has completely reformulated the majority of its products in recent years, emphasizing a high percentage of natural components while eliminating potentially dangerous compounds. In order to build an emotional bond with customers, staff members also highlight the brand's unique character, which is derived from its profound Portuguese origins, sourcing local foods, and honoring its legacy. In addition to its transparency which builds trust amongst consumers, the brand is highly innovative and uses constant customer feedback to guide product development regarding cosmetics current trends. In the highly competitive clean beauty industry, this responsiveness and continuous development help the brand stay relevant.

Regarding the second sub-research question, an online questionnaire was sent to 34 people in order to gain insights about consumers' opinion on the brand Benamôr 1925 and its claims of using safe and natural ingredients.

To sum up, we can say that Benamôr's commitment to safe and natural ingredients has a crucial positive influence on its brand reputation in the clean beauty market. Indeed, a significant majority of consumers, 94.1%, see the brand's use of natural ingredients in a positive way and 97% of the respondents place high value on ingredient safety. This clear alignment with clean beauty cornerstones emphasize health and environmental care and help building strong consumer trust and further loyalty. The transparency and dedication of

Benamôr 1925 to produce clean beauty products enhance its reputation without any doubt. Furthermore, its focus on using local, safe ingredients and on fostering positive consumer feedback highlight its solid position in the market. In essence, Benamôr's emphasis on safe and natural ingredients strengthens its reputation by aligning with clean beauty values. To continue thriving, the brand should keep spotlighting these strengths, address any concerns about modernity, and maintain its clear and transparent communication.

This study demonstrates how Benamôr 1925's image in the clean beauty market is shaped by its emphasis on natural and safe substances. The brand's devotion to these principles is valued by both staff and customers, who regard it as essential to its success. Staff highlight how Benamôr is unique and builds trust through its openness, educational initiatives, and dedication to natural ingredients. Additionally, consumers responded positively, which is consistent with a developing trend where ingredient safety and transparency are essential.

These results are supported by recent research, which shows that customers' demands for safer, natural cosmetics have increased recently. This change is the result of growing environmental awareness and concerns after the COVID-19 epidemic. Benamôr's distinctive educational blend and strong Portuguese heritage strengthen its commercial position.

It's vital for Benamôr's approach to maintain emphasizing its dedication to natural components. Along with keeping up consumer education, transparency and innovation should continue to be major priorities. Retaining good customer relationships and involving staff through interactive content and feedback may help the brand remain visible in the competitive marketplace for clean cosmetics.

7.2. Limitations and future research suggestions

The limitations in this research are mainly related to how data was collected. The interviews with Benamôr employees were useful, but it would have been better to tailor the questions to each participant's specific job role. The variety of positions within the company made it hard to capture a range of opinions and experiences. More targeted questions, reflecting the different roles, would have led to more detailed answers and a clearer picture of the situation.

Also, the interviews did not sufficiently highlight the importance of natural and safe ingredients. The marketing team's focus was on other aspects like eco-friendly production and the brand's cultural identity, especially "Portugalidade." It would have been better to emphasize how natural and safe ingredients are crucial for consumers and how they might affect their view of the brand.

Regarding the questionnaire, most participants were under 25, which is younger than Benamôr 1925's usual target audience, which is generally between 30 and 45 years old. This age difference could affect how representative the results are of the brand's core audience. Also, it would have been helpful to include more responses from people living abroad or non-Portuguese residents. Even though Benamôr is not widely known internationally, it is often bought as a souvenir of Portugal because of its strong identity. Indeed, gathering opinions from different countries could provide a broader understanding of how the brand is seen in various cultural contexts.

To improve future research, it would be better to focus on a quantitative approach with a larger sample size. This would allow for more comprehensive data collection and a better understanding of perceptions regarding so-called "safe and natural" ingredients. The goal would be to generalize the research questions beyond a single brand to get results that are applicable to a broader context. This approach would lead to more reliable conclusions and useful recommendations for brands in this sector.

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Appendix

A) Interview with Pierre Stark, CEO & Partner at Sociedade de Perfumarias Nally, Lda

Context of Brand Evolution in Recent Years

We have progressively moved towards natural products. Benamôr, a brand created in 1925, had outdated formulas when I acquired the company in 2015, which is why we made significant changes at that time. Even though some ingredients were still legal, we removed them, such as parabens, paraffin, and mineral oils, which are still present in many products today but are legal. The concept of naturality is subjective. Are mineral oils natural? From my perspective, no, but for others, they might be. Natural products come from nature, so some might consider petroleum, in its unrefined state, as natural.

Initially, we took an approach focused on eliminating certain ingredients we no longer deemed up-to-date, based on European laws and regulations, as well as our ethics on naturality. For example, we completely removed parabens, even though European regulations allow their use despite them being considered endocrine disruptors. We stopped using them a long time ago, but many brands continue to use them because they are highly effective in microbiology and ensuring formula stability. Our approach was to remove a number of ingredients that no longer aligned with our brand values. Then, we documented the percentage of natural ingredients in each formula. For older formulas, the naturality percentage might be around 70-80%, but for new formulas, we ensure at least 90-95% natural ingredients before launching.

1. What specific strategies does Benamôr use to communicate the safety and naturalness of its ingredients to customers?

As an independent and relatively small brand with limited resources, we have some freedom but are limited in terms of investment. We primarily invest in areas that we believe will help the brand grow, such as opening new stores and developing new products. We do very little advertising due to budget constraints, and while we do engage in digital marketing, it's on a small scale.

Our main strategy for communicating the naturalness of our ingredients is through our product packaging. We convey the benefits to consumers using pictograms, which we plan to utilize even more in the future.

