Natural Cosmetics and Consumer Touchpoints
THE VALUABLE FACTORS SHAPING THE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The thesis will take into analysis the expanding market of eco-friendly beauty products in Italy, and it will investigate the ways in which the main players are interacting with consumers through the study of the visible “touchpoints”.

Indeed, the positive trend interesting all types of green, environmental and sustainable products has recently expanded also to beauty products, which are shifting from being niche products dedicated to specific segments of interested and demanding consumers to concrete alternatives to the classical beauty brands mostly distributed through pharmacies and perfumeries.

While the trend of sustainable consumption in general has been covered by many authors and consumer behavior studies, literature and empirical research on the specificities of the beauty market is still fragmented and not too wide.

The research will try and add to existing theories taking into account the status quo of the market (analyzed through the results of a questback sent to 460 consumers) especially by focusing on the best practices encountered in the approach of some of the most successful players.

The findings of the research will show that companies wanting to exploit this positive trend to grow their market share and even steal consumers to other distributors need to focus on providing the right consumer experience.

A peculiar consumer experience can be reached in different ways that will be presented throughout the study, and it can make the difference in terms of creating an unforgettable mark in the consumer perceptions and sets of images and associations.

The study will thus suggest some possible ways to reach this experience based on actual case studies and feedbacks from consumers: this, in order to individuate the consumer touchpoints in which it is smart to invest in this moment of potential and to base the long-term success of the market leaders of tomorrows, “brand builders” of today.
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1. Introduction

The trend of green, “natural” beauty products is increasing year by year worldwide, and consumers’ awareness on the matter is growing simultaneously.

Major key players in the marketplace are thus trying to adapt their businesses in order to meet consumers’ needs and turn this moment of change into a long-lasting source of brand equity for their companies.

To do so, beauty companies have to understand how to exploit this positive trend involving eco-friendly products in order to stand aside all other players.

However, in the current marketplace, habits, practices and customs are made dynamic and hard to track in a definitive way by easily mutable technologies and changing consumers’ wants and needs (Dimitrova et. al, 2009).

When it comes to personal care and grooming, consumer behavior studies can help detecting the fundamental motivations behind the decision of buying such particular products.

The reasons behind this type of purchase are indeed quite complex and they mix different levels of involvement and awareness, of consciousness and subconsciousness: skin health, environmental benefits, interest for the unusual, following of a trend, positive attitude towards a particular brand and many more (Chen & Chai, 2010).

When it comes to beauty products, both existing studies and best practices show that one of the most effective ways to favorably impact on a consumer perception is to enhance the consumer experience prior, during and after the moment of purchase.

The fact that this part of the purchasing process is one of the most important for green friendly beauty products suggests that the key to achieve success on a larger scale is to strategically adjust marketing messages in order to stress consumers’ benefits also on a social, fashion and lifestyle perspective, appealing not only to environmental and health consciousness but also to the targets consumers’ sense of fashion and beauty (Niinimaki, 2010).

Besides, brands that now are targeting their products to consumers caring particularly about the environment or who are interested in the origin of the products they use for their
personal care, can rely on a favorable context which is pushing eco-friendly messages and interest for the provenience of each single part of the final product to the daily debate. Indeed, almost all product categories now have a part of their offer completely dedicated to the eco-friendly cause, and the trend does not seem to stop: cars, clothing, detergents, office items, notebooks, and most of all, food.

Food and beauty products are probably the items that are most directly influenced by this new wave stimulating a newly generated interest towards the background and the story of the products used in the everyday life. Their origin becomes extremely important especially because it guarantees the quality and the actual benefits of the final products for a desired balance between personal wellness and environment (Kim & Chung, 2011). Natural beauty products can be seen as some kind of complex recipe for the skin or for the body in general, and an informed consumer is interested in selecting them with the same attention for the detail generally kept for food one directly eats.

Most companies are thus promoting their brands by stressing the quality of the ingredients they chose, especially if they are “product driven” and targeting the consumers who are the most interested in the cosmetics formulas and composition.

Many others are still exploiting the opportunity of this association with quality food awareness by presenting their products as if they were attractive gourmandises, playing with the multi-sensoriality of creams and bars of soaps that sometimes smell and feel like desserts.

1.1 Aim of the research

This research has the purpose of investigating the ways consumers and brands interact on a daily basis in the current marketplace.

The findings of this paper will be placed into the theoretical framework of Integrated Marketing Communications studies, in particular adding to the idea that companies are more and more seeking the most effective touchpoints in which to invest in order to create actual value to their consumers and build this way a competitive advantage towards competitors (Hogan et Al., Journal of Business Strategy, 2005).
Consumer Research and Behavior techniques will be used to gather the data, ideas and facts necessary to the assumptions constituting the basis for the developing of the thesis, especially to identify the underlying wants and needs of the target.

The final parts of the research will insist on the idea of the importance of consumer experience especially for the companies aiming at building strong brands, and that are thus consumer-oriented in order to make their companies’ value propositions relevant for their targets (Vargo & Lusch, Journal of Marketing, 2004).

As anticipated, in order to determine a scope of investigation for the research, the paper will focus on a specific market, the one of eco-friendly beauty products. The choice was made because such products traditionally imply a high form of involvement from the consumers’ side, which can be explained by values, beliefs and complex sets of metaphors and meanings that they see represented by their purchase.

To cover this topic, the author has constructed a research question that captures the main purpose of this thesis:

**RQ:** *When it comes to eco-friendly beauty products, can companies operating in a highly competitive environment win their consumers by investing on touchpoints providing a “brand experience” during the purchasing process, instead of focusing on the products’ attributes only?*

More specifically, the study will dig deeper into the “brand touchpoint wheel” (Davis, Longoria, Brand Packaging, 2003) applied to this market, determining pros and cons of the marketing tools used by companies to communicate, reach and offer value to the final consumers. In order to do so, the research will be supported by data obtained through a questback sent to 460 consumers of a biological beauty brand, an in-depth interview to an active consumer, participant observation online and mistery shopping in dedicated POS.

Through the determination of the most effective and valuable touchpoints developed by specific companies to get in contact with consumers, the study will place its findings in the theoretical framework of IMC, as each of the touchpoints outlined by the study is as a
matter of fact part of a strategical marketing plan involving different tools working in cooperation to create value.

The purpose of the whole study is to demonstrate that for the particular specificities of the market of green beauty products it is very important to provide a special retail experience supported by a concrete, broad and targeted presence online, in particular through tools that allow consumers to communicate directly and feel involved whenever they want or need (e.g. social media, brand communities).
This finding will thus add to the service-centered view on marketing, showing how the main firms in the green beauty business must keep on testing their consumers and co-creating value with and for them, being customer-driven (Sheth, Sisodia, Sharma, 2000) and market-driven (Day, 1999).

1.2 Thesis structure

The aim of this sub-chapter is to offer an overview of the content of the research, and to anticipate how it is developed through the different paragraphs and parts of the paper. The idea is to guide the reader in order to prepare the mindset and facilitate the discovery of the theme.

The first chapter offers an introduction of the theme and it explains the reasons behind the choice of the topic before passing to develop the research question and the learning objectives of the study.

The second chapter covers the theoretical foundations for the work by summing up some of the most relevant existing studies on the subject of touchpoints and eco-friendly consumption goods.

The third chapter presents the scientific methodology used in the development of the thesis, including an explanation of the approach chosen and the way it was shaped in the moment of data collection.

In the fourth chapter a market analysis is provided, presenting the current situation for the top players in Italy for eco-friendly beauty products and the key characteristics of both goods and consumers as today.
The **fifth chapter** presents the moments of data collection, the main evidences gathered through data and different case studies aimed at exploring sides of the consumer experience, through various focuses.

In the **sixth chapter**, the author summarizes the results of the thesis and the ways in which they answered the research question. Ultimately, the author provides a critical perspective on some of the findings and covers as well possible developments for future research on the matter.
2. Literature review

The first chapter of the study has the purpose of covering part of the literature on the subject taken into account, which could help solving the research question. Literature was gathered by researching through database and online sources, looking for relevant keywords and by investigating prior studies of the most prominent authors who explored the theme. Aside from establishing the foundation for the analysis of the current market situation in eco-friendly beauty goods, the review helped the study in terms of defining hints about possible “dark” areas becoming interesting discussion points for the survey’s questions and on field investigations which were going to be conducted.

2.1 A direct contact between brand and consumer: the touchpoint

The key concept analyzed through the whole study is the idea of “touchpoint”, as the purpose of the research itself is to determine the successful interactions between brand and consumer and the reasons behind their success in general and, most of all, in the specific case of the “green” beauty products’ market. Even if a definition of the meaning of “touch-point” can seem at first quite immediate and easy to seize both in theory and in practice, it is important to cover all possible impacts it can have in affecting the idea of a brand and in the operational implementation of a service in the market (Duncan & Moriarty, 2006). Many authors have been covering this subject in the last decade, and most studies on the matter are concentrated particularly after 2008, when global economic crisis made crucial for companies to correctly evaluate the return on investments of all marketing leverages they invested on, in order to determine the effective ones and those that were not as indispensable. Indeed, the main part of studies regarding consumer touchpoints is aimed at introducing a 360° analysis which should “enlighten” the various strategic options a company faces when it comes to take budget decisions.
For instance, this theme was explored in 2009 by Spengler and Wirth, who wrote the article “Maximizing the impact of marketing and sales activities” in order to clarify and expose the ways in which those that they call “shrinking budgets” are affecting the approach of companies to the constant monitoring of their points of contacts with consumers.

The assumption funding their study is that while there was a time when companies got “carried away” by all the possible online and offline instruments and platforms that became available to vehicle their communication messages, this “as many channels as possible” approach is now decreasing together with the spending capacity in the planning stages. Thus, the mapping and the managing of the company investment becomes one of the key axes for the planning of a company’s strategy and each investment touching each channel becomes susceptible of a constant realignment.

In their article, the authors also cover the huge potential of touch points in the aim of first reaching potential clients and then turning them into actual purchasers: they also underline how each touch point has a different impact on a consumer’s perceptions and on the ways the brand equity can be affected on various levels which are not the same in all circumstances.

A very interesting framework provided by their work was the short summary of the key findings of prior touchpoint analyses, revealing some constant characteristics that will later be relevant to confront with the evidences observed through direct data gathering.

In short, they recall that:

- The biggest part of the personal, subjective and thus most directly impacting consumer’s perceptions experience happens during the sale process or at the point of sale;
- A relevant part of the brand experience gets shaped by recommendations coming from friends and acquaintances, or from articles and content shared by print media. However, recent peer-to-peer communication and online and digital communities are increasing their relevancy;
- About 10% of consumers decide about their future purchases on information sources like internet, e-mail, apps and social media.
The fact that a study from 2009 already presented as the summary of current and prior studies on the matter two out of three points regarding online interaction, social media influences and new digital tools as the core focuses of consumer experience analysis, became an alert for what should have been a good angle from which to interpretate the same theme on 2014, after years of social media expansion and digital instruments improving and enhancing.

Another key learning funding the base for a touch point analysis on any type of market and product category is the understanding that the only way to define the effectiveness of different channels and their usefulness in communicating the desired messages to consumers comes from taking into account only what is actually received and not what it is sent to a target group.

When there is a gap between sent and received it becomes thus interesting and crucial for a healthy company to re-adjust its messages, targets or channels investments according to the desired strategy.

A study that adds to this view is expressed in an article by Hogan et al, “Brand-building: finding the touchpoints that count”, which also stresses the importance of evaluating and chosing before entering the market the most relevant and coherent touchpoints accordingly with consumer base and brand positioning.

While Spengler and Wirth focus more on the idea of selecting the most effective channels in order to optimize budget choice and consequently increase brand equity through effective and efficient investments, Hogan et al. investigate the necessary steps for the creation of a memorable consumer experience as a main aim for those that are defined by the study “successful brand-builders”.

In particular, the article is useful for the purpose of this research because it completes the framework of general considerations on touch points by providing some necessary steps in the aim of reaching consumer satisfaction through direct interactions consumer / brand:

1. Chose the most profitable consumers in terms of long term growth and invest on them. Targeting is the first step to concentrate the investments on the only clients that really are relevant and interesting for the brand’s future.
2. **Concentrate the investments** on few touch points that should be selected depending on their potential in terms of directly affecting consumer behavior and brand loyalty after the purchase.

3. **Set realistic goals for implementations** in order not to lose the focus and always be able to monitor some key touch points that need to bring positive results quickly.

4. **Keep monitoring the market** standards and competition: a touch point that once was considered as a competitive advantage towards competitors could quickly have become a normal industry requirement no longer perceived as something “extra” from the side of consumers.

As for the study previously mentioned, this article also underlines how a consumer experience is shaped through a complex set of intertwined events that occur prior, during and after the purchase and which get all together like pieces of a puzzle forming in the consumer’s mind some kind of “virtual” but extremely “real” brand equity in terms of direct perceptions.

Another view on the theme is provided by Davis and Longoria, who also offer a definition of marketing touchpoints adding to the concept of the importance of making them work together and in synergy in order to increase their effectiveness and create a consistent brand experience leading to consumer satisfaction.

It might be useful to shortly present the authors’ definition of touchpoints in order to clarify it once more and to determine the starting points for their further considerations:

> “What is a brand touchpoint? It’s all of the different ways that your brand interacts with and makes an impression on customers, employees and other stakeholders. Every action, tactic and strategy your brand has with customers or stakeholders, whether it is through advertising, a merchandising display or a customer service call, is a brand touchpoint. (...) In general, brand touchpoints fall into three distinct customer-experience segments: pre-purchase experience, purchase experience and post-purchase experience touchpoints.”

Davis and Longoria thus introduce in the discussion the “time factor”: the fact of splitting the points of contact brand / consumer according to the moment where the interaction
happened (before, during or after the purchase) is a smart way to simplify and make easier for companies to monitor and keep track of the impressions the brand is leaving in consumers’ perceptions.

This distinction is going to be taken into account throughout the whole study, in order to understand not only which touchpoints are the most effective when it comes to eco-friendly beauty products, but also the moments in which they are most likely to hit and positively reach the target consumers.

The article shortly brings to the reader’s attention also the theme of the brand packaging, which will be later presented as one of the key elements most directly creating a link between natural cosmetics’ brands and influencing a customer perception in the quickest way.