In our stores, the décor reflects the values of “Portugalidade”—local and traditional values—and art deco design. Our newer stores emphasize these aspects more than the original ones. For instance, at our Benamôr Loreto store, near Praça Luis de Camões, the natural and botanical dimensions of our ingredients are immediately visible through natural ceiling elements, green paint, botanical ingredient descriptions, and the logo.

2. What foundations does Benamôr rely on to claim that it uses safe and natural ingredients?

Safety involves both legal and brand responsibility to sell a product that complies with legal standards and poses no risk to consumers' skin. To demonstrate that our products are safe, we conduct both internal and external tests to prove the stability of the formulas and run dermatological tests to demonstrate their efficacy on the skin. This is the basis for claiming that our ingredients are safe.

Regarding ingredient safety, we purchase them from suppliers who must guarantee their safety through tests. This is crucial because if a consumer has an issue, it's Benamôr that is held responsible. We may then turn to our suppliers depending on the nature of the problem.

In terms of ingredient naturality, there are many methodologies, but we've chosen to communicate heavily through percentages, which evolve over time. For older formulas with low naturality, we reformulate to increase the percentage. Over the last six years, we've reformulated a lot, adding interesting ingredients to boost naturality, such as organic ingredients. Our brand policy is to never launch products with less than 90% natural ingredients, and our latest formulas always have at least 90%, often reaching 95%.

3. How does Benamôr differentiate itself from competitors in terms of natural brand approach and ingredient transparency?

We differentiate ourselves through “Portugalidade.” Over the last two years, we've reflected on how our brand differs from others. Since naturality is no longer a crucial differentiator or a key USP (Unique Selling Proposition), we've focused on “Portugalidade.” One

distinguishing factor is sourcing some ingredients locally. We use local ingredients like Portuguese oranges for our “Laranjinha” range, Jacaranda flowers for the “Jacaranda” range, and Portuguese salt and sugar for body scrubs. Our aluminum tubes are still produced in Portugal in the same factories as in 1925. Aluminum is easily recyclable, and our supplier is less than 400 km away, not on the other side of the world. That’s what sets Benamôr apart.

4. How do safe and natural ingredient claims contribute to Benamôr’s overall brand identity and perception in the clean beauty market?

We believe that using Portuguese ingredients strongly contributes to the brand's local and authentic identity. The farther we move from Portugal, the harder it becomes to convey our values. That’s why it’s essential that our products reflect these values. It becomes difficult for an independent brand to convey this identity in a foreign environment.

5. What marketing decisions have been made to reinforce Benamôr’s claims regarding safe and natural ingredients? Can you share any efforts or collaborations Benamôr has established to enhance the credibility of these claims?

The main decision to reinforce our claims around safe and natural ingredients was establishing a precise brand policy when we redefined our USP a year and a half ago. We made decisions on formulations in collaboration with the R&D department, excluding several ingredients and creating a blacklist of items we’ll never use in our formulas.

In terms of collaborations, we’ve tried to work with suppliers towards this direction. However, it’s not always easy. While Portugal has great producers, sourcing cosmetic-grade ingredients can be more challenging. For example, we use Algarve sea salt for our body scrubs and oranges for certain products. When we find a supplier with suitable raw materials, we assess whether they meet cosmetic standards. If not, they will need to conduct tests to align with industry standards. This process can be time-consuming.

6. How does Benamôr ensure that its commitment to safe and natural ingredients positively impacts its brand reputation in the clean beauty market?

We believe communicating our values regarding safe and natural ingredients positively impacts our reputation. In today’s world, everything we say can be easily verified. Our goal is

to communicate the truth, both in stores and on social media, about what we are doing. This provides a form of guarantee for us.

We avoid greenwashing, even though it can be tempting since there are no clear regulations. We make efforts to document facts, statistics, and percentages to reassure consumers and ensure that our values positively impact our brand's reputation.

7- How does Benamôr approach information asymmetry in the cosmetics sector, particularly when it comes to claims of safe and natural ingredients, and what actions does it take to increase transparency and customer trust?

To increase transparency and trust with our customers, we comply with regulations. First, through Andreia Rodrigues, the director of our laboratory, who is very involved in associations like AIC (the National Cosmetic Association), of which our company, Nally, is a member. We also have strong ties with FarmED due to our role as producers, as we are subject to various European regulations. We are not a brand that outsources its production, so as a producer, we bear much more responsibility than other brands that buy outsourced products and focus solely on branding. Since we have someone deeply involved in legal associations in Portugal, we were aware, for example, that a new European regulation on allergens was coming months in advance. On the ingredients label, known as INCI, for this product (shows the Elixir from the Rosto range), we list the perfume ingredients at the end, followed by allergens. The new allergen regulation regarding INCI will evolve so that any allergen present in the perfume must be explicitly declared and clearly identified on the INCI list. As a result, our INCI list will expand to provide more information to the consumer.

8- How does Benamôr integrate consumer feedback and preferences into its product development process, particularly regarding the use of safe and natural ingredients?

Consumer feedback primarily comes from social media. We interact with many customers who respond to us on these platforms. As for complaints and comments about the formulas, we have a department within our research and development team that is managed by a person responsible for legal matters and another focused on consumer feedback. We handle feedback internally through this department. We believe we are quite responsive in this area. We also receive information from our stores, so if there's an issue, we are aware of it very quickly. Customers come in, return, notify us, and communicate. We have a very short feedback loop.

9- Can you tell us about the obstacles Benamôr faces in maintaining or improving its brand reputation based on claims of safe and natural ingredients?

The obstacles are mainly related to the research and development department. In terms of suppliers, for instance, we face difficulty accessing Portuguese suppliers capable of providing all the ingredients we want. This is a real problem. For example, I have been searching for years for a Portuguese organic rose so we could claim our Rosto range contains it. This is a significant obstacle for us in terms of naturality, and in the future, it could hinder the improvement of our brand's reputation. We want to do more regarding naturality but are limited by the supply options in Portugal.

10- How does Benamôr handle customer skepticism or concerns regarding the effectiveness of botanical ingredient-based cosmetics?

This is a huge question. First, what is effectiveness? It's a matter of managing consumer expectations, which vary greatly depending on the part of the body. For example, for the face, consumers have very high expectations due to the positioning and claims of the brands. It's important to conduct tests aligned with our claims, such as clinical or consumer tests. Since we've been developing the Rosto range, like the Elixir, we tested its effectiveness and 24-hour hydration. To make the international claim of 24-hour hydration, we have to pay 1,000 euros. We have a panel with a certain number of requirements for this test; we carry it out, and if the results are demonstrated, we can put this claim on our product packaging. These are not very sophisticated clinical tests, but they work.

There are also consumer tests, such as reducing the dullness of the skin. We send the product along with a questionnaire to a certain number of people. For the Elixir, we did this with 30 people. We ask them questions, and afterward, we can inscribe the results on our products. Skepticism is quite common, normal, and especially human in cosmetics. People want results that are proven, so we either prove them through clinical tests or consumer tests.

It's clear that when we talk about naturality in terms of ingredients, these are relatively mild in terms of active ingredients compared to what someone might imagine for skin care actives. But this is evolving a lot because more and more women are seeking natural products, not just for the body but especially for the face. For the body, they seek more classic benefits, for example, anti-aging in that area is much less sought after. For the body, they are mainly

looking for intense hydration, and these are relatively easy elements to prove, as there are well-known and effective active ingredients for hydration.

11- Can you describe the methods or approaches used by Benamôr to combat customer skepticism or concerns about the safety and naturalness of its products?

Regarding safety, it's dermatological testing and providing evidence that reassure customers. Once the products are dermatologically tested, customers feel much more reassured and thus less skeptical.

12- Can you give examples of how Benamôr's marketing efforts highlight the advantages and benefits of buying products made from safe and natural ingredients?

Through the products themselves, we see that it works. Our brand is quite accessible in terms of price, but we do place higher value on certain products. For example, the Elixir is sold for 39.90 euros, which is much more expensive than our Crème de Rosto, which is priced at 19.90 euros. The Elixir is a more highly valued and more technical product with proven and more effective benefits. These efforts are made at the product level, positioning certain products in our brand portfolio towards more technical aspects, offering real benefits that consumers expect from skincare products.

The brand is moving more and more in this direction, but not in a radical way, as that's not the spirit of the brand. Our values are not to create technical products but to make products using natural ingredients. Our brand platform is based on three categories: body, face, and fragrance. Fragrance is very important for us because it enhances the buying experience in terms of margin and gives the brand a sensory, well-being, and emotional dimension, which is quite different from skincare. Our brand platform today is balanced between technical skincare, well-being, emotion, and other classic benefits such as ultra-hydration. We talk a lot about well-being, which is closely aligned with our brand platform and name. I believe that reinforcing the naturalness and local sourcing of our brand and its ingredients contributes to consolidating this brand platform focused on naturalness.

B) Interview with Andreia Lança Magarreiro, Global Brand Director of Benamôr 1925

1- What particular strategies does Benamôr use to communicate the safety and naturalness of its ingredients to customers?

Benamôr emphasizes transparency and do communicate the safety and naturalness of our ingredients :

- Through clear ingredient information on products packaging and in our website,
- We highlight natural components in marketing communications (website, newsletters, articles, social media content, collaborations and partnerships...),
- We showcase positive reviews (to ensure trust and safety).

2- Which base does Benamôr use to support its claims of employing safe and natural ingredients? (Andreia Rodrigues, Laboratorio)

3- How does Benamôr differentiate itself from competitors in terms of its approach to natural branding and ingredient transparency?

Benamôr distinguishes itself from competitors by its own legacy (100 years old brand, that always preferred to use natural ingredients and using more sustainable packagings and by promoting the usage of the Portuguese botanics and ingredients), prioritizing ingredient transparency (in product packaging and website), making specific tests, highlighting natural components and the natural index of each product, showcasing positive reviews... This multifaceted approach reinforces our commitment to natural branding and ingredient transparency, setting it apart in the cosmetics market.

4- In your opinion, how do safe and natural ingredient claims contribute to Benamôr's overall brand identity and perception in the clean beauty market?

Safe and natural ingredient claims play a pivotal role in shaping Benamôr's brand identity and perception in the whole cosmetics market and also in the clean beauty market. By prioritizing ingredient safety and naturalness, Benamôr aligns itself with the values of consumers seeking clean and ethical skincare options. This commitment fosters trust and loyalty among customers who prioritize transparency and sustainability in their beauty routines. Moreover,

by consistently delivering on these claims through transparent labelling, certifications, and positive customer experiences, Benamôr solidifies its position as a reputable and trusted player in the beauty market. Overall, the emphasis on safe, portuguese and natural/botanical ingredients not only defines Benamôr's brand identity but also enhances its credibility and appeal to consumers seeking authentic and responsible skincare solutions.

5- Which marketing decisions are made to reinforce Benamôr's safe and natural ingredient claims? Can you talk about any efforts or collaborations Benamôr has launched to boost the credibility of its safe and natural ingredient claims?

See Answer to question 1.

6- How does Benamôr guarantee that its dedication to safe and natural ingredients has a positive impact on its brand reputation in the clean beauty market?

Benamôr ensures that its dedication to safe and natural ingredients has a positive impact on its brand reputation in the clean beauty market through meticulous attention to:

- **Transparency:** Clear and comprehensive labelling of ingredients (on the packaging and website) as it reinforces trust, demonstrating the brand's commitment to openness and honesty.
- **Quality Assurance:** Rigorous quality control measures ensure that only safe and natural ingredients meet Benamôr's standards, reassuring customers of product safety and efficacy.
- **Customer Satisfaction:** Positive experiences and testimonials from satisfied customers serve as endorsements of Benamôr's commitment to safe and natural ingredients, bolstering its reputation through word-of-mouth and online reviews.