The example provided is the one of “Tom’s of Maine toothpaste”, selling natural care products made with pure ingredients: the packaging is coherent with the brand’s identity as it looks simple, environmental friendly and, unlike most toothpaste brands, the images are not as colored and bright and the paper used is beige colored carton with a simple picture of the vegetal on it.

This coherency helps creating consistency between the brand messages sent to consumers, and the actual positioning becomes this way easier to seize and stronger facing competitors.

Another interesting tip the study provides, also taken in consideration when evaluating the consumers’ feedback on their perceptions of the market, is the method suggested to conduct external research. The approach brought to light by the authors considers different attitudes towards different groups that can each give insights on specific strengths and weaknesses of all touchpoints.

Consumers should indeed be divided in three categories: past or lost, potential and current. As the focus and the expectations of each of these groups are shaped on different parameters, it is important for a company to listen to all of them with different purposes in order to improve the situation towards competition.

2.2 Shaping customer knowledge: the CBBE model

Quantity does not necessarily mean quality and effectiveness to the aim of communicating the right message to the right consumers in the right moment.
A comprehensive, cohesive model to interpret and to set the right priorities when working on the brand strategy is the customer-based brand equity model (CBBE model, Keller 2001a, 2008).

This theory is very useful for the purpose of the study as it accords a very central position to brand knowledge, defined as the mix of attributes, characteristics, information and perceptions that the average consumer holds in mind about a brand because of marketing programs and activities.

As the study is investigating the touchpoints influencing the purchase of the eco-friendly beauty products in the Italian market, and the reasons of the success of each, it is clear that the link with the dynamics constructing the brand knowledge shared by consumers is direct and evident.

Particularly, brand knowledge does not only represent the actual facts about a brand and the sum of the messages issued by its communication efforts: the key aspect of it comes from the fact that it mixes them with all the thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images and personal experiences that occur individually and which will likely stay linked to the minds of consumers forever in their memory.

The reason why brand knowledge is so powerful comes exactly from this particular characteristic, making it hard for companies to change or influence the result of all these interactions once they are installed in the consumer's mind.

Hence, it is critical for organizations to intervene and try and shape the image they want to express about their brands at an earlier stage and thanks to a very careful selection of the moments of contacts with their potential consumers.

CBBE model recognizes the power of brand knowledge by declaring that the strength of a brand lies in the minds of consumers and the meaning it represents to them, which could be very different from the original one but at the same time still positively affecting their perceptions even if for different reasons than those originally planned by the brand management.

The CBBE model also takes into account two definitions that can make the difference in terms of winning competition in a crowded market environment: brand image and brand awareness.
Brand awareness represents the trace left by a brand in the mind of a consumer even after the contact with the communication messages sent by the company: it is very important because when awareness is strong, it is likely for a brand to be recalled by people in the moment of need recognition in all types of conditions.

A strong awareness can even bring consumers to think about a brand when seeing the direct or indirect advertising of another brand which might be less known in their experience but selling the same type of product category.

Brand image, on the other hand, can be considered as the sum of consumer perceptions and associations for a brand that are automatically linked to the brand when thinking about it: this type of definition is very visual as it actually refers to the concrete images and concepts that the person connects to a company due to prior exposure to branded products.

Of course, the stronger and the more positive associations a brand manages to create in its consumers’ mindset, the more likely the consumer will turn to a POS to actually purchase the product.

Points-of-difference towards competition can be created even in markets with many players and the same type of products because of limitations in terms of product development: when extra attributes generate, a series of favorable effects take place and they can be as crucial for the economical success of a brand as enhanced loyalty, price premiums, or price elasticity response in case of a price increase.

Using CBBE as a theoretical framework, the study will thus add to this view by selecting the activities that really seem to be driving sales in the italian market, both by creating awareness and by giving start to a positive set of perceptions.

It is easy to catch an immediate connection between the concrete concept of harmonizing a company’s touchpoints (previously mentioned) with the theoretical concept of integrated marketing communications (IMC), as both theories aim at combining, completing and creating a synergy with all the different parts of a communication mix.

Particularly, Keller’s (Journal of Marketing Communications, 2009) definition of an integrated marketing communication program is the following:
“The development, implementation, and evaluation of marketing communications using multiple communications options where the design and execution of any communication option reflects the nature and content of other communication options that also make up the program”.

This definition is summed up by Keller with the idea that a marketing plan following the rules of IMC should always be Consistent, Coherent, Convergent and Continuous towards the messages vehiculed and the tools used to communicate them. As suggested by Keller, the different parts of a brand communications aimed at potential consumers should mix together and add to each other forming in conclusion a brand knowledge that enhances brand equity and really is greater in value than the actual sum of the different ingredients.
Keller’s study as well later focuses on the raising importance of interactive marketing communications online, which are presented as the natural solution for modern companies needing to follow their consumers, who are moving to the internet.
It is going to be relevant for the study to analyze this part of the IMC online in order to define both opportunities and the biggest challenges of the moments of contact between brand and consumer taking place in the web.

2.3 A customer driven view of marketing

Another good theoretical assumption for the study is the work of Vargo & Lusch who, in 2004, published in the Journal of Marketing a very interesting and detailed article regarding “Evolving to a new dominant logic in Marketing”.
The key concept of their study is that the normal marketplace has been switching from being “goods-oriented” to “service centered”.
With this kind of perspective, the client is placed in the very centre, especially when a 360 degree touchpoint analysis takes place (Spengler, 2008).
The goods centered view puts the focus on the product itself, having a determined value representing a physical utility that passes from owner to owner thanks to an economical regulation: to maximize efficiency and revenues, the companies’ productions should be standardized and produced quickly and constantly.
On the other hand, the service-centered view puts the focus on the consumer and it implies a continuous series of social and economic processes that are largely focused on resources that should always be better than competition in order to survive. This view is coherent with the idea of monitoring touchpoints as a way to regularly check consumer satisfaction, as it considers marketing as a continuous learning process eventually improving firm performance by cultivating regular relationships with consumers to whom it is offered a value proposition as close as possible to their needs.

An organization’s core competencies are thus not anymore physical assets but they become instead “bundles of skills and technologies” as expressed by Hamel and Prahalad (1994).

This theory puts the products in the hands of consumers, and it adds to the previous considerations on the importance of catching their favors there where the company still has the control of the interactions: the touchpoint.

In this sense, service centered view is consumer centric and market driven and firms need to keep generating hypothesis and testing them in order to find the best mix and match suitable for their product positioning and target sales.

The outcomes of a marketing mix thus become an extremely important part of the planning process itself as they can be fully studied and understood just once they become alive in the marketplace, getting new meanings once they are reaching the consumers.

Another important consideration linked to this theory seeing services instead of products is pointed out by Gutman (1982) who underlines how items are “means for reaching end states or valued states of being such as happiness, security or accomplishment”.

Indeed, consumers very often buy products because the simple fact of owning a determined object, displaying it to other people and experiencing its property provide satisfactions which are way wider than those associated with the mere product function of the purchase.

This suggestion becomes very useful for the subject of the research as for natural beauty products there is a very common component of self-satisfaction and personal realization because of the feeling of meeting some precise beliefs and ideals thanks to a purchase.

2.4 Consumer behavior: what lies behind the purchase of a natural cosmetic
In order to set the basis for further investigations on these main theories and to take them into account in the next stages of the research, it is important to cover as well some of the existing literature dedicated to the market of natural cosmetics and the behavioral aspects of the target consumers.

An interesting perspective on the theme was provided by Davis-Bundrage & Kim in their article “Predicting Purchases of Eco-Beauty Products: A Qualitative Meta-Analysis”, where the authors recognize the great potential of natural and organic personal care industry for expanding from niche to mainstream.

Particularly, the article suggests that a way for the market to take this quality (and quantity) jump would be to consider the benefits and vantage points coming from the use of these products not only from an environmental and health benefit point of view but from a social, “fashionable” one.

Indeed, a good step to start increasing the client base rapidly and in the long term could be to consider the products because of attribute-based desires and not only through health and environmental benefits: many of the brands present on the market as today, including the biggest players, are indeed shifting from a mere “green” image by adding to that core aspect many other attributes which are more social, fashionable and stylish, characteristics that have been in the past linked mainly to expensive, luxurious cosmetics mostly sold in perfumeries (Yan et al., 2011).

By definition, natural cosmetics and personal care are placed in the product category of ecological consumer goods and the purchasing habits around them have been investigated with the aim of understanding sustainable or eco-friendly consumption.

This type of consumption and the marketing efforts directed to explaining it fall in the area of “green marketing”, which however takes into account many different types of product categories going from household products to food to fuel: the difference between beauty items and all other products of this type comes from the fact that beauty products are used by the consumer to directly alter and possibly improve personal image, self-esteem and to meet the latest trends (Ray Davis-Bundrage and Kim, 2012).

Besides, cosmetics are considered as “twins” to fashion and clothing in the aim of increasing personal satisfaction by encountering consumer aesthetic desires (Niinimaki, 2010).
As for eco-clothing, one possible way for these products to overcome their niche position is to reflect widely consumers’ styles and expectations, adding to the environmental concern and inspiration also a good design providing an appealing product.

What is considered as an “appealing design” for a dress can be translated into cosmetics through attributes like formulation, color, pleasantness of the texture, ease in application and a distinctive product packaging.

Thanks to new media facilitating the spreading of information and the internet being an enormous source of all types of content, it has become easier for interested consumers to retain details on what is good and what is not for their body, and people have become more concerned with the environment, health, and product ingredients especially when becoming aware of some of the harmful effects of synthetic cosmetics on the skin.

However, studies on natural cosmetics have been less covered in literature than those on other kinds of organic products and the reasons influencing purchase intention and the willingness to pay higher prices are still partially unexplored.

A study that was useful in order to set some paradigms was “Sustainability seen from the perspective of consumers” (2011) by Hanss & Böhm.

The work aims at investigating the reasons behind a purchase for a “sustainable” product by individuating all main attributes pushing people to the choice of a particular branded product.

The findings of the research are not directly related to cosmetics, but they can help summing up some of the evidences regarding green products consumption which still attract some of the consumer base, and that will be taken into account for the purpose of this study.

Macnaghten et al. (1995) maintain that “sustainability involves moving from a current unsatisfactory state (i.e. one in which economic needs are pursued at the expense of environmental and social needs) to a satisfactory state (i.e. one in which economic and social needs are met in ways that do not exceed the limits of the environment)”.

Through interviews directed to about 150 respondents, Hanss & Böhm collected new data in order to understand what gets to the minds of consumers when they think about the concept of sustainability: the evidences collected showed that people are most immediately relating this idea to a sense of concern that does not have to be ignored in
order to protect the environment from endangering risks threatening the health of planet earth.

Sustainable products thus become items that are in line with a sustainable form of consumption, reducing the ecological and social problems associated with the average production operated by companies.

In order to recognize these products, precise labels expressing the ways in which the products were produced and the standards that were respected not to harm the environment can be adopted: however, such labels are mostly noticed by people that really are into the cause and who are purposely seeking for those details (Teisl et. al, 2008).

However, such labeling and the packaging resulting from it is not suitable to attract more consumers and to increase the target of green cosmetics.

This study will indeed focus on the type of consumers that really can be attracted to the market by particular communication moves and precise touchpoints that can enhance or modify brand image, as consumers seeking only products that encounter such rigid standards represent a core group that is less flexible and open to receive new messages by brands, as their existing set of values and beliefs is already occupying a big part of their total interest towards the brand or product (Doran, 2009).

Indeed, in such cases, the interest towards the cause and the product category is stronger than the one for the specific product, and these consumers get more attracted by precise qualities that they seek from the start rather than by products that would possibly offer a mix of characteristics they may or not be looking for from the beginning.

2.3 The concept of sustainability declined to cosmetics

As already mentioned, Macnaghten et al. (2013) maintain that the concept of sustainability involves moving from a current unsatisfactory state (for instance, one in which economic needs are pursued without considering the negative influences on present and future social needs) to a satisfactory state (one in which both economic and social needs are met in ways that do not exceed the limits of the environment).

Macnaghten and colleagues (1995) also explored in prior studies the ways consumers approach the sustainability concept.
Their findings show that people relate to this idea two main aspects in particular: care for the environment and the concern for a common future shared by the whole humanity. In particular, many of the respondents of their research seemed to insist on the link between the two, for instance by underlining that changes in human lifestyle are needed in order to secure the livelihood of current and future generations. Since Macnaghten’s studies, media-coverage of sustainability issues increased considerably, so it is now possible to assume that people are even more aware about the sustainable development aspects of the world, and, consequently, of the business world.

“Sustainable products” can be defined as products that allow consumers to reduce ecological and social problems associated with normal production. Gerlach and Schudak (2010) provide a list of product attributes that are often associated to such category, and some of them are for instance the no use of toxic chemicals, the saving of energy, care for animal rights, fair trading and also product quality and longevity. However, some of these aspects may not be the key features that consumers seek in their ideal product when it comes to beauty, and it will be interesting to explore other ones as well in the following of the research.
3. Methodology

This chapter will outline the way the research is conducted: the structure of the method used can be framed in the scope of research design (Yin, 2003). Particularly, the methodology of the work will be taken into analysis through the “research onion” defined by Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2011), which considers the steps of a dissertation design as different layers that start from the widest to eventually reach the heart of the detail.

3.1 Research Philosophy and Approach

Different studies lay on different types of perspectives and the aim of the researcher is to address the philosophical areas of social science by selecting the most appropriate for the field of investigation and for the purpose of the research question. Some of the most common and popular research philosophies are positivism, interpretivism and post-positivism: the focus now is not to give a detailed presentation of each of these approaches, but to offer an overview in order to later get to the details of the choice of the model used for the thesis.

Positivism is the classic approach sustaining a scientific method of investigation. Such a way of proceeding implies mostly empirical research and evidence collected through data that will be used as the foundations of hypothesis testing. Classic forms of data collecting are scientifically structured surveys, large samples analysis and numeric correlations between results.

Interpretivism focuses instead on the direct observation of people and their habits and preferences. In this case the tools used to construct the research are qualitative data, subjective experience, smaller samples and detailed examinations from which the researcher will later take out a more general meaning.

Post-positivism is a middle way between the two, sharing the same basic fundations of positivism (empirical research and data collecting) but taking a more relativistic approach when analyzing them. Indeed, the methods used to get to the final evidences are a mix between quantitative and qualitative.

The philosophy behind this approach towards research comes from the belief that there is an objective world, but it is necessary to filter it through the perspectives of different individuals and their unique experiences and background.
Knowledge is indeed partial on its own and basic observation of it does not guarantee a full view and a complete understanding; the whole can just be brought to light by considering it through the lenses of individual experience. Because of these considerations, interpretivism has been often chosen as the preferable approach when investigating business studies (Saunders et. Al, 2011): indeed, interpretivism does not have as its main focus to analyze facts and objective reality at the fullest. Its main purpose is instead to investigate and analyze only the phenomena recognized as interesting for the research purpose in order to take meaning out of them and create links suitable for the construction of a final result. However, even more relevant and useful to the aim of this dissertation is the post-positivism methodology. The purpose of this choice is the desire of mixing the actual reality and numerical evidences found on the current market for eco-friendly beauty products in Italy with more personal and “in-depth” observations, having the potential to enlighten some dark areas and aspects that would otherwise remain unseized. Such an approach gives the researcher a double chance: using the pros of inductive research and its capacity of discovering hidden connections between states of things and reasons behind them, while at the same time still funding the basic steps of the process on data and concrete experiences allowing logically derived considerations (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

3.2 Research Method

As anticipated, the chosen approach being post-positivism, the method used to answer the research question will mix quantitative and qualitative methods. Numbers and facts gathered through the quantitative section of the analysis will pave the way to the progressing of the research: they will both indicate complete elements which can be taken as sources of knowledge to get to a conclusion for the research purpose but at the same time they will outline areas that should be analyzed through a different angle, not limited only to numbers and facts. Qualitative research will follow the discussion anticipated by the data collected, by investigating on a deeper lever the evidences judged as more relevant in order to define
the best possible touchpoints for a company working in the eco-friendly beauty products’ market.

A method of analysis differs from another by the way data are collected, analyzed and presented, and the choice made by the researcher sets the scope of the investigation and its potential findings.

In the case of this dissertation, the decision of following both paths of quantitative and qualitative methods was due to the will of not losing any chance to understand the dynamics of a market which is reasonably new and whose key attributes and core consumers still have to be classified and studied on a broader level.

The high potential of the market in terms of consumer behavior studies and the following managerial implications for companies operating in the sector impacted on the decision of adopting a mixed methodology.

Particularly, the goal was to identify through quantitative methods some of the key elements needed to start the actual research (e.g. identity of the core consumers, top of mind brands, statistics on preferences) in order to later pass to a wider qualitative study allowing to explore broader areas of interest through the analysis of textual responses (e.g. community content, in-depth interview, mistery shopping).

Such a method of research is particularly useful to outline different perspectives on a subject and to later put quantitative information on a real world, made of individuals and their personal experiences and feelings more than statistics.

The assumption is that, once individuated the most relevant group of consumers and the key elements grouping them together and linking their preferences for the eco-friendly products they use, all characteristics of qualitative research will be enhanced by the fact that they are not only valid but also addressed to the right group of people, targeted through quantitative methods.

Quantitative research becomes thus a bridge to individuate the most precious consumer insights that will later be analyzed in detail through a classic qualitative approach.

Maxwell (1998) states that one of the biggest advantages of qualitative research is that it is particularly useful to understand the meanings given by people to particular aspects of things, and the reasons behind them.

Besides, the context becomes extremely relevant as well in order to fully understand all the influences shaping consumer experience and the personal perceptions of each.
Through this way of proceeding it becomes possible to construct new meaning during the process, adding to theories used as a framework by observing new unexpected phenomena due to circumstances that either were not explored before or that were never associated in the same way.

The theme of consumer touchpoints has been broadly analyzed by different authors who were able to provide specific examples of the effectiveness of each tool used to reach the consumer through detailed research and specific brand or product examples. However, qualitative only research is most of the times mainly interpretive in the sense that it is funded on the final personal interpretation of the data collected, which need to be set in the right theoretical framework in order to be reconducted to a conclusion that can be applied to a larger group of consumers.

All data collected, already based on personal experiences, feelings and perceptions, thus need to pass through the also personal point of view of the researcher, influenced by a combination of social context and knowledge background in which the researcher is situated.

Indeed, Creswell (2003) states that no researcher can avoid the personal interpretation brought to qualitative data analysis.

The mix with quantitative data collection also has the goal of lowering the chances of personal interpretation and specific cases impacting on the final considerations issued by the development of the research: a bigger sample of consumers already segmented “numerically” into different groups of interest and relevance to the research is used as the base for the qualitative investigations that will follow.

This first step has the purpose of selecting the target sample from the beginning, allowing the qualitative tools to target only the consumers which are in line with the aim of the study as brought to light by the quantitative assumptions.

It is also important to define which is the goal of the research in terms of its final content being “theoretical” (aimed at enhancing the existing theory on a subject matter) or “applied” (used to interpretate a particular subejct matter through the new knowledge gathered): the research has the purpose of collecting results that can be applied to the contemporary situation of the market in Italy, thus adding to the existing theories and creating new perspectives more specifically aimed at this precise product cathegory.
Indeed, while many of the evidences outlined by the research are theoretical in the sense that they confirm and sustain the existing theories also presented in the literature overview, the most relevant findings are specifically related to the market of eco-friendly beauty products in Italy, thus helping the reader understand the specificity of this theme. This approach is one of the most common when it comes to qualitative research (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), as it allows the use of theory in order to inform the reader prior and during the investigation and its application throughout the development of the findings.

3.3 Research Strategy

This part of the dissertation aims at explaining the tools used in order to conduct the research and the reasons behind this choice. The instruments used to collect data and evidence have to be of course in line with the research approach previously stated and they need to be the most suitable for the gathering of the insights needed to the progress of the research.

The first step was the construction of a questback: the questback provided many interesting feedbacks because of the qualitative sample of consumers to which it was forwarded.

Indeed, the questback was structured and sent through during a six months internship at L’Oréal Italy and in the context of a research aimed at collecting quali-quantitative feedbacks on some of the product lines of a biological brand of the group.

The most interesting part is that the questback allowed a double segmentation to the aims of the research, both at a first and on a later stage.

Indeed, the questback was sent directly by the market research department to a list of email contacts provided by the digital communication department: the contacts were taken from the brand database made of the consumers who willingly gave their email and personal information to the brand by subscription to newsletters and mailing lists. (Appendix 8.1)

The receivers were thus segmented from the very beginning being consumers interested in the market of eco-friendly beauty products as they either already purchased at least a product from the L’Oréal brand or because they were curious enough to sign in to a subscription to receive more pieces of news.
Globally, the questback was made of 25 questions and it was mainly aimed at exploring the level of appreciation of different product lines towards consumers and, on a wider level, the involvement and liking of the brand image, which had recently gone through a repositioning from green / herbal to eco-friendly / sensorial and more feminine.

However, while the general aim of the questionnaire was about establishing the kind of relation between specific brand and the liking towards its current or past consumers, some of the introductory questions were shaped by the researcher in order to dig deeper into the general habits and rituals of interaction between the sample and a generic beauty brand.

Indeed, while this type of questback is sent by L’Oréal at least once a year to the target consumers, in order to monitor their feedbacks and to seize the development potential, the first “generic” questions were added with a specific investigation purpose: during the six months internship while working for the brand, each intern has to develop a personal research project aimed at improving the brand, and this one was about locating the most impactful consumer touchpoints in the consumer / brand relation.

Through this questback, wide in scope and precisely targeted thanks to the fact that it was sent and managed directly by the market research department of a multibrand company, a first part of primary data was collected.

The way the questback was conducted was convenient for the research as it allowed the study to rely on some primary data without having to suffer the drawbacks of primary data gathering: general low response rate, smaller samples, a longer time to process and elaborate the results.

In the context of a quali-quantitative analysis, the results of this first questionnaire became the starting point for a market analysis founded on case studies focusing on different aspects of those that were named as the top of mind brands in the eco-friendly beauty products.

At first, a more generic competitor analysis was provided in order to define the context of the research through secondary data collected through article research classified as “recent”, so that they could be as close as possible to the actual status of the market.

Later, some of the most relevant top players were presented through a different perspective aimed at bringing to light a particular side of the consumer experience linked to the brand.
In this case, stratified purposeful sampling was employed, meaning that the cases were selected so that they could both highlight common patterns and at the same time provide unique characteristics of each company (www.princeton.edu).

Such a rationale in choosing companies and case studies is directed at selecting only the cases that are rich in information and potentially informative towards the solving of the research question.

Going further with the research, and getting more and more into detail, another source of primary data was used in order to assemble new and relevant consumer insights: an in-depth interview to a loyal consumer of one of the most interesting brands on the market took place in Milan.

The interviewee was recruited after a mystery shopping visit that took place in the flagship of one of the most interesting and promising brands on the market, Caudalie: after the research “on paper” through secondary data, online investigation and indirect experiences, a mystery shopping visit into the unique monobrand store in Italy was indeed planned. The visit had the purpose to directly test the consumer experience provided by the brand in its flagship, in order to understand the priorities of the brand in terms of communication and to experience the multi-sensorial contact promised by the brand on paper.

Once the visit was over, it appeared that the chance of interviewing in detail a consumer involved in the brand, aware of the specificity of the market and used to the interaction provided by the eco-friendly beauty brands in Italy, could have added to the purpose of the study.

Particularly, it was interesting to expand and get deeper with the questions addressed to the consumer, which were going to be personal and targeted than those provided in the first quantitative questionnaire, only forming the basic skeleton for the research and the inspiration for the secondary, qualitative investigations.

All of these different data, coming from a wide range of sources and collected through various methods, provided meaning individually but even more when put together: each piece was a contribute to the global understanding of the phenomenon, and such a convergence added strengths to the results as the various insights came together to establish a wider and deeper understanding of the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008).
3.4 Delimitations of the research

The first obvious delimitation is that the thesis only focuses on the Italian market of eco-friendly beauty products: this choice was made because it was more relevant for the research purpose to dig deeper into a limited group of consumers sharing the same background and expectations (e.g. the Italians) rather than investigate on a major scale but with lower chances to understand the dynamics behind the purchasing intentions.

The survey, mystery shopping visit and interview used throughout the research are all addressed to Italian consumers and points of sales: as anticipated, this choice allowed to consider the cultural variables and existing concepts that could influence the analyzed segment’s mindsets, but on the other hand it might have left out some important considerations that an international scope could have brought to light.

Along with that, online participant observation of consumer communities was however held on an international level thanks to internet, so that it was possible to relate those findings to those collected in Italy.

All relevations are considered as a mean to reach a universal meaning especially thanks to the theories constituting the skeleton of the work itself.

Besides, although it might appear as if a single-country focus can make the study weaker, some scholars (e.g. Leung and Horwitz, 2010) actually argue that a single-country setting is more desirable.

Another factor that might influence the outcomes of the studies is directly related to the decision of focusing the research on the Italian market: the main players presented through the study to illustrate different aspects and ways of using consumer touchpoints are not so many, as the Italian scene is still little fragmented in terms of charismatic companies that can be perceived as leaders and thus directly influencing the consumers’ purchasing intentions.

Besides, most of the companies presented do not have Italian origins and their marketing strategy is simply adapted to the sales area: this fact does not allow the study to consider the interesting and complex world of strategic product development, which would have
been pertinent to analyze as the product itself is of course the main and most direct touchpoint between brand and consumer.

Nevertheless, to answer the research question it is also direct and simple to analyze other actions in a brand touchpoint wheel that a company can decide to implement to affect the consumers’ perceptions: leaving the product development theme away paves the way to a “clean start” for the analysis as the main companies in Italy (excluding Bottega Verde) all start with products that are not created *ad hoc* for Italian consumers.

This way, competitive advantages get created through other types of interventions that aim at shaping a whole world of meanings and images around the brand with extra-dimensions that extend the moment of purchase: in store experience, information gathering, social media involvement, post purchase assistance and so on.
4. Market Analysis

4.1 Description of the market: Green Beauty Products

The purpose of this part of the study is to conduct an analysis providing relevant considerations on the typology, characteristics and attributes of the market of “green cosmetics” in Italy.

A synthesis of the existing studies on the matter will be provided, so that it will be possible to draw conclusions about the factors impacting the buying behavior of people who feel close and involved in this type of products.

The series of characteristics that define the consumer profile of such individuals, set in the context of the marketplace in Italy right now, will indeed be crucial to provide a new perspective on marketing natural beauty products brands.

Significant influential factors that push consumers to the existing market of green products need to be traced down in order to turn them into actual statements useful for the aim of expanding the natural and organic cosmetic market towards a mainstream one.

Before starting digging deeper into the topic, some basic distinctive definitions are needed: the whole study focuses indeed on the market for eco-friendly beauty products, but what are they really? What does “eco-friendly” even mean, in a product marketing sense? What are the differences with other terms such as “bio”, “organic”, “natural” or “green”?

Generically, by “green marketing” it is possible to define the production, promotion and distribution of products (of all types) that are considered environmentally safe.

This definition is the one taken from Wikipedia and it thus expresses the common view on the matter, shared by the average internet user.

Following this definition statement, it is easy to imagine that consumers expect “green firms” to implement a broad range of activities in order to maintain their image, and such activities can involve the characteristics, composition, production processes, packaging changes, and also advertising claims or messages of the products sold.

Almost all types of product categories or services can be classified as “green”, if they meet any or some of the features previously stated: air travel, food, laundry detergents, bio fuel, bottled water, clothes, cars.
While all of these products and services can, if green, be appreciated on a first level by consumers sharing similar concerns on environment, it is of course impossible to state that a person sensitive to the topic of eco-friendly goods will be attracted in the same way to all of these different offers.

Environmental concern and health benefits are indeed one of the components in building the buying attitude towards green products, but social and personal attribute-based desires are key to understand the actual choices of the consumer base, and what pushes them towards a specific market and, even more precisely, to a determined brand.

For instance, natural cosmetics can’t be analyzed only as products studied for the purpose of understanding the dynamics of sustainable consumption: Ray Davis-Bundrage and Kim (2012) say that eco-friendly beauty products are “fashion products, used methodologically by the consumer to participate in altering image, image maintenance, promotion of self-esteem, and trendsetting”.

The definition of “green” applied to a product, process or service aimed at a third party with a purchasing power is thus very wide and open to different contexts and declinations. Similar to this expression there are other generic terms like “natural” and the most common “eco-friendly”, often used in the context of speaking about sustainable consumption and with a more or less precise extent.

Useful to the research is instead the definition of two words recurring in the semantic field of the natural market and sharing the same meaning: “biological” and “organic”.