7- How does Benamôr address information asymmetry* in the cosmetics sector, particularly when it comes to safe and natural ingredient claims, and what actions does it take to increase transparency and consumer trust? (Andreia Rodrigues, Laboratorio)

8. How does Benamôr incorporate consumer feedback and preferences into its product development process, notably the use of safe and natural ingredients?

Benamôr actively incorporates consumer feedback and preferences into its product development process:

- Sporadic surveys and feedback requests through our email database.
- Market Research: Benamôr conducts thorough market research to stay informed about evolving consumer preferences and trends in the beauty market. This helps them understand the demand for specific ingredients and formulations that align with our brand USP and our commitment to safety and naturalness.
- Consumer active listening in our stores : we actively listen to our customers feedback (in store or by email) about products they would like to see in our brand, questions or doubts about ingredients, etc, and this feedback is always shared with our marketing team.

9- Can you talk about any hurdles or obstacles Benamôr has experienced in preserving or improving its brand reputation based on safe and natural ingredient claims?

While Benamôr has strived to uphold its brand reputation based on its legacy and naturality (linked to portuguese botany), of course there are always challenges to overcome :

- Ingredient Sourcing Challenges: finding local and / or high-quality natural ingredients consistently and sustainably can be challenging due to factors such as environmental fluctuations, supply chain disruptions, and ethical considerations. Maintaining a reliable and ethical supply chain while meeting consumer demand for natural ingredients requires ongoing diligence and resource allocation.
- Navigating Regulatory Requirements: Adhering to regulatory standards and compliance requirements for labelling and claims related to safe and natural ingredients can be complex and subject to scrutiny. Ensuring compliance with evolving regulations while maintaining transparency and consumer trust necessitates ongoing monitoring and adaptation.
- Managing Consumer Expectations: Meeting consumer expectations for product performance and efficacy while prioritizing safe and natural ingredients is always a delicate balancing act.

- **Competitive Landscape:** In a crowded marketplace, standing out among competitors that also have safe and natural ingredient claims requires continuous innovation and differentiation.

10- How does Benamôr manage customer skepticism or reservations about the efficacy of cosmetics products made with botanical ingredients?

Benamôr tries to manage customer skepticism or reservations about the efficacy of cosmetics products made with botanical ingredients through:

- **Scientific Validation:** The brand invests in research and development to scientifically validate the efficacy of the natural ingredients used.
- **Transparency and Education:** Benamôr prioritizes transparency by providing comprehensive information about the ingredients used in our products : through content on our website, social media platforms, and product packaging.
- **Customer Testimonials and Reviews:** Positive testimonials and reviews from satisfied customers serve as powerful endorsements of the efficacy of Benamôr's botanical-based products. Sharing these testimonials on the brand's website, newsletters and social media channels helps build trust and credibility among potential customers.

11- Can you describe any methods or approaches Benamôr uses to combat customer skepticism or worries about the safety and naturalness of its products?

See answer to question 9.

12- Can you give examples of how Benamôr's marketing efforts highlight the benefits and advantages of purchasing products made with safe and natural ingredients?

Some examples of how we do some marketing efforts to highlight the benefits and advantages of purchasing products made with safe and natural ingredients are :

- **Ingredient Spotlight Campaigns:** Benamôr from times to times may run marketing campaigns that spotlight specific natural ingredients used in a launch or star product, emphasizing their benefits for skin and overall well-being (example : Elixir and

Bakuchiol in April 2023, Ginja and sour cherry extracts in November 2023) through social media.

- Educational Content: Through blog posts, social media content, and newsletters, Benamôr educates consumers about having natural ingredients and its portuguese botany inspiration. We also explain how certain botanical extracts nourish and revitalize the skin, or how natural oils provide hydration for instance and the benefits of specific fragrances.
- Customer Testimonials: Sharing testimonials and reviews from satisfied customers who have experienced positive results with Benamôr's products reinforces the benefits of choosing safe and natural ingredients. Hearing about real-life experiences can inspire confidence and encourage others to try the products.
- Partnerships with people (artists, influencers) with similar values to Benamôr that advocate for our products and its natural ingredients benefits.

C) Interview with Andreia Rodrigues, Laboratory Director of Benamôr 1925

2- Which base does Benamôr use to support its claims of employing safe and natural ingredients?

For all products we calculate the Natural Origin Index using the following normative documents:

- ISO 16128-1:2016 - Guidelines on technical definitions and criteria for natural and organic cosmetic ingredients and products
Part 1: Definitions for ingredients
- ISO 16128-2:2017 Cosmetics — Guidelines on technical definitions and criteria for natural and organic cosmetic ingredients
Part 2: Criteria for ingredients and products

We ask for each raw material supplier, a document declaring the naturalness index and carrying out the calculations. Here's an example:

Figure 2 - Calculation of natural origin content by including formulation water

$$C_{+H_2O}^{no} = \sum_{\alpha=1}^n (P_{\alpha} \times I_{no\alpha})$$

where

$C_{+H_2O}^{no}$ is the natural origin content of a product, as calculated by including formulation water as an ingredient;

P_{α} is the percentage, by mass, of each ingredient, α , in the product and includes formulation water as an ingredient;

$I_{no\alpha}$ is the natural origin index corresponding to each ingredient, α , in the product.