The terms refer to raw materials used in the process of creating the final product, which have to be handled, manipulated and finished in a way that entitles the firms operating “organically” to obtain a special certification.

For instance, organic foods (which are also the base for many natural cosmetics) are cultivated using as little as possible of modern and synthetic inputs such as pesticides or chemical fertilizers and trying to use instead some natural equivalents.

Besides, in the following steps of production no industrial solvents, additives or unnatural substances are used at any moment.

The movement of “organic farming” took shape in 1940s as a statement against the increasing mechanical industrialization of agriculture, and it developed since then affecting people’s level of awareness about the origins of the food they buy on a daily basis (Paull, 2006).
While starting from the farming business only, this way of looking at the production of common goods or raw materials spread fast and easily to other categories and markets. Of all the products directly influenced and thus developed on the organic theme, natural skin-care cosmetics are for sure one of the most immediate declinations of organic food: ingredients have to be derived from natural sources only (herbs, roots, oils, fruits) and combined with naturally occurring carrier agents (preservatives, surfactants, humectants). The ingredients thus need to exist in nature and no intervention from synthetic chemicals is accepted, so that the original elements and their properties are preserved. However, the scope of this paper will not be restrained only to the specific category of organic products, as for its purposes it is instead more interesting to investigate the behavior of consumers seeking generically “natural” products too.

4.2 Current Market Trend

Globally, the natural personal care products market is showing a high growth potential which is interesting new entrants to join the existing companies, especially tempting big groups to develop further their organic products lines (Bundrage & Kim, 2012).

The market situation in Italy is characterized by the same positive trend and predictions of growth, yet interesting different key players. Recent studies from Cosmetica Italia (National Association of Cosmetic Entreprises, July 2013) on the current situation show that the national demand for cosmetics in Italy is following a negative trend, forcing the industries to reach a global decrease of -2,4% vs. previous year in terms of volumes of production. This translates into an overall value for the selling of cosmetics to final consumers (sell-out) of around 9.400 million of euros in 2013.

In terms of traditional distribution, perfume shops are the worst performers of the year, losing -5,1% vs. py (previous year) in terms of sales. Another channel suffering the decreasing purchasing power of Italians is the professional one, where both hair and beauty saloons are losing an average of -8% vs py. Pharmacies are instead showing a “flat” trend, slowly increasing their growth after a year of slight decrease.
In this adverse scenario, there is a channel that keeps growing year after year, increasing its market share significantly: herbalists’ shops, which grew of around +3,5% vs py, reaching a market value of over 410 million of euros. The main reason for this growth is defined by Cosmetica Italia’s study as the “growing interest shown by consumers towards green products, and the expansion in Italy of mono-brands shops selling them.”

According to a recent research of the British Institute “Organic Monitor”, globally the market of beauty products classified as natural, biological and organic had a turnover of about 14 billion euros worldwide. Europe alone counts for 2.1 billion euros with about 200.000 companies producing organic cosmetics. The country spending the most in “natural beauty” is Germany, with 865 million euros, followed by Italy, France and England.

This context shows that the Italian market for skin care products is rapidly changing, as the balances that once characterized it are now taking new shapes, seeing traditional distribution channels getting weaker and weaker. Cosmetica Italia’s study shows how the interest of Italians towards natural beauty products is stressed by the growth of herbalists’ stores, but just few key players on the green market are taking full advantage of this mutating consumer taste, through their strategic moves, promotions, communications and renewed positioning.

Indeed, the growth of herbalists’ shops along with the flat trend of pharmacies (which can be considered as positive in a decreasing context) provide great visibility to natural products all over the country in Italy, and the chance to rapidly reach a great number of interested consumers.

“Going green” seems to be the new trend in consumer taste, and this phenomenon is supported by market analysis attesting the growth of this market in terms of turnover and of actual spending disposition from interested consumers. Indeed, a study from newspaper “La Repubblica” (2012) indicated that Italians are willing to spend more if the products they buy are “eco-bio”, taken from herbs and plants and produced away from chemical contaminations and artificial substances.
The study also offers some kind of “identikit” of the average bio beauty customer in Italy, portrayed by dermatologist Doctor Canci, who is collecting direct considerations from patients who ask her advice on the most suitable products for their needs. Indeed, many of her patients are asking for about two years now to receive natural products only, to heal their skin issues, and the doctor managed to sum up the characteristics she noticed to be common among most of them: the majority of this group is young women aged between 25 and 45, educated (often graduated) and with the habit of surfing on the internet often to do all kind of everyday research. They also order the products they want on the internet and they have them shipped in the nearest herbal shop or directly at home: the products they order may come from very far away (South Africa, Australia) and with a consequent high mark-up, but they are willing to pay it just to meet their specific needs. The Doctor says that the fundamental characteristic that connects them is their pride and the strong belief they seem to carry towards their decision of “going green”, in order to avoid chemicals and live naturally for theirs and nature’s sake.

4.3 Top Players

Throughout the study, only the key players on the Italian market will constantly be taken as a benchmark in order to illustrate some best practices and to give examples on how theoretical evidences actually take place. Biggest companies aside, the green beauty products’ offer in Italy is very fragmented, consisting of small brands distributed mostly through herbalists shops, pharmacies and dedicated sections in supermarkets. These smaller brands do not invest in communication at all, except for some point of sales materials or internet websites: they do not lean on the brand image they want to vehiculate, only on their products and their capillar presence right where the consumers look for them.

Indeed, they manage to survive in a very competitive market thanks to the natural dynamics of the distribution itself, allowing the right consumer to reach the product more suitable for his or her needs: for instance, it is likely that the consumer buying beauty treatments in a herbs store is already more informed and involved in the matter than the
one who is attracted by a branded image of a company and its world of meanings more than by the attributes of the product itself.

A recent research by Euromotor International (Skin Care Market Analysis in Italy, June 2014) defined the followings as the top players in Italy when it comes to green beauty cosmetics:

![Figure 1: Top green beauty brands in Italy: market share](image)

Of all these brands, only Bottega Verde is Italian (and distributed only in Italy): L’Occitane en Provence, Caudalie and Nuxe are French while Lush is a company founded in the UK.

In order to better outline the key characteristics of the market that will be analyzed and to get closer to the dynamics behind the shaping of consumers’ preferences, a short overview of these five brands will follow.

**Bottega Verde:**

The first characteristic useful to start framing the success of Bottega Verde in Italy is its Italian origin: it is indeed a company that invested all its efforts in targeting a consumer that it knows very well thanks to years of presence on the market and communication efforts thus directly aimed.

Bottega Verde originated in 1972 in Tuscany, as a herbal shop: later on it became part of Modafil group and it increased its positioning on the field with a series of monobranded stores all over Italy.
Since 2000 the company also sells its products online through an easy to browse, interactive website that both is a mean of enhancing awareness and a way to directly increase sales. This multichannel strategy united with the communication messages and the incredible amount of new products issued (over 200 new products every year) paved the way for the brand’s success in Italy. The products themselves are not “organic” (70% or more made of purely organic ingredients), they are “natural” as they all have some vegetal component and more generally they always recall some natural image and inspire a similar lifestyle of respect for the environment mixed with the excitement of enjoying the best nature can offer in terms of colours, perfumes, textures and qualities. Bottega Verde is enjoying its status of market leader thanks to the already mentioned several years of presence in the market, and most particularly through a wide and capillary distribution. However, due to the increasing competition from relatively new entrants on the market, the company might have to start reconsidering its current strategy quite soon, especially through investigations on its consumer base that could help detecting their level of satisfaction and the actualy loyalty they achieved regarding the brand.

**L’Occitane en Provence:**
L’Occitane is a brand that gained market share space thanks to its core image linked to the atmosphere and perfumes of South of France. The company was founded in 1976 and since then it expanded worldwide (unlike Bottega Verde) exporting its brand identity all over the world especially thanks to a very personal and warm point of sale experience. Each shop recalls clearly the world of associations linked to the origins of the brand, as actual bouquets of lavender and other provençal flowers are spread all over the shelves to remind the consumers about the freshness and the importance of the provenience of the ingredients composing the products. Meanwhile, the store is composed so that each corner and viewpoint can look like a direct window on a typical local traditional herbal shop in Provence: gardening greenhouses are also a strong inspiration, and it might look like the products in the shop are the flowers or
fruits directly generated by them and brought straight into the shop after a patient manufacturing.
This particular POS identity is sustained by a strong distribution, which is spread in Italy through over 50 monobrand stores, set in the most central and popular locations.
As for the “green” level of the products, they are not organic and the company is considered “natural” to the eyes of the consumers mostly because its communications focus on the pure ingredients directly cultivated in the South of France.
Indeed, all the core ingredients for the brands’ products come from that region, and those that have to be produced abroad are treated in a “sustainable way” like in the case of Karite butter: discovering the work of Burkinabe women, L’Occitane’s founder Olivier Baussan decided to support them by creating a fair-trade cooperative which as today provides them with work and educational programs.
It is thus possible to assume that the reason why the company is perceived as “green” comes from the mix of two factors:
• The automatic association that the majority of Italian consumers have in mind when thinking about Provence (uncontaminated nature, perfumes, flowers and expertise in perfumery making thanks to a tradition dating back to centuries), a major element in the brand identity expressed first of all through the name itself and which secondly gets declined in all customer touchpoints;
• An increasing focus in communicating to all consumers (especially thanks to online tools) the initiatives and achievements of L’Occitane Foundation, which organizes many events matching nature and charity. Besides, the company is always keeping an eye on sustainability and it is always eager to communicate its efforts through announcements and dedicated sections on their official website.

Caudalie:
While L’Occitane’s direct source of inspiration is Provence, the main themes for this other french brand are the vineyards and the beneficial properties of wine and grapes declined in beauty products.
Mathilde Thomas, founder of the brand together with her husband Bertrand, declares on the official website:
“Our story starts in Bordeaux (France) at the heart of the vineyards on the family estate. The rare beauty of this natural setting inspires us every day. The vine and grapes possess exceptional powers for the skin – powers which were simply waiting to be developed.”

The company was founded quite recently, in 1993, and the identity of the brand does not insist on history and tradition but focuses instead on the effectiveness of its products thanks to high quality and specialized research that focuses on investigating grape-seed Polyphenols to use as a base for skin care cosmetics.

The brand was indeed created after 2 years of research that lead to the production of some small samples of face creams that were initially distributed through local pharmacies in the Bordeaux area: Caudalie later registered a patent for the extraction and the stabilization of grape-seed Polyphenols, ingredient that since then still is the core treasure for the company’s success.

By expanding the company’s “headquarters”, still located in the family’s properties, a hot spring 500 meters underground was discovered and Caudalie started exploiting the potential of the revitalising beneficial effects of its water, combining them with vine and grape extracts to create Spa treatments.

In this sense, the company started from its origins to produce natural products, as it matched ingredients taken directly from the family’s properties with the scientifical expertise of a team of researchers that developed and increased rapidly the products offer.

However, it was just in 2006 that the company decided to embrace completely the lucky trend of green beauty companies, with the decision of avoiding the use of parabens and committing with what they called "Cosm'ethics".

This “formal pact” in support of the environment became even tighter in 2012 when the company joined the association “1% for the planet”, made of firms that decided to donate 1% of their yearly worldwide turnover to support environmental projects.

Along with that Caudalie supports many more green friendly initiatives (like planting trees in crucial areas like Brasil) and associations (for instance WWF).

The brand is distributed on the market mostly through selected pharmacies, but in 2013 the first monobrand store was opened in the heart of Milan, a real “temple” able to express the totality of the brand’s identity.
Caudalie managed to gain the favors of Italian consumers thanks to its “different” positioning, which attracts both nature lovers and “results oriented people”, seeking effectiveness and cutting edge scientifical research.
This particular positioning strategy and a distribution taking place through pharmacies allowed the brand to find its ideal consumers, who are different from those that buy L’Occitane or Bottega Verde and who are instead more likely to be the same who buy cosmetics in perfumeries.

**Lush:**
The brand was founded in 1995 in the UK and it is famous for producing fresh, handmade cosmetics, which are gathering a bigger and bigger community of supporters especially among vegans.
The name “Lush” has a complete different impact on the average italian consumer as it doesn’t sound as traditional and reassuring as “Bottega Verde”, and it also sounds less familiar than other names in foreign languages that the consumer can at least relate to something happening in the everyday.
“Lush” doesn’t recall any specific meaning to italian speakers, so for sure no immediate connection to the world of green and biological products takes place.
Besides, not even to an english speaker the name “Lush” suggests a link with the trend of natural products. It recalls instead the stylish world of associations linked to luxury, fashion, pleasure and high society lifestyle. The word is indeed a slang for “luxurious”.
Despite this choice for the brand name, the company really is strictly committed to the biological, green, ecological and animal-friendly cause: their brand motto is “fresh handmade cosmetics, 100% cruelty-free” and the brand philosophy is completely transferred on the products.
It is possible to state that Lush is the big player on the market which really gets closer to the idea of “organic” and 100% green beauty product.
The products are chosen by large communities of vegetarians and vegans, but the company does not forget to keep up the “glamourous” part of the brand by attracting people through a direct, confident and appealing communication that aims at enriching the fruition occasions by making them look light and fun.
For instance, a part of the “about us” section on the official website, introducing the brand’s beliefs and inspirations, claims that Lush believes in small tricks to help the environment such as saving water by taking a perfumed, bubbling bath in two rather than alone.

This sentence is a short way of summing up the company’s strategy which turns into the image perceived by the consumers.

It will be important for the study to later investigate what happens (and how) in LUSH stores as stepping inside one of them really is like entering a museum about the brand and its mission.

Indeed, an interesting retail experience mixed with products that attracted a peculiar group of loyal consumers, which almost look like a “fanbase” gave strength to the brand worldwide.

Nuxe:

The word “Nuxe” comes from the merging of “Nature” and “Luxury”, so once again the brand name itself expresses the positioning.

The company was founded in 1989 when the family of young entrepreneur Aliza Jabès decided to take over a small laboratory specialized in aromatherapy and phytotherapy starting its activity in 1957.

After some years of experiments, product development and research, the family decided to move the business to the next level, by distributing through pharmacies in 1996.

Nuxe is the leading brand of natural cosmetic products in French pharmacies, and it is now expanding worldwide with a presence in 58 countries all over the world.

Nature is a source of inspiration for the brand, and the main ingredients of all product lines come directly from the botanic expertise gained by Nuxe laboratories in years of presence on the market.

However, the most appealing side of the brand to consumers’ eyes is the way it manages to mix natural ingredients, effectiveness, and a highly developed sensorial side which enhances the delicate perfumes of each component and that is expressed through appealing textures and packaging.

In Italy, the brand gained a lot of visibility thanks to its innovative way of mixing natural products with a fashionable side, and this characteristic did not pass unnoticed towards
press: Nuxe gained indeed important press coverage on many of the most read Italian magazines and it won several prizes as “best choice” brand for journalists (particularly relevant is the “Prix d’excellence de la Beauté” by Marieclaire, gained in 2010). However, the glamorous side of the brand did not cover its natural roots which still are fully expressed both by the product lines and by the initiatives supported by it: the brand logo is a simple tree, the slogan of the brand is “naturally beautiful” and about 80% of ingredients come from vegetals and flowers, let alone “bees” originated ones. As for the case of Caudalie, the brand attracts a segment of consumers which appreciates the most the sensorial and effective aspect of natural products: fresh and delicate perfumes, light and soft textures, actual responses of the skin to the beneficial effects of the products.

4.4 Different brands, a mutual background: key attributes

As briefly presented above, the key players in Italy do not all compete directly as they aim at different targets of consumers who are segmented through personal characteristics, taste, preferences and sets of priorities and beliefs which are mirrored in the complex world of perception of the brand image. Nevertheless, it is possible to indicate some elements that can be defined as “core characteristics” and that allow the observer to individuate the attributes that create a link between all the brands moving in the green beauty products area and that should thus be kept in mind as a way to investigate the typical consumers and the preferred positioning strategies companies have chosen. Indeed, all the most important brands on the market present these attributes as part of their brands, and their positioning strategy relies more on the amount of which each characteristic is mixed with other ingredients rather than by its presence or absence. The key values these companies seem to offer mirror the qualities the average consumer looks for in a beauty product, especially when “natural”:

- Natural origin: as anticipated when trying to define “green cosmetics”, the attribute “natural” can have very blurry definitions when it comes to the consumers’ expectations and the companies’ interpretations. However, it has to be a source of inspiration that
needs to be present at least in some of the brand elements to attract interested consumers. The theme of nature can take a more or less evident space in the company’s image but it has to be perceived at least in some form. Most often the brand name or the logos themselves recall the green, natural inspirations, but in many cases this factor can be less evident at a first glance and yet even more present like in the case of strictly organic products that target informed consumers who seek beauty items meeting determined characteristics which are better expressed through products than through communication.

- **Innovation / Tradition:** these two contrasting attributes are also part of the immediate communication of many of the top players brands on the market. Indeed, when it comes to the products’ offer, many of the natural ingredients used are reassuring, common and apparently not too elaborated elements which the consumer can meet normally in a daily routine. For instance, honey or lavender are very common natural products used by generations and generations or to create homemade beauty products. This familiarity feeling is one of the leverages natural cosmetics companies push on the most to attract consumers, supported by all types of communications and often also through story telling techniques, for instance through POS communications or directly on the webpages (“About Us” section, with a story reconstructed year by year which generally gets to the first steps of the brand origins, taking place in the coziness of a small laboratoire or even in a family home). The fact that products used for beauty reasons are created with the same ingredients over the years covers natural brands with some kind of “historical” legitimacy getting in contrast with many cosmetics on the market whose ingredients sound scientifical and hard to read by the average consumer and which can inspire concern over the artificial components of creams, soaps, lotions and other ingredients that will be applied directly on the skin.

However, in order to keep the market alive and appealing to the eyes of consumers who wish to be surprised, the main green beauty brands are competing on innovation and research: the roots are thus still natural and the core ingredients do not change, but the approach becomes up to date and edgy, with scientifical labs investigating all the hidden properties of plants, flowers, fruits or honey to find the perfect formula to enhance the health and the beauty of the body.
Indeed, the main players often communicate proudly the number of patents and licensed formulas that they managed to register thanks to their discoveries and achievements.

Sensoriality: as above mentioned, one of the key strengths of natural products is that all their main components are natural ingredients well known by the consumer, who most likely also already has in mind a peculiar set of associations and personal memories linked to them. Companies try to exploit this factor by developing the sensorial side of their products and putting an extra effort in making the textures pleasant and attractive, the perfumes delicate and sensual and the names of the products evocative and charming.

This particular attention defines the new wave of natural beauty brands and signs the line versus the first wave of “vegetal” cosmetics which were and still are distributed through herbal shops and that immediately express their origins through a strong and distinct smell that suggests a direct link with unrefined, green elements but that on the other hand does not create a pleasant atmosphere and the luxurious ideal that should push the consumer to the purchase.

The sensorial side is also the result of a long series of research investigations and innovative techniques that aim at offering to consumers who care for the natural origin of the products they use on their skin the same comfortable and attractive textures offered by brands distributed for instance through perfumeries or supermarkets.

It becomes thus challenging and then more interesting for the clients to find out the ways in which artificial elements, generally used to provide the products with some key characteristics that should never lack (e.g. softness, smoothness, balance of the perfumes, freshness and lightness of the cream), can be substituted by their natural equivalents: for instance, silicons can be replaced by the plumpness of royal gelly.
5. Data Collection

5.1 Data Collection & Analysis

As anticipated in the methodology chapter, because of a research approach mixing quantitative and qualitative considerations, the outcome was that different data converged in the various steps of the process by bringing each a new piece of information or an insight completing what was collected previously.

For this reason, it is possible to state that the research was not structured from the very beginning in terms of where, how and when to find which data.

However, there were two main moments during which data collection took place, and they brought to light two different types of data.

The questback was the first step taken in the making of the research, as it was sent in May of 2013 in the context of the 6 months internship for L’Oréal Italy which was taking place. Starting from April 2013 the focus of the internship was the construction of the questionnaire itself, in the context of a wider analysis and the gathering of a qualitative feedback on the overall brand image.

The questions composing the questback can be classified as belonging to two different groups, constructed according to their aim:

1. Questions decided along with the brand management in order to explore and seize the consumers’ responses to the physical attributes of the product lines offered by the brand:

   An example of such questions is the following: “Have you ever tried the new night cream?”; “If so, would you buy it again?”; “If you wouldn’t, why?”; “What are the attributes you appreciated the most in this product?”.

   The last two questions then presented a series of possible answers guiding the consumer.

   The answers to this part of the questionnaire were later analyzed in order to establish which were the most successful lines, the reasons behind their appreciation and the cause of the negative feedbacks.

   Particularly important was the calculation of the purchasing intentions based on the answers of consumers who already tried the products and who wanted to rebuy it in the near future. While this part of the data collection wasn’t as connected to the actual
purpose of the study, it still managed to provide useful insights for later considerations. For instance, it turned out that for all product lines the attributes that were appreciated the most were very similar to those of the classic luxury beauty products ones, such as “pleasant perfume”, “efficacy” and “texture”.

This data was particularly relevant because it was in line with the new brand positioning (the brand was moving from strictly herbal/green to more feminine and sensual) and because it showed how these characteristics gained importance towards consumers compared to the questback sent the year before.

2. Ten questions prepared and constructed specifically to the aim of the research:

These questions were placed in the introductory part of the questback and they were never part of all other questbacks sent the months before to the same consumers. They were thought with two main goals to achieve: 1) Get to know the sample of consumers present in the database, as never before they had received any type of personal question 2) Investigate the ways in which they interact with natural beauty brands normally, and the most common and effective points of contact.

The very first questions were introductory and basic, placed in the questback to understand the dominant sex and average age of the group of respondents. Moreover, it was asked to the group to state whether they had purchased a natural beauty product in the last year: this in order to make a distinction between current consumers (up to date on the market trends, informed, potentially ready to buy again soon) and “sleepy” ones, who bought in the past and thus share some interests with the product category but who are not active anymore.

Another part of these questions focused instead on defining with precision the moments of contact between brand and consumer during an average day, the preferences of the group on the content available on social media pages for the beauty brands they buy, the preferred locations when it comes to shopping for creams and products for the body, the most impactful form of communication they noticed on the point of sale and so on. It was also asked to name the top of mind brands for the product category.

The answers would be guiding the study in order to both define the limits of the market in Italy and the characteristics of some of its typical consumers.
The analysis of the answers was conducted in June 2013. At first, a general collection of the numerical outcomes of the survey took place and the results were later summed up through graphs and charts.

A second part of the analysis involved instead the construction of a pivot table, a tool used in data processing in order to summarize and cross the outcomes of a database. The most relevant feature of a pivot table is that it can sort, count and order the results of a survey in an immediate way, which also allows to create connections between different data.

For this reason pivot tables are often used to quickly create unweighted cross tabulations. This type of data-crossing was crucial in order to understand the phenomenon through different lenses allowing to link quantitative data with qualitative considerations.

For instance, an analysis that can be generated through the use of a pivot table could be answering the following question: “Among the people aged below 30 who bought a product for the first time in the last year, how many got in touch with the brand online?”.

In order to obtain relevant results it is important to prior classify the respondents in segments of interest according to the aims of the research, selecting clusters sharing some mutual traits that allow the pivot table to outline habits and preferences of distinctive groups of consumers to take into account separately.

Primary data was collected as well in July 2014, when both mystery shopping visits and an in-depth interview took place in Milan.

The research being based on understanding the most valuable consumer touchpoints experienced in the process of purchasing an eco-friendly beauty product, it became evident that an experience “on field” could have added to the completeness of the perspective.

In a business focusing a lot on the retail, mystery shopping can be considered as the primary means of measuring the actual consumer service delivery along the “production line” and this is because the most part of the common interactions between consumers and employees are hard to monitor from distance or merely by the sales results (Buxton, 2000).
However, individual interactions are an important part of the consumer experience and they contribute to the shaping of a brand image in consumers’ minds, so they can’t be forgotten when analyzing all types of touchpoints in a brand-final user relationship. Along with the interactions with the sales associates, a mystery shopping visit also allows the researcher to experience the total of the direct and indirect forms of communications brought to life in the POS by the brand management to the aim of catching the consumer’s interest and loyalty.

The visit took place in the Caudalie monobrand store in Milano, Via dei Fiori Chiari. While the shopping visit itself was not structured, in order not to be influenced and to register the experience exactly as a normal shopper would do, the aims of the visit were planned before to work as guidelines or as focus points to keep in mind while browsing the store.

The description of the visit itself will occupy another paragraph in the following of the research, but it was important to anticipate the topic now as it also brought to another type of primary data collection: the in-depth interview.

The interview took place some days after the mystery shopping visit: right outside the shop consumers were stopped and it was asked their availability to answer some questions regarding their relation with the brand and their overall perceptions and ideas towards the eco-friendly beauty products in general.

While some disagreed, eventually a 54 years old woman agreed to give her personal data with email and phone number so that a meeting could be settled in the next coming days.

The main advantage of an in-depth interview is its ability of enabling consumers to share their perspectives, stories and experiences related to a particular social phenomena and allowing for rich and contextual information (Wahyuni, 2012).

Coherently with the quali-quantitative research approach, the interview was semi-structured so that while there were some aspects and elements which needed to be covered by the conversation, some other parts managed to stay more flexible and spontaneous in order to facilitate an authentic flow of personal experience and perceptions.

Such a structure allowed the researcher to be ready to respond to any new topic or issue rose by the interviewee and which could be interesting enough to expand penetration, explanation and investigation on the matter (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013).
Before the interview, the interviewee was informed about the general topic of discussion and about the aim of the research itself, and asked about the possibility to be recorded. The location was chosen by the interviewee as it was agreed to conduct the discussion personally and not through Skype or phone. The outcomes of the interview were considered as case accelerators because of the value of the respondent, who was matching the consumer profile interesting for the research. It is possible to find the interview in the appendix section, reported on paper, along with the details of the meeting with the interviewee (Appendix 8.4).

In order to cover all sources of data gathered to the aim of the research, it is important to mention two other tools used to achieve a better understanding:

1. More “on field” visits to all retail distributors of the product category in analysis and to all competitors presented in the research. These visits are not classified as “mystery visits” because they were not as structured as the one that took place in Caudalie. The researcher simply browsed the product offer sometimes without even interacting with sales advisors, with the only aim of getting a complete idea of the current market situation and trying to define the key elements connecting different brands images (points of parity and points of difference).

2. Secondary data collection online through online participant observation of forums, communities, social media pages, consumer feedbacks and all possible signs and perceptions left by online users likely to be offline consumers.

5.2 Evidences and data analysis

As the purpose of this research is to determine the most effective way for Italian beauty companies to create value and outshine competitors by creating the perfect consumer experience, it is important at this point to start exposing some of the evidence issued from the extra data directly collected.

The study will now turn to the results of the survey aimed at 460 respondents and whose questions had the purpose of investigating the following aspects of the target’s consumer behavior: a) What are the key attributes sought by people when purchasing green beauty
products? b) Which are the “top of mind” players in the Italian market when it comes to eco-friendly cosmetics? c) Which are the main touchpoints that consumers experience with a beauty brand during an average day? When does the “contact” happen?

Four hundred and sixty respondents answered the questback. Almost 95% of the respondents were female, and most part of the group (67%) was aged between 30 and 49 years old (10% between 18 and 29 and 22% over 50). Most interestingly, three hundred and thirty-six respondents (73%) claimed that they bought at least once in their life a beauty product that can be defined as “green”, “bio”, “natural” or “eco-friendly”.

As anticipated, the answers collected through the survey were later analyzed with a pivot table, in order to cross different outcomes and to isolate particular trends in approaching the purchasing motivations and average behavior for the product segment.

The sample of 460 respondents can be considered as quite reliable and interesting towards italian habits in the market, especially because the italian market of green cosmetics is rapidly expanding but still is quite small, and so is the number of actual consumers that are trackable and willing to answer questions about their purchasing habits and their personal tastes, wants and needs.

Hence, a sample of 460 respondents of which 336 people bought at least one product of the analyzed typology in their life as consumers can be considered as pretty reliable in giving a rather clear idea of the main factors linking the target’s experiences and characteristics of the individual.

As above mentioned, 73% of the respondents claimed to have already bought a beauty product of this kind at least once in their life.