MP	Matérias-Primas	% Natural Origin Index	LIP CREAM ROSE AMELIE
MP438	Água de produção	1	71,15%
MP590	Glycerin	1	5,00%
MP558	Microcare SB	0,55	1,00%
MP534	Sacarina	0	0,05%
MP645	Plurol Stearique WL 1009	1	5,00%
MP460	Tegin Pellets	1	2,00%
MP596	Lanette 16	1	2,00%
MP579	Shea Butter	1	2,00%
MP421	Coconut Oil	1	2,00%
MP401	Hydrargan	1	2,00%
MP597	INCA Omega Oil	1	1,00%
MP638	Rosa Moschata Oil	1	1,00%
MP641	Macadamia Oil	1	1,00%
MP642	Soy Oil	1	1,00%
MP454	Tocoferol	0	0,20%
MP646	Omega Butter	1	3,00%
MP572	Extrato Rosa Damascena	0,992	0,10%
MP539	Perfume Authentic Rose Lip 1626083	0,57	0,10%
MP295	Lactic Acid	1	0,40%
NATURAL ORIGIN INDEX - FLA			99,26

In this case, the Natural Origin Index is 99,26%.

7- How does Benamôr address information asymmetry in the cosmetics sector, particularly when it comes to safe and natural ingredient claims, and what actions does it take to increase transparency and customer trust?

At Benamôr, we work with the utmost clarity and transparency. We search for the best suppliers who meet the brand's pillars of naturalness, quality and nationality. We also have a Regulatory Affairs and Marketing department that complement each other perfectly, knowing the limits of what can be mentioned in terms of claims.

1. Before the product is launched onto the market, the Regulatory Department validates the product's claims, respecting the principles of regulation 655/2013 laying down common criteria for the justification of claims used in relation to cosmetic products. For more details, please open the link that has the principles of cosmetic claims:
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R0655>
2. All products are subject to a safety assessment which includes the substantiation of the claims, for which we have all the supplier's certificates in terms of technical data sheet, naturalness, origin and description of the claims and their conditions of use.
3. For all products, the substantiation of the claim is verified through a patch test (skin irritation test)
4. For some products, we also carry out a consumer test to validate some key claims - we did this for Revitalizing Face Elixir.
5. On our website we also list the naturalness index of all the products, by product, so that there is transparency for the consumer.

D) Interview with Inês Henriques, Digital Marketing Manager at Benamôr 1925

1- What particular strategies does Benamôr use to communicate the safety and naturalness of its ingredients to customers?

Benamôr uses the following communication strategies to get across the messages inherent in its values: content marketing (e.g. Sociedade Ponto Verde infographics), educational communications on social networks and newsletters, through press releases and influencer marketing, through occasional partnerships with influencers who highlight the brand's key values.

2- Which base does Benamôr use to support its claims of employing safe and natural ingredients?

Benamor passes on these messages, which also contribute to raising awareness of the brand's values among its customers, through its digital communications, via newsletters, social networks and also through personalized in-store service, where these details are passed on to customers.

3- How does Benamôr differentiate itself from competitors in terms of its approach to natural branding and ingredient transparency?

Benamôr uses Portuguese botanical extracts, grown in Portugal, and some of the ingredients are ancient and well-known herbs from Portugal's botanical diversity, and communicates its ingredients and formulation aspects on its packaging and on the product pages of its website.

4- In your opinion, how do safe and natural ingredient claims contribute to Benamôr's overall brand identity and perception in the clean beauty market?

These (using safe and natural ingredients) are fundamental points that are part of the brand's DNA, and which should be communicated to customers, contributing to a more real and authentic perception of the brand.

5- Which marketing decisions are made to reinforce Benamôr's safe and natural ingredient claims? Can you talk about any efforts or collaborations Benamôr has launched to boost the credibility of its safe and natural ingredient claims?

Benamôr always tries to use natural ingredients of Portuguese origin in its formulations, such as one of the most recent launches, the revitalizing Bruma, for example, a partnership with the Termas de São Pedro do Sul with Portuguese Mineral Water, directly from Portugal's main spa, an important point being the use of reference Portuguese ingredients.

6- How does Benamôr guarantee that its dedication to safe and natural ingredients has a positive impact on its brand reputation in the clean beauty market?

In my opinion, I think it's a work in progress, because it's a message that is also linked to the brand's own notoriety in the Portuguese market, which we are continually working on so that these basic values can be more deeply rooted (through our communications, press efforts, etc).

7- How does Benamôr address information asymmetry* in the cosmetics sector, particularly when it comes to safe and natural ingredient claims, and what actions does it take to increase transparency and consumer trust?

In my opinion, Benamôr addresses the asymmetry of information in the cosmetics sector with a commitment to transparency and consumer education. We recognise that consumers have the right to know the ingredients they are applying to their skin and the production processes behind the products they choose. To increase transparency and consumer trust, we communicate the ingredient lists on the website and packaging, disseminate educational content about our products and curiosities about the production process in the factory; and respond in a personalized way to all the questions that come to us via customer support on the website and social networks about any specifics of our products (always with the necessary feedback from our laboratory).

8- How does Benamôr incorporate consumer feedback and preferences into its product development process, notably the use of safe and natural ingredients?

This question is addressed to the laboratory, but in my opinion, at Benamôr, the importance of consumer feedback in the product development process is really important. To incorporate consumer feedback and preferences, research is carried out to understand consumer preferences regarding ingredients, textures, fragrances, all laboratory tests are carried out to ensure the safety of ingredients and on the communication side, we communicate openly with consumers about the ingredients used in our products, highlighting natural ingredients and explaining their benefits.

9- Can you talk about any hurdles or obstacles Benamôr has experienced in preserving or improving its brand reputation based on safe and natural ingredient claims?

This question will be directed more at the laboratory that works on these issues on a daily basis.

10- How does Benamôr manage customer skepticism or reservations about the efficacy of cosmetics products made with botanical ingredients?

On the marketing side we always adopt a transparent approach to consumer feedback in order to convey the necessary trust to our customers.

11- Can you describe any methods or approaches Benamôr uses to combat customer skepticism or worries about the safety and naturalness of its products?