When asked if they bought any product from the category in the last 12 months, 39% answered that one or two products were purchased and 24% says that 3 to 5 of these products were bought in the last year. Another 24% says that while they shopped for similar products in the past, no recent purchase took place in the last months.
The respondents were also asked to name the top of mind natural beauty brands that come to their heads when thinking of the available product offer, as a means to outline with some precision an idea of the market shaped by its actual customers. The brands mentioned were surprisingly little fragmented, as it appeared easy to identify the top 4 companies as Bottega Verde, L’Occitane en Provence, Caudalie and Lush. It is interesting to cross this evidence with another result of the survey: respondents were asked as well to indicate the ways they got to know about the natural beauty brands that they feel as closer to them. Taking as a scope of analysis only the consumers who never bought a product before, it appears that 55% of the total found out about the brands directly in the Point Of Sale. Another 18% heard about the brands’ products on Internet, a 9% read about it on magazines and, lastly, 5% thanks to the word-of-mouth by friends or family.

However, by digging deeper into this scenario, it is possible to underline a first clue, helpful to the evolution of the study on the subject: people who actually bought at least a product in the last 12 months chose as top of mind brands the same companies already mentioned, but with a greater concentration: this group of respondents (73% on the total) represents indeed the 72% of the total of people naming those 4 companies as “their” market leaders. Making it simple, the consumers who are more engaged and whose purchase intention is more likely to turn into action in the short run refer to those brands in their minds when thinking about these products.

This segment of “recent buyers” is characterized by another trait that makes its behavior different from the one of the other respondents: the ways in which they heard about their favorite brands is very different from the ones of the “non recent buyers”. The split in the “causes for brand awareness” scenario changes completely: 37% (vs. 18%) got in contact with the brands thanks to a research on the Internet, 28% (vs. 55%) found out about them directly in the POS (Point Of Sale), a 14% (vs. 5%) got a direct piece of advice from a friend and a 12% (vs. 9%) read about it on magazines.
Consequently, it appears very interesting to monitor in particular the behavior and the characteristics of these 336 respondents, who recently bought at least one product and whose ways of interacting with the brands on the market are active and up-to-date. The fact that the majority of this group of consumers gets to know the brands they consider as the market leaders thanks to a research on the internet (37%) shows that they are really committed to the category and that they are more sensitive to the communications that such companies send them, directly or not.

Still strong is also the percentage of those who met the brands directly in the POS (28%): due to the fact that this group is interested, involved and also bought recently one of these products, it is logical to assume that they often find themselves in specialized shops not only to buy natural beauty products but also to buy other kinds of items or just to browse the overall offer.

This evidence is also in line with studies on the market stating that for beauty products the customer’s experience in the POS still is where the sale is won or lost, where the brand comes to life, and where the seeds of loyalty are planted (Armoudoum & Ben-Shabat, 2012).

To complete the picture, 12% of the group adds that they were also influenced on the choice of brands by an advice, an experience or a conversation with someone they knew and who recommended (or simply talked about) a brand in particular.

As anticipated, the research is now assuming that the group of respondents who recently bought a natural beauty product really is more up-to-date on the market trends because of a higher interest and a real knowledge of the product offer (as suggested also by the brands named as “top of mind”, which mirror the real current key players on the Italian market).
The choice of funding the assumptions of the research on this group of respondents is taken with the aim of developing a marketing strategy with a high potential both in terms of generating brand awareness and in terms of call to action. Next paragraph is presenting some case studies that can be referred to as best practices on the market in terms of reaching their targeted consumers, from different perspectives and choices of touchpoints focus. Presenting them will be a good starting point before getting to the conclusions and the evidences collected so far to answer the research question.

5.3 Case Studies

5.3.1 “The Lush Experience” and its effects on the brand fanbase

The complex and articulated philosophy behind this brand is fully expressed in the retail experience provided by Lush to any person entering one of the brand’s stores. Lush’s stores are all located in very central areas, next to stores that often sell high end products and that are highly frequented by a segment of customers that the brand wants to target: up-to-date, informed people with a refined taste and the curiosity of finding the latest trends. Besides, shaping the brand image through the context made of the stores near by is one of the first rules for any retail strategy, and in the case of Lush the aim is to create a fashionable image.
The inspiration the brand took comes from old style “food groceries”, the display of the products is very similar to the one of fruitsellers and, accordingly, the items almost look like exquisite and tasty snacks and gourmandises.

As the hallmark for the brand is the passion for everything fresh and natural, all products come from absolutely natural ingredients, including innovative fruits and vegetables generally hardly used by cosmetics industries.

The result is that the colors, shapes, sizes, and aromas of the products give to anyone the possibility of confusing them for edible pieces: one of the most known slogans of Lush is indeed “You're not Supposed to Eat it!”.

Thanks to its strong personality supported by the right retail strategy, Lush has now grown to enjoy a cult brand status. According to Lush founder Mark Ritson, every aspect of Lush’s operation exudes brilliance and the brand is moving toward an "iconic power brand" status. Lush has developed a loyal, almost “evangelical” customer base and it is not uncommon for its customers to pool their resources to purchase Lush products in bulk and arrange a get-together when the products are delivered.

One of the key strenghts of the brand is indeed that it managed to attract a very solid “fan base” made of the brand’s key customers who really relate with Lush’s philosophy and who get along easily with other persons sharing the same interests, concerns and sets of values.

This kind of situation generates a valuable connection not only between brand and customers but also between customers and customers, and it is made possible by online gathering and social media.

For instance, communities of Lush fans are created spontaneously online and the brand has little to do with it, leaving its presence as a marginal part of the content that is created daily by users who know in detail and use daily the company’s products.

As for the example of the youtube video tutorials used by some brands to promote indirectly the rituals linked to their products through the use of an influencer (like a beauty blogger), online communities are a strong way to strengthen positive associations and “customer best practices” that can make the difference in the moment of purchase.

When the brand has a strong personality, it is likely that the customers will also be easily segmented as they are moved and convinced to chose a brand over another for a particular range of characteristics that make the difference compared to competition.
For instance, Lush attracts the vegan community with its “cruelty free” motto and its organic ingredients. In this case, the brand becomes for its consumers one of the means used to reach “higher order needs”: as stated by Gutman (1982), this is why consumers not only are happy to buy products expressing a message that they share, reflecting an image that they see as close as possible to the reflection they see for themselves: they also buy determined goods because the simple fact of owning them, being able to use them, experience them and let other people know they chose them can provide inner satisfactions which can’t be expressed only through the physical and concrete functions of the product itself.

As above mentioned, vegans are some of the core supporters of Lush, and here below it is reported an example of a proud consumer who happily shares his enthusiasm online, seeking interaction with other users. The following quotations are taken from the website “Lushcosmetics.livejournal.com”, a spontaneous community formed by consumers and brand supporters independently from the official brand website:

“Hello fellow Lush lovers, greetings from the UK 😊 I was wondering how many of you that use Lush products are vegan? Lush make a big deal of labeling things and making vegan products which is great. I love the fact that a high street shop is helping to promote vegan awareness and it’s so easy to buy nice things that don’t cost loads of money.”

However, the playfulness and glamorous appeal of the brand is also a big part of the online “buzz”, with a series of entries classified under the hashtag “#alushlife”:

“I had a lovely shower tonight and I realized I can now do head to toe Lush 😊 Washed my hair with Reincarnate and Jungle conditioner. Washed body with It’s Raining Men (sooo awesome and thick) and face with Buche de Noel. Hopped out, massaged some Saving Face on and smoothed on a Catastrophe Cosmetic mask. I let it sit while I used a Hottie massage bar to moisturize all over (first time using it, I LOVED the scent!).

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Washed off the mask and treated a few spots with Grease Lighting, spritzed my face with Breath of Fresh Air and moisturized with Gorgeous (I got a sample from my local shop and I am SO in LOVE). Put some Pied de Pepper on my feet and snuggled up in my pjs and slippers all soft and warm. I smell FANTASTIC. Happy ending to the weekend. :)

Again, Lush products are presented as means to get an experience, the “Lush experience”, that offers to those enjoying it way more than the individual benefits of using regular beauty products.

This customer clearly expresses all her excitement and satisfaction towards the fact that she’s been able to use products by Lush only, covering all different types of grooming rituals and showing off that she really likes to take her time and spend it to create the best experience for herself.

Such a positive consumer / brand relationship paves the way for a “win-win” situation that all companies would like to reach for their products: indeed, consumers often do not realize that what is making them so satisfied with the items they purchased is far from being linked to physical properties; the experience that they live thanks to them though, is one of the strongest possible touchpoints that a brand could create with its clients.

Once this “virtuous circle” is unlocked, consumers’ perceptions get blurry and the same products provide particular benefits that seem to be irreplaceable also towards competition just because the feelings and the level of involvement taking place when using them are made of subtle and complex variables that the consumer perceives as directly connected with the products.

However, it is also important to consider that the experience a brand can provide doesn’t come only from the personal and direct use of the products or services purchased: it can also be indirect.

Indeed, as stated by Hogan et Al. (2005) “a brand is the sum of the customer’s experiences with the product or company. It is transmitted in every interaction with the customer over the lifetime of the relationship.”

One more time, it becomes thus evident that a company should always be careful in managing not only the points of contact that directly hit the customer on a daily basis (e.g. POS, online page, customer service…), but also those that are less evident and still crucial in shaping a negative or positive mindset.
An example is word of mouth, that both online and offline can cause snowball effects which once started are hard to stop, whether or not the scenario spreading is good for the brand.

In this it is evident that when a spontaneous community formed by happy users deciding to gather online with no other purpose than sharing the passion for Lush appears on Google when looking for info on the brand, the first impression and the expectations of the potential customer are already positively affected.

5.3.2 POS, turning interest into purchase: Lush VS Bottega Verde

When considering again the results of the questback, it is important to remember that 55% of the total respondents claimed to have gotten in contact with the natural brand they had in mind thanks to interactions directly in the POS.

Even more interestingly, 28% of the respondents who recently purchased a natural beauty product affirmed to have heard about the brand later becoming top of mind for them thanks to the POS.

The places where consumers buy the final products are those that can affect most directly their opinions on the brands and their offers, and companies should be aware of the vast potential of their stores in terms of communicating to different targets, enhancing the brand image on many levels.

Armoudom and Ben-Shabat (2012) discussed the keys to reach a valuable customer experience for beauty product shoppers, and ended up stating that “the experience at the point-of-sale remains the most important. It is where the sale is won or lost, where interaction with the brand comes to life, and where the seeds of loyalty are planted.” (Appendix 8.2).

It becomes vital for a company to understand how to construct the best customer experience in the Point of Sale, by differentiating from what other brands do in order to stand out in the crowd and adopt best practices that can immediately enhance the clients’ perceptions towards the products.

On a more generic level, it is possible to state that POS Communications have the goal and the possibility to reach the following objectives (taken from lecture on POP Communications, MCM Class of Copenhagen Business School, December 2011):
1. Attract attention in a highly competitive environment;
2. Remind about the brand’s existence and its product offer;
3. Inform on the products’ range, characteristics and specificities;
4. Persuade consumers of the brand’s superiority versus competitors;
5. Create a strong brand image to invest on future loyalty.

In order to offer the best customer experience, many natural beauty brands are working on creating a particular “store atmosphere”, an attribute that, if built wisely, really can impact on the consumers’ perceptions at a deep, emotional level.

The atmosphere in the POS is composed by different factors such as the visual dimension (dominant colours, shapes, shadows or brightness), the olfactory level (perfumes, freshness) and the tactile elements (softness, smoothness, temperature).

Each of these components can shape the consumers’ perceptions in a specific way, changing from person to person accordingly to the individual’s taste, emotional background, culture and emotions.

This interaction between the characteristics of the store and the consumer’s mood and personality can affect directly the purchasing behavior, depending on whether or not the client is satisfied by the overall situation.

Companies selling green beauty products understood the potential of the “atmosphere factor” in a POS, and the market leaders are already taking the opportunity by creating stores that look as close as possible to the image of the brand.

The elements presented by Armoudom and Ben-Shabat’s study as key ingredients of the retail strength of a company focus on two main aspects: the appeal of the brand and its products and the deep knowledge of the brand’s consumers.

Armoudom and Ben-Shabat also present in their study a possible way of classifying the five classic steps encountered by a consumer when entering the POS (Appendix 8.3).

This model will now be presented directly through the example of two of the main players on the market, Bottega Verde and Lush, whose POS were visited by the researcher in order to test particular aspects of their retail strategy and positioning.
1. Welcome

**Bottega Verde:** The first impact when entering the standard Bottega Verde store allows the customer to start shaping its idea of the products and the brand itself; a big logo is always put in the very middle of the room so that it is immediately visible to any person entering the store, and the green colour dominates all. When available, a sales person greets the visitor, but the approach is not so personal and more aimed at giving the customer the chance to browse the products displayed independently, at least at first.

**LUSH:** Lush stores are conceived to give the consumers the possibility to feel immediately as if they were entering some kind of “beauty wonderland” as all products are displayed in a very original and impactful layout. Sales associates leave the consumers free action when entering, especially in bigger shops, as the structure of the shop suits the independend purchase.

2. Atmosphere

**Bottega Verde:** The furniture used inside the shop enhances the positioning of the brand, as the dominant colour is green and the matching tones are light, soft shapes such as pink or light purple. Many delicate but yet very direct images of nature are used all over the display (flowers, leaves, water drops) and the products are presented mostly in wall shelves reminding those of supermarkets and divided by functions (sunscreens, perfumes, cosmetics, shower gels…). The fact that the layout is practical and adapted to a “self-service” fruition like in mass distribution makes it easier for the customer to have a look at the offer independetely, and this factor limits the developing of an immediate relation with the sales advisor who doesn’t take the role of brand ambassador.

**LUSH:** The first impression is the one of stepping into a very playful environment which is carefully planned in order to mirror and communicate even to the unaware visitor the philosophy of the brand. The products are displayed in a “casual” set-up, with piles of soaps in all colours, big baskets filled with bathing balls in all perfumes, blackboards on the walls with handmade writing indicating the location of the products and the newest offers. There is no direct recall to the idea of nature but the immediate feeling is that the products displayed aren’t the results of an industrialized process because of the “spontaneous”-looking, warm and seemingly familiar structure of the POS.

3. Touch and feel
**Bottega Verde**: Each of the many products displayed can be tried through testers allowing the consumer to smell the different perfumes and touch the type of texture. However, this is the only form of sensoriality that can be experienced in one of the Bottega Verde’s shops, as there is no other link to the products’ ingredients than the possibility to try the final product.