This question will be directed more at the laboratory that works on these issues on a daily basis.

12- Can you give examples of how Benamôr's marketing efforts highlight the benefits and advantages of purchasing products made with safe and natural ingredients?

Some examples of how Benamôr's marketing actions highlight the benefits and advantages of buying products made with safe and natural ingredients: We emphasize the use of "botanical extracts" in all communications, highlighting the importance of the natural ingredients present in the products; highlighting clear and visual messages that communicate the benefits of these ingredients for the skin. We are also committed to transparent communication, highlighting the list of ingredients used. We also emphasized the brand's heritage, as a solid and trusted brand for almost a century - highlighting the emotional and trusting connection with consumers

We opted for a transparent, educational and engaging approach, in order to raise Benamôr's profile and build a strong bond with customers and differentiate itself in the cosmetics market.

E) Interview with Joana Mauricio, Marketing Manager at Benamôr 1925

1- What particular strategies does Benamôr use to communicate the safety and naturalness of its ingredients to customers?

Our recipes are based on the botanical diversity and the historical and cultural know-how of our country. All of our formulas feature a minimum of one key plant-based ingredient sourced from Portugal and are composed of a minimum of 90% natural ingredients, emphasizing our commitment to natural origins.

Currently, 80% of our production is made up of aluminum – the most recycled and recyclable material in the cosmetics industry. Our aluminum packaging is 100% recyclable and made from 40% recycled aluminum, preserving all its properties infinitely and allowing 95% energy savings in each recycling, compared to the first time it is produced.

This choice reflects our commitment to a greener future for all.

2- Which base does Benamôr use to support its claims of employing safe and natural ingredients?

All the claims and communication used in Benamôr are supported by regulamentation like Declaration of Quality, Declaration of naturality of ingredients and Vegan products declaration.

3- How does Benamôr differentiate itself from competitors in terms of its approach to natural branding and ingredient transparency?

Benamor products are formulated with high quality cosmetic ingredients that are supplied by trustful providers, some of which have built a strong relationship with the brand since 1925. It is Benamôr's policy to use, whenever it is possible, 100% plant extracts, which include, for example:

- sweet almond oil (*prunus amygdalus dulcis* oil), coconut oil (*cocos nucifera* oil), peanut oil (*pluketenia volubilis* seed oil), argan oil (*argania spinosa* kernel oil), shea butter (shea butter), aloe vera extract (*aloe barbadensis* leaf extract) and rose damascena oil.

Additionally, Benamôr's philosophy stands to avoid using petroleum-based raw materials (residual value of 1,6%). An example of this is the usage of paraffin and vegetable vaseline. Further, Benamôr's products do not include parabens as preservatives in its formulas.

4- In your opinion, how do safe and natural ingredient claims contribute to Benamôr's overall brand identity and perception in the clean beauty market?

Please see the previous answers.

5- Which marketing decisions are made to reinforce Benamôr's safe and natural ingredient claims? Can you talk about any efforts or collaborations Benamôr has launched to boost the credibility of its safe and natural ingredient claims?

Since 1925, Benamôr has been using aluminum packaging – the most recycled and recyclable material in the cosmetics industry – and has a long-standing partnership with the same Portuguese producer. Aware of the need to be committed to the planet and privileging local sourcing, Benamôr seeks to be as responsible as possible through the implementation of a long-term sustainability strategy.

In 2019, it was the first brand to develop a Refill system for cosmetic products in Portugal. Its products are ethically handmade, composed of ingredients of Natural Origin & Cruelty Free and produced in aluminum packaging.

Since 2018, Benamôr has collaborated with Sociedade Ponto Verde to manage its waste and encourages a more responsible consumption of products, providing reusable tote bags, ideal to replace disposable bags.

In addition, Benamôr has been developing initiatives to appeal to sustainability through partnerships with environmentally friendly organizations. In 2022, she collaborated with the organization "Plantar uma Árvore", responsible for reforestation and diversification of biodiversity in Portugal, allowing to strengthen ecosystems and their resilience to climate change. And, in 2023, it strengthened its partnership with Sociedade Ponto Verde, with the aim of helping consumers to correctly separate and recycle our packaging.

In this way, we can say that our pillars are based on awareness, responsibility and sustainability.

6- How does Benamôr guarantee that its dedication to safe and natural ingredients has a positive impact on its brand reputation in the clean beauty market?

Please see the previous answers.

7- How does Benamôr address information asymmetry* in the cosmetics sector, particularly when it comes to safe and natural ingredient claims, and what actions does it take to increase transparency and consumer trust?

** An information asymmetry is a situation where, on a market, the economic agents contracting or exchanging are not on an equal footing in terms of information, with one of the two agents holding information that the other does not have. In the cosmetics market, this may be the case for product production methods or the complete list of ingredients.*

8- How does Benamôr incorporate consumer feedback and preferences into its product development process, notably the use of safe and natural ingredients?

Close relation with stores and the retail manager, collecting insights directly from consumers through our stores teams.

9- Can you talk about any hurdles or obstacles Benamôr has experienced in preserving or improving its brand reputation based on safe and natural ingredient claims?

There are some formulas that sometimes are adjusted and reformulated through real feedback.

In addition, one of our main challenges is related to the implementation of Refill Systems in all our stores, which is not always possible due to the infrastructures and resource conditions available. Another very challenging aspect is our commitment to reducing plastic in our packaging, towards the development of sustainable and plastic-free packaging by 2025.

The education of our consumers is also fundamental on this path, and it is a huge challenge to reduce consumption and encourage a change in consumer buying behavior in a more responsible way. Many consumers are becoming more and more aware, but awareness is still quite limited in some industries.

Another key and challenging aspect is the acceptance of sustainable products by the market. Some consumers may be willing to pay more for sustainable products, while others may be more price sensitive.