**LUSH**: Here a declaration from a girl that entered one of Lush stores: “My nose led me to the shop, as the smell of the products hits you in the face before you even set foot inside.” (The Guardian.com, 2013)

Indeed, Lush puts the complete focus on its products as it is shown through the display tactics chosen for its retail point of sales. Soaps, creams, shower gels and all kinds of other products are presented in a way that suggests prosperity and abundance, with products that are literally piled on each other. This choice invites consumers to feel like they can just touch, feel and hold in their hands all products before choosing them and purchasing them.

Besides, most of the items are sold in “minimal” packaging that both suggests the traditional wrapping style of tiny village markets back in time and that both represent an eco-friendly solution to avoid big amounts of waste: this easy presentation also leaves exposed a part of the product itself: for instance big bars of soaps are covered by paper just in the central part. As a result, visitors can really feel the product in a sensorial way and, at the same time, all the different perfumes of the many products in the shop become a whole that creates a new unique “Lush” olfactory dimension which becomes automatically a living part of the brand attributes themselves.

4. **Advice**

**Bottega Verde**: One of the main strengths of Bottega Verde is the constant rotation of the products put on the spotlight in the store, as promotions and new offers come up weekly forcing the products to change location all the time. This turns into a shop that always gives the idea of being freshly up to date even for a customer that stopped by just few days earlier. This trick is the same used by the biggest “fast fashion” groups like Zara or H&M, which rely on enormous quantities of new items coming to their stores weekly and attracting people inside on a regular basis.
Because of this reason, advice is not the main component in the stores as the products are easily presented and displayed by themselves, and sales associates intervene just when required by the customer.

**LUSH:** The store staff is young and friendly at first, and there is no pressure in buying anything even after asking for advice. The sales advisors get into details when asked specificities about the ingredients, and they also offer the customer the change to dig deeper both online and on the “Lush Times”, a printed leaflet available in the POS.

5. Checkout

**Bottega Verde:** After the purchase, the sales advisor often offers the consumer coupons and discounts tickets valid on determined products on the following weeks.

This simple after sales management technique turns into a success for the brand because of a good interaction with online tools and social media, which keep reminding online the promotions and extra offers valid offline.

**LUSH:** The company does not keep as a main focus the enhancing of promotions and special offers at the moment of check out. Mostly, at the moment of purchase consumers are asked if they’d like to join the Lush community by leaving emails and personal information which will later be used by the brand to send ad hoc communications through monthly newsletters. Through this digital instrument customers are invited to get back to the store and take advantage of promotions, new product launches and special seasonal offers.

These two unsimilar and yet both very successful ways of creating a customer experience in the POS are examples of how companies targeting the same group of clients can decide to invest on completely different strategic touchpoints.

Bottega Verde can rely on a distribution that is capillary and on a major market share: the retail strategy of the brand is more focused on the mere presence than on the concept or brand philosophy, and through aggressive promotions and communications both online and offline.

This is why it is impossible to place Bottega Verde as one of the brands which are innovating in terms of shopping experience at the moment of purchase: the communication linked to the brand’s history, values and ideals takes place before entering
the stores, which are not the brand’s “temples” but only a practical location where the supporters of the products can find them and buy them. The sales advisors are not trained to create a connection between the customers and Bottega Verde, and they do not go into deep on the products details or the philosophy behind them: coherently with the store layout they just offer their help in case someone is looking for a product they can’t find or can advice on the items most suitable for the clients’ needs. The shelves, leaflets, exhibitors and panels indicating the different product segments facilitate the “do-it-yourself” and pave the way for a quick and easy sale.

Lush on the other hand has a complete different retail strategy, which aims at attracting consumers in the POS and telling them a story, catching their interest and making them feel as if they became part of a community, a private “club” of people sharing the same philosophy.

5.3.3 Social Media and online presence: Bottega Verde & Neve Cosmetics

Companies owned websites are not a novelty for marketers: they are the most immediate and obvious form of communication a brand can chose to place content on the internet and make it available to any user. However, these sites are often perceived as partial and not fully helpful to those who still are in doubt. They for sure offer detailed and useful information to people who already are convinced by the brand, who are gathering the pieces of information they need to transform their interest in the actual purchasing moment (e.g. store locator, prices, promotions, product range).

On the other hand, official websites do little to attract consumers who are still exploring the range of possibilities in terms of market offer, and who are interested in the purchase but still unsure on which brand to chose. Social media presence becomes thus crucial for any brand that wants to generate awareness, and it appears to perfectly suit the product category of natural cosmetics because of the level of involvement they engage in buyers. All major social media are quickly outpacing any mass media in terms of reach, time spent and social and political impact.
The key characteristic for this kind of digital tools is “authenticity”: consumers are not listening anymore to normal communication messages from companies whose products they interact with on a daily basis, they became more selective and they immediately can tell if the content is trustworthy or not.

Consumers are now used to engage with a wide array of information sources, and user generated content is becoming more and more widespread, taking the spot of automatic benchmark people look for during the information seeking process.

Companies deciding to take the path of social media, do it by keeping in mind one simple concept: customers are people first, and buyers second. As people thrive on relations and pieces of advice from people they trust, social networks have the chance and the aim of connecting users into communities of trust.

In order to individuate the types of social media most suitable to the product class in analysis, the study will now present examples of different social networks that could create the desired type of contact with potential consumers, and the ways in which they can operate.

Facebook is for sure the most popular and widely used social network, where all kinds of brands fight in order to catch the attention of interested users by generating interaction with different communities of potential customers.

A tool like Facebook can be crucial for a company that wants to create a community of consumers around its business, because of the many possibilities made offered by the website.

For instance, a company could manage through Facebook aspects such as the promotion of events aimed at creating awareness around the brand, product launches and promotion, customer engagement and customer feedbacks, online contests, sharing of videos & photos, building of customer loyalty.

While these types of online marketing activities can be seen as generic and suitable for most product categories, it is interesting to consider the specific market of natural beauty brands and its development potential through a proper use of Facebook.
An Italian study by E. Angelici (“Cosmetici online: la nostra indagine social”, 2013) shows how the most visible brand on all online platforms in Italy is “Bottega Verde”, followed by German brand “Al Verde Naturkosmetik” and then by French “Caudalie” and “L’Occitane”. As anticipated, Bottega Verde is the first natural beauty brand in Italy in terms of visibility, fact that makes it also the category’s top of mind.

This remarkable result is also due to the company’s Facebook strategy, based on the frequency of content updates and the following customer engagement generated by the interactions between Brand and User.

Indeed, Bottega Verde overcomes all other brands in terms of number of posts per month, and the results in engagement are directly proportional: users generally interact through comments, “likes” or “shares” principally to a brand like this one, which is very regular in providing content.

Besides, the brand is very active in promoting dedicated initiatives targeted at reaching the final clients’ interests on different levels: simple call-to-action aimed at moving the user to the POS, photographic contests where the fans of the page are asked to send personal photos which will be used on the Facebook page, open questions to collect direct feedbacks from the final consumers following the page.

Bottega Verde can thus be taken as an example on how Facebook can be used to increase brand awareness and to generate call to action through a series of incentives, promotions and playful communications inviting the interested user to visit the POS.

Unlike other brands which use Facebook barely as a free tool to communicate with consumers basic informations on their products, Bottega Verde manages to create a successful synergy with other forms of online social media increasing the impact on the target audience.

Indeed, the brand is developing and successfully using two other ways of catching the consumers’ attention online: Blogs and Youtube.

In the cosmetic industry, these two social media tools are strictly intertwined: this because Bloggers and “Youtubbers” often become some sort of “beauty guru”, strong influencers who receive the trust of their followers because they share with them each step of the experience with the product, from the need recognition to the purchase, ending with the trial and finally the feedback (Notti, MarkUp, 2013).
Products dedicated to the personal care suggest in people who chose them an idea of "ritual": a particular procedure is dedicated in a defined moment of the day to a precise need of our body, and this action will generate positive feelings of self-fulfillment and relax during and after it.

This is why it is easy to understand that online communities who gather on the theme of beauty care are mostly interested in the moments of the product application itself, to capture an easy to repeat technique, which will grant them the best possible results. Tutorials became so popular because they developed a playful side of the normal use of the product purchased, giving relevance and importance to a moment that was before "mechanical" and not lived in its full "social" potential.

Bloggers and Youtube beauty stars now give voice to everyday concerns of the average user, making it easy for everyone to improve a beauty experience that, in most cases, would have not existed (at least consciously) otherwise.

An example of how the right use of Youtube and video tutorials really can make the difference in the competitor scene is Neve Cosmetics: the brand started in 2009 in Italy selling beauty products with ingredients taken from minerals only and later extending the offer to natural skincare products.

The company, which sells exclusively online, managed to attract a wide consumer base thanks to a tactical collaboration with a makeup artist famous on the Internet for her video tutorials. The brand thus increased considerably its brand awareness by attracting the right type of potential client directly online, where most consumers make their decisions and, in the case of Neve Cosmetics, also purchase.

The company now has over 14.000 Youtube subscribers, more than the top market player Bottega Verde, which has only 1.685 regular followers on the site.

This brief presentation of Bottega Verde and Neve Cosmetics’s social media situation can be interpreted as follows:

- It is important to determine what type of content can be perceived as useful and relevant to the community gathered around the brand: in the case of natural cosmetics, for instance, information on how to maximize the treatment’s efficacy,
topics on lifestyle, invitations to events and sharing of news or initiatives aligned with the brand image;

- The community needs to feel that the company really cares for its needs and opinions, and the interaction with the followers’ base is extremely important to give this impression and ensure a long-lasting relationship with the users.

5.3.4 Caudalie: multisensoriality in the monobrand POS

Caudalie’s founder Mathilde Thomas recently decided to open a monobrand store in Italy, the first in the market as before this opening the brand was distributed only though a selected network of pharmacies.

The store was the one that was chosen for the mystery shopping visit because it had the potential of providing a complete view on all types of touchpoints that can be used by a brand in its retail communication.

The new store is defined by the brand as a “Boutique” with the aim of enhancing the luxurious positioning of the brand and its premium products in the natural segment.

As it often happens, the position of the shop in the city mirrors the desired positioning of the brand in terms of marketing strategy,

First of all, the store is located in “Via Fiori Chiari”, a street in the heart of Brera quarter whose name immediately sounds delicate and perfectly matching a natural beauty brand: “Street of the Light Flowers”.

Besides, Brera is a very central area of Milano which is guaranteed to receive daily a high amount of traffic of people walking and browsing the many shops of streets that are tiny compared to the rest of the city, looking still very traditional and almost “vintage” unlike the overall modern and chaotic image of Milan.

The general atmosphere of the area is cozy and quiet, as there is no car access to the street, and the actual size of the stores located there is not as big as in the very center of the city or as in notorious luxury and fashion street “Via Montenapoleone”.

However, Caudalie carefully selected the location for its first monobrand in Italy (one of the few existing worldwide) also accordingly with the desired target of consumers the brand wants to reach and then keep and transform in loyal buyers: middle-upper class.
Brera is an area of Milano considered as very posh and refined but a bit away from the actual beating heart of the city, which is commercial and overcrowded every day (Corso Vittorio Emanuele, starting from Duomo and reaching S. Babila square). The area is mostly frequented by locals: this choice of location and, consequently, of potential consumers, reflects the desire of the brand of creating loyal customers with whom to maintain a long term, “deep” relationship.

The store indeed looks like a little art museum representing a piece of the french vineyards brought to life and moved to the center of Milano. Everything inside it is designed and conceived to both attract and stimulate the curiosity of the casual visitor and to inform and conquer the taste and preferences of a more stable consumer who already knows the brand and who should hopefully fall in love with it purchase after purchase, trial after trial.

The “Boutique” clearly has the purpose of spreading the brand philosophy and its world of meanings by creating a tangible contact between company and customers. The store lives as a sign of the commitment the brand is promising to the market, and to Italian consumers: it is a way to keep in touch, to be there physically with sales associates who are formed and “raised” to be breathing the brand atmosphere and to be speaking about it with knowledge and passion, to offer to any person stepping inside the shop a glance of the concept behind Caudalie’s products and to try and explain what are the main benefits and key characteristics towards competitors.

The function of the shop itself, its purpose of being present for the sake of being present and not primarily to sell as much as possible, is what makes it so interesting for any analysis: Caudalie’s concept store is like a window open for the possible interpretations of the brand strategy through the attributes used to approach the customer in the POS.

The shopping window is like a living painting welcoming the visitor with real grapes’ plants. The first feeling is warm and familiar, the shopping windows do not cover the inside of the store which is actually completely visible from the outside thus not hiding it from the eyes of people passing by.

Even if the positioning of the brand is premium and the aim is to gather a qualitative and restricted more than a big but superficial group of supporters, the evident aim of the shop
is not to look unaccessible and cold, scaring people away or giving the uncomfortable feeling of being unwelcoming which is the typical first impression of many luxury stores. A big screen at the bottom of the main wall displays continuously charming landscapes of the property Château Smith Haut Lafitte, the place where everything started and where the brand expanded research after research, grape after grape.

The images show many relaxing views and then indulge on some details referring to some of the key attributes and strengths of the brand (the raisins, the team of experts working in the laboratories, the spa and its thermal water) and then seem to take the viewer into a walk in the vineyards where Caudalie’s “magic” happens and the main ingredients of the products get to life.

The theme of the brand history follows in other parts of the Boutique, where images of the property are alternating with frames that define the main steps in the brand history, the scientific discoveries, the most prestigious awards.

Everything is enlightened by lights and lamps that look like big raisins, once more not to miss the link with the core theme, grapes and vineyards.

A dominant position is taken by the Bar Beauté Barrique, located in the very center of the store and inviting everyone to get in touch and discover the products, the inspirations behind every line, its properties and its effects both alone or with the guide of a dedicated figure, the “winotherapist” who, almost like a wine sommelier, is available for providing personalized advice and the best beauty routine for all skin needs on appointment.

The presence in store of such a specialized figure is again a sign of the fact that the store is targeting a loyal clientele made mostly of locals or either way of people who keep the contact with the Boutique enough to make it possible for them to plan a visit just to get some more time with a person exploring the products’ characteristics privately.

Caudalie’s experience in the unique monobrand store in Italy also allows the consumers to experiment the sensoriality and the pleasant side of the treatments offered by the brand’s products, which are particularly suitable to become part of beauty rituals.