Finally, the adoption of more sustainable, efficient and transparent practices that improve a company's environmental and social performance involve significant investments in new technologies, materials and processes, and is a long-term challenge.

10- How does Benamôr manage customer skepticism or reservations about the efficacy of cosmetics products made with botanical ingredients?

All the products are proven by regular quality tests.

11- Can you describe any methods or approaches Benamôr uses to combat customer skepticism or worries about the safety and naturalness of its products?

12- Can you give examples of how Benamôr's marketing efforts highlight the benefits and advantages of purchasing products made with safe and natural ingredients?

Entrevista Sociedade Ponto Verde

- So far, what results and milestones have been achieved in terms of environmental targets?

Over the last five years, the recycling of Benamôr and Nally packaging placed on the market has reduced CO2 emissions by 40 tons. We currently have 80% of our production in aluminum packaging, followed by cardboard packaging and glass jars. Another of the targets achieved was the availability of refill systems in our own retail stores.

·What role has Sociedade Ponto Verde played in helping us to achieve a smaller environmental footprint?

Since 2018, Sociedade Ponto Verde has been helping us to reduce our waste by managing our packaging waste, contributing to a reduction in carbon emissions over the years. This is reflected in total CO2 reductions of around 40 tons. This data is provided by the company itself, helping us to monitor our environmental evolution in an efficient and credible way. Providing

information on the progress made and areas for improvement, in order to ensure a greener and more promising future.

Sociedade Ponto Verde is also crucial in raising consumer awareness and giving credibility to the implementation of sustainable practices, helping us to promote more conscious consumption and calling for the recycling of our packaging. Last year, we reinforced this long-lasting partnership with an educational initiative, with the aim of informing and encouraging more people to practice the correct process of separating materials and recycling our packaging, through our infographics or directly on our website on each product page.

What makes Benamôr a brand that makes a mark?

We are a holistic, natural and wellness beauty brand for a universal type of beauty, far from traditional beauty stereotypes.

Feeling good! A “Wellness” brand where all the senses are drawn in to give women not only results on the skin, but a real sense of well-being and indulgence.

From the carefully designed packaging that captivates the eye, to the incredible textures and addictive scents, each of our little tubes embodies beauty and joy. We firmly believe in the wisdom passed down from our grandmothers: “Happiness is a woman's best face-lift”.

Since 1925, Benamôr has been loving its unique botanical beauty recipes, formulated with natural Portuguese ingredients and meticulously hand-packaged in our Lisbon factory, embodying the timeless values of honesty, simplicity and loyalty that are deeply rooted in Portuguese culture

Our artisans have been dedicated to producing high-quality skincare for over a century, employing traditional production methods that have been passed down for generations

A brand that spans generations, renowned for its aluminium packaging and a pioneer in the Refill system in its own stores. Aware of environmental concerns and on the road to a healthy planet, Benamôr has stood out for its eco-friendly initiatives and sustainable practices, which contribute to reducing the ecological footprint and a greener future.

F) Interview with Ana Medeiros, Marketing Intern at Benamôr 1925

1- What particular strategies does Benamôr use to communicate the safety and naturalness of its ingredients to customers?

Benamôr uses clear labeling, detailed ingredient lists and emphasizes the percentage of natural ingredients in each product. It uses pictograms relating to the high percentages of natural ingredients, both in its products and in some other communication elements, such as the website.

2- Which base does Benamôr use to support its claims of employing safe and natural ingredients?

Benamôr produces practically all of its formulas in its laboratory, so there is a high level of control over the ingredients used. In this sense, as all the formulas are produced "in-house", the brand uses knowledge of their naturalness, as well as the local suppliers from whom they buy the raw materials, making it possible to calculate the percentage of naturalness of each product. Here, there is also the trust that is attributed to the local supplier with whom we work.

3- How does Benamôr differentiate itself from competitors in terms of its approach to natural branding and ingredient transparency?

Benamôr differentiates itself through the detailed transparency of its ingredients, highlighting traditional Portuguese formulas, using natural and exclusively Portuguese ingredients.

4- In your opinion, how do safe and natural ingredient claims contribute to Benamôr's overall brand identity and perception in the clean beauty market

The emphasis on safe and natural ingredients reinforces Benamôr's brand identity, positioning it as a reliable and clean beauty brand on the market, appealing to consumers who are concerned about their health and the environment. What's more, when a brand positions itself as safe and using only natural ingredients, it uses a very strong positioning that it has to fulfill, and because of this, consumers develop a level of trust in the brand, which happens naturally.

5- Which marketing decisions are made to reinforce Benamôr's safe and natural ingredient claims? Can you talk about any efforts or collaborations Benamôr has launched to boost the credibility of its safe and natural ingredient claims?

Benamôr reinforces its claims through collaborations with influencers and ecological certification bodies. There is a strategy in choosing the influencers with whom they collaborate, for example, using mainly individuals who have environmental concerns, who use a more natural image and who, above all, share the same values as the brand.

6- How does Benamôr guarantee that its dedication to safe and natural ingredients has a positive impact on its brand reputation in the clean beauty market?

Benamôr guarantees a positive impact by maintaining strict quality control, having a high knowledge about the ingredients that are used, engaging in transparent communication, and consistently delivering products that meet their high standards for safety and naturalness.

7- How does Benamôr address information asymmetry* in the cosmetics sector, particularly when it comes to safe and natural ingredient claims, and what actions does it take to increase transparency and consumer trust?

I don't know.

8- How does Benamôr incorporate consumer feedback and preferences into its product development process, notably the use of safe and natural ingredients?

Benamôr actively seeks consumer feedback through surveys, social media interactions and product reviews. This feedback influences product development and improvement, ensuring alignment with consumer preferences for safe and natural ingredients. Not so much with regard to the use of natural ingredients, as this is already standard practice for the brand, but above all with regard to packaging, product scents, etc.

9- Can you talk about any hurdles or obstacles Benamôr has experienced in preserving or improving its brand reputation based on safe and natural ingredient claims?

I don't know.

10- How does Benamôr manage customer skepticism or reservations about the efficacy of cosmetics products made with botanical ingredients?

I don't know.

11- Can you describe any methods or approaches Benamôr uses to combat customer skepticism or worries about the safety and naturalness of its products?

I don't know.

12- Can you give examples of how Benamôr's marketing efforts highlight the benefits and advantages of purchasing products made with safe and natural ingredients?

Benamôr's marketing efforts highlight benefits such as the absence of harmful chemicals, the use of eco-friendly packaging and the skin-nourishing properties of its natural ingredients, often backed up by customer testimonials.

G) Questionnaire's script

My name is Pauline Moulineau, and I'm in my last year of a master's degree in Communication Studies. I'm conducting a research project on the influence of safe and natural ingredient claims on the brand reputation of Benamôr 1925.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any moment without providing a reason. The information obtained is anonymous and confidential, and will be used purely for academic purposes. It will take approximately 10 minutes to fill in the questionnaire.

Your perspective as a potential consumer of the brand is critical to this study. I really appreciate and thank you for your time!

Relationship with the brand

1. How familiar are you with the brand Benamôr 1925?

- a. Very familiar
- b. Somewhat familiar
- c. Not very familiar
- d. Not familiar at all

2. How do you consider yourself in relation to Benamôr 1925?

- Not a customer
- First-time customer
- Occasional customer
- Regular customer
- Loyal customer
- Advocate (actively recommends our brand to others)

Naturalness of ingredients

3. How important are natural ingredients to you when choosing beauty products?

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Neutral
- d. Not very important

- e. Not important at all
- 4. How do you verify the naturalness of ingredients in beauty products? (Check all that apply)**
- a. Reading labels
 - b. Researching online
 - c. Consulting beauty experts
 - d. Checking certifications (e.g., organic, cruelty-free)
 - e. Relying on brand reputation
 - f. Other (please specify)
- 5. How would you rate Benamôr 1925 on the use of natural ingredients?**
- a. Excellent
 - b. Good
 - c. Average
 - d. Poor
 - e. Very poor
- 6. How do natural ingredient claims influence your perception of Benamôr 1925?**
- a. Very positively
 - b. Positively
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Negatively
 - e. Very negatively
- 7. How do you compare Benamôr 1925 to other clean beauty brands in terms of naturalness?**
- a. Much better
 - b. Better
 - c. About the same
 - d. Worse
 - e. Much worse
- 8. How likely are you to purchase Benamôr 1925 products in the future based on their natural ingredient claims?**
- a. Very likely
 - b. Likely

- c. Neutral
- d. Unlikely
- e. Very unlikely

9. How likely are you to recommend Benamôr 1925 products to others based on their natural claims?

- a. Very likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neutral
- d. Unlikely
- e. Very unlikely

10. How much do you agree with the following statement: "Natural ingredients are more safe than synthetic ingredients in beauty products."

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

Safety of ingredients

11. How important are safe ingredients to you when choosing beauty products?

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Neutral
- d. Not very important
- e. Not important at all

12. How do you verify the safety of ingredients in beauty products? (Check all that apply)

- a. Reading labels
- b. Researching online
- c. Consulting beauty experts
- d. Checking certifications (e.g., organic, cruelty-free)
- e. Relying on brand reputation

f. Other (please specify)

13. How would you rate Benamôr 1925 on the use of safe ingredients?

- a. Excellent
- b. Good
- c. Average
- d. Poor
- e. Very poor

14. To what extent do safe ingredient claims influence your perception of Benamôr 1925?

- a. Very positively
- b. Positively
- c. Neutral
- d. Negatively
- e. Very negatively

15. How do you compare Benamôr 1925 to other clean beauty brands in terms of safety?

- a. Much better
- b. Better
- c. About the same
- d. Worse
- e. Much worse

16. How likely are you to purchase Benamôr 1925 products in the future based on their safe ingredient claims?

- a. Very likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neutral
- d. Unlikely
- e. Very unlikely

17. How likely are you to recommend Benamôr 1925 products to others based on their safety claims?

- a. Very likely
- b. Likely

- c. Neutral
- d. Unlikely
- e. Very unlikely

Perception of the brand

18. How do you perceive Benamôr 1925's commitment to clean beauty?

- a. Strong commitment
- b. Moderate commitment
- c. Weak commitment
- d. No commitment

19. How transparent do you believe Benamôr 1925 is about the ingredients they use?

- a. Very transparent
- b. Somewhat transparent
- c. Neutral
- d. Somewhat opaque
- e. Very opaque

20. If Benamôr 1925 was a person his/her personality would be...

Table 2 - The Corporate Character Scale developed by Davies

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Completely agree
Daring					
Reliable					
Snobby					
Honest					
Trendy					
Hard-working					
Masculine					
Selfish					
Casual					

Exciting					
Secure					
Authoritarian					
Simple					
Charming					
Tough					
Sincere					
Cool					
Technical					
Rugged					
Controlling					
Young					
Corporate					
Arrogant					
Extrovert					
Imaginative					
Inward-looking					
Straightforward					
Exclusive					
Aggressive					
Open					
Friendly					
Up-to-date					
Refined					
Easy-going					
Elitist					

Achievement oriented					
Ambitious					
Stylish					
Leading					
Prestigious					
Pleasant					
Elegant					
Trustworthy					
Reassuring					
Supportive					
Agreeable					
Concerned					
Socially responsible					
Innovative					

Demographic information

21. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary/Third gender
- Prefer not to say

22. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44

- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 or older

23. What is your nationality?

- (Open-ended response)

24. In which country do you currently reside?

- (Open-ended response)