For instance, the store gives the visitors the chance to taste some of the biological infusions and grapes’ juices or also the possibility of testing a hands’ gommage followed by the application of one of the best-selling hand creams by Caudalie.

The Boutique also shows to consumers a part of the brand identity that would be otherwise completely forgotten through the indirect distribution channel: the expertise in
spa and spa treatments. Directly inside the store, a particular cabin space is dedicated to
exclusive massages and treatments following the strict protocols issued by the brand
which would otherwise be performed only in the few prestigious Caudalie Vinothérapie
Spa all over the world.
Caudalie is an example of the trend that has been catching an increasing number of
retailers selling beauty products, who are switching from a monodirectional sale approach
to a multimedia, multisensorial, multipersonal way of presenting the products to a always
more prepared and interested potential consumer.
For this reason Caudalie gives a good hint on how a brand can decide to integrate in a
clever way different levels of experience in one small shop, to link firmly to the mind of the
persons who will try it all the positive associations and beauty practices they will enjoy and
that will always make them think about Caudalie.
The right approach for a brand not to be forgotten is to provide consumers with the biggest
quantity possible of emotions, coming from all different sensations that can be emotional,
tactile, visual, olfactory, to enhance multisensoriality and its consequences: a unique
message which is mixed with the existing perceptions and past sets of beliefs, images,
feelings and memories of each individual that creates an exclusive experience impossible
to repeat in the same way to anybody else. Such a bond between brand and consumer
can become really hard to untight.
This was confirmed by the interview to one of the store’s consumers conducted to the aim
of the research: the woman already knew the brand because of the pharmacies, and she
was a regular consumer. However, she found out about the store by chance, walking in
her favorite area of the city, and she hasn’t stopped visiting it since then.
She also affirms that getting inside the shop for the first time changed her approach
towards the brand, and her overall idea and perceptions about it (in a positive way). (See
Appendix 8.4)
6. Conclusion

The research had the aim of defining the current situation in Italy for the market of eco-friendly beauty products and to investigate the most successful form of touchpoint between brand and consumer, in order to establish which are the most valuable aspects in the profiling of a consumer experience.

The existing literature on consumer touchpoints stressed how important it is for companies to keep monitoring each of their points of contact with their consumers, as every one of them has the potential of dramatically impact on the brand equity, positively or negatively. One of the key considerations of the study is that the image of a brand formed into the mind of a consumer can be easily shaped by the messages sent by the company, but once it is formed it is harder to change it back. For this reason, Keller’s CBBE model represented one of the key theoretical backgrounds of the study, underlining the importance of what is held in the minds of consumers about a brand and the consequent significance of the detailed planning of each media investment decided by a company in the early stages of the development of a marketing mix.

This theoretical view applied to the consumption of eco-friendly beauty products was confirmed by the data collected directly and by the comparison with existing research on the matter and with market studies.

Even if the Italian market is still very fragmented and characterized mostly by herbal shops and smaller brands sold through pharmacies and parapharmacies, the main players on the market managed to catch their target consumers’ attention through the right media investments. They generated awareness and installed a defined brand image on different clusters of consumers through specific products and positioning strategies that are reaching their targets, contributing to expand the market for eco-friendly products in Italy.

One of the findings of the study was brought to light by the questback investigating the consumers’ habits and perceptions regarding the current market state: when asked to
name the brands perceived as top players, the respondents named the actual market leaders in terms of sales and market share. While a part of this evidence is due to the fact that the market in Italy still presents few big companies, another part has to be associated with the fact that awareness of the product offer from the side of consumers is directly related to the purchasing intentions turning into revenues for the companies in the short term. This way, the study confirmed once more the CBBE model by insisting on the strategical importance of the perceptions formed in the consumer mind to actually impact on a market trend. However, the main theory impacting on the findings on the thesis is Keller’s IMC program, which can be seen as the highest guideline on the topic of finding effective touchpoints for a company’s brand and whose “rules” proved to be respected by two of the most successful and more promising brands take into account, Caudalie and Lush. As covered in the literature review, IMC imagines a marketing mix that is consistent, coherent, convergent and continuous with all messages broadcasted and through all tools used to do it. The two brands taken in the research as an example of best practices are indeed following this “guideline”, by being solid and convincing on all the touchpoints on which they are focusing their marketing investments. The research conducted through the questback, interview and direct POS visits, together with data gained online especially through the observation of communities of interest and social media interactions, showed that these brands are using all types of different ways to communicate their positioning and create a synergy which seems to be positively embraced by their consumers. Again, this situation is an example of IMC because all the different brand / consumer interactions created this way end up generating something new and perceived as bigger than the sum of the individual points of contacts between the two, and the benefits linked to each one of them. However, the actual aim of the research was to define the means through which a company operating in the increasingly growing but still very young market of eco-friendly beauty products could gain market share and win consumers towards competitors.
What was found through the research and investigation of the current consumers’ preferences and market trends can be inscribed in the theory of Vargo & Lusch and their *new dominant logic for marketing* (2004): indeed, the brands that seem to be catching the consumers’ attention and concrete spending resources in a new market full of expansion potential, are offering a whole set of intangible resources along with their products, focusing less on the physical attributes and more on the experience provided and the interactions coming with.

Lush’s informal way of communicating to its consumers, creating a sense of bonding between users (indeed contributing to the generation of spontaneous online communities); Caudalie’s brand history developed on a concept store that almost looks like a theatre, where a story comes to life; Bottega Verde’s collaboration with bloggers and Youtube stars to install beauty rituals; L’Occitane en Provence online contests and games to stimulate involvement and participation: they are all examples of a new form of communicating with consumers by providing a value that is not just the product itself.

The market of eco-friendly beauty products in Italy is gaining market share and consumers year after year compared to the total of more traditional cosmetics and beauty items distributed traditionally through perfumeries, supermarkets and specialized distributors (e.g. hairdressers, estheticians), all channels that are encountering difficulties compared to herbalists shops, the only distributors that are constantly growing in terms of income.

When analyzing the raise of this product typology it is however important to make a distinction between specialized, almost “unbranded” products targeting a specific and smaller group of consumers (distributed through pharmacies and herbalists shops) and bigger companies following the growing trend of green in beauty but working on their brand building potential as much as on their product characteristics.

Indeed, in the context of a general repositioning of the eco-friendly consumption goods, perceived now as trendy and up-to-date, the brands that are taking the most out of the situation are those trying to expand their products’ perceived attributes in order to gain market share and even “steal consumers” from perfumeries and more classical beauty brands which always counted on their premium positioning.

The rest of the offer, made of specialized products focusing on their 100% green ingredients, origins, and benefits are also doing well because of a solid cluster of informed and loyal consumers that follow the products offer with constance.
However, their unexisting efforts towards creating a strong brand in such a favorable moment could not guarantee the expansion of their market share or of a solid growing of their consumer base.

The study suggests as well that consumer preferences for this product category are moving to a whole new set of intangible aspects which were before mostly associated to other types of beauty products and at some point even to fashion items.

All most successful nature inspired brands are indeed trying to shift their products’ attributes from merely green (bio, vegetal, organic, sustainable and each brand’s specificites) to the level of sensoriality, pleasantness and brand appeal.

This finding will be covered more in detail in the next paragraph, analyzing the possible managerial implications for the market leaders.

6.1 Managerial Implications

The study outlined which are the touchpoints perceived by consumers as more valuable when getting in contact with their favorite natural beauty brands, and it tried to define the most effective when it comes to actually influence the purchasing intentions.

In order to provide a possible starting point for a reflection from the side of companies operating in the business, the main findings of the investigation will be summed up through the already mentioned paradigm by Hogan et al., which presents the necessary steps for creating a successful consumer experience and turn a company from normal player to a leader in brand building.

Each step will also define the concrete suggestions that companies in the market should keep in mind when defining their marketing mix, based on the findings of this research.

The last one of the four steps will instead be presented as a separated consideration in the final paragraph of the research.

1. Choice of the consumers: each brand needs to know who to target in order not to send too broad messages that can reach everyone but that might get lost in the sea of all other similar messages from competition. In order to get the best ROI when it comes to messages sent VS a favorably shaped purchasing intention, a prior decision on who to target has to be made. The findings of the research suggest that the most active and
responsive segment of consumers in the current market state are women between 25 and 45, educated and informed on the latest trends thanks to a wide network of information gathering (online and offline articles, magazines, word of mouth with friends with similar interests).

A company that wants to take the extra step and grow in terms of market share and brand image strength should now focus on a target used to receive communication messages by premium beauty brands and who is up to date with the latest trends, as this target is the one who seems to be more willing to get attracted by this new trend in consumption. Besides, focusing on consumers that are more responsive to the market changes can guarantee a more solid long-term perspective for a company that is now growing together with its context, being able to adapt to this growth.

2. Choice of the touchpoints: coherently with the idea of targeting only the group of consumers relevant for the long term success of a brand, companies should also decide in which way they want to reach them. The study showed how only few touchpoints are always mentioned by interested consumers, and how they seem to be impacting directly on their preferences. Particularly, the strategical leverages that seem to be more favorably embraced by interested consumers are two: online presence (especially through social media) and experience in the POS.

Internet has become for the majority of companies nowadays the first obvious answer when considering how to communicate effectively and, as a matter of fact, quickly to the desired consumer audiences. Aside from the official websites, most modern tools such as blogs, online forums, communities, the comments issued by an article or by a youtube video, become a source of discussion, and people spontaneously gather to exchange opinions, listen to others’ point of views or simply to express theirs to fellow passionate of the same topics.

The results of the survey seem to suggest that, for natural cosmetics brands, taking the path of social media communications could be a successful choice, because of a great target-reach potential both in terms of scope and in terms of quality of the relationship instaured.
Consumers who seek information on a determined product see in most cases internet as the quickest way to collect what they need to enhance their knowledge and thus be guided through the purchase.

It also appears that word of mouth, opinions from friends who already tried the product and the possibility of discussing with other potential buyers the different alternatives prior the purchase are all factors which affect individuals’ perceptions towards the brands.

Consumers’ perceptions and expectations on a specific product category are shaped not only from individuals’ sets of beliefs and preferences, but also by more rigid constraints that come from the specificities of the goods themselves.

Mass market distribution is now common for many low cost beauty care brands often sold in supermarkets, but the most typical way of buying skin treatments and cosmetics is through the advice of a trusted sales person.

In Italy in particular, the market is still characterized for instance by many different small perfume shops whose owners and sales associates manage to create a direct relationship with their customers.

This way, each individual receives a personalized advice and consequent product recommendation, as the sales person is likely to have collected precious insights on the customers’ preferences, skin issues, taste and priorities during the past visits.

Such a client-seller dynamic has the great potential of creating long-term relationships with the customer base, enhancing loyalty by creating an added value difficult to replace.

Indeed, while the same products or brands can easily be found elsewhere, the same can’t be said of the personal advice offered by “the usual shop”, where sales persons already know what to offer, to whom and for which reasons, avoiding this way direct or indirect switching costs to the consumer that wants to feel understood, skipping the troubles and the time necessary to start explaining personal necessities and preferences from scratch.

As the respondents declare to be used to seeking information on Internet and that word-of-mouth is an important part of the decision making process when it comes to chosing which brand to purchase, investments on social media seem to be a good path to take in order to provide the final consumers with the kind of content they want, and in a way they trust.

Such a finding can be inscribed again in Vargo e Lusch (2004) view on the matter, who also state that entreprises can only offer value propositions that have to be embraced by consumers and who have to participate in the creation of it.
Social media are the perfect tool to build a co-creation relation between companies and consumers, and to readjust the necessary aspects of a brand’s products or communications.

On the other hand, the consumer experience taking place directly in the POS represents as well another important moment in the process of getting noticed and remembered by consumers in a competitive context, and the most successful and promising brands are all investing on this leverage in order to stand aside other players in a unique way (Appendix 8.5).

Again, the important aspect is that the experience provided in the POS has to match in all details the image the company wants to shape in its consumers’ minds. As stated by Hogan et al., the brand ends up being the customer experience it provides to its clients, as what is left in their perceptions about it is more important and long lasting than the product attributes alone.

In the case of eco-friendly beauty products, the retail experience is still extremely relevant also because the product category has always been traditionally sold in pharmacies, perfumeries and herbalists shops where consumers could rely on the personal advice of sellers who learned to understand each customer’s needs and then remembered them for their next visits, planting the seeds of a loyal relationship.

That’s why even more now, when these products are shifting their focus to become more qualitative and appealing to consumers also in a sensorial level, fighting directly with the market of high-end, premium cosmetics, the actual contact with the products before trying them can become a competitive advantage for the companies that manged to work on appealing formula, perfumes and textures.

The retail strategy of a game changer like Lush is to create in all shops a very consistent and multisensorial brand experience, enhancing the products’ perfumes, ingredients’ origins and band’s beliefs and inspirations.

Stepping inside a shop becomes almost like entering a beauty wonderland, where the touch and feel, browsing of the offer and product testing becomes enjoyable even for the random consumer who was not interested in the purchase before getting inside.

Another example comes from Caudalie, the brand that among those taken into account mostly aims at reaching a premium, exclusive image.
The brand keeps being distributed almost entirely through pharmacies and parapharmacies, a choice that both allows a capillar presence on the market and that keeps communicating the feeling of legitimacy and effectiveness gained by the advice of formed professionals who are also there to prescripe actual medicines. However, the company decided to add the monobrand store in the heart of Milan to invest on the long-term image of the brand, and to communicate in a deeper, complete way the brand positioning.

Through its history, its core inspirations, a dedicate and trained sales force and a series of local activities and after purchase recalls aimed at generating a loyal customer base, Caudalie’s consumers should follow the brand’s updates also online and in the rest of Italy, thanks to the presence in a wide number of pharmacies where POS materials in the dedicated spaces try to recreate the same inspirational environment.

3. Setting of realistic goals for implementations: the fact that eco-friendliness is now going through a favorable moment in pretty much all product categories should not mislead companies by pushing them too far and away from the core characteristics that sill are required by consumers.

The findings of the research suggest that the most appreciated brands as today are developing a sensorial, appealing side that has the potential for further development and which could fight always more with the installed beauty brands present on the market for years now.

However, green friendly beauty companies should not try and fight with those competitors all at once, forgetting their origins and increasing for instance their price before they even managed to get installed in their consumers’ minds with the new brand image they want to communicate. Such a sudden shift could end up being counterproductive, risking to confuse even the consumers who already bought and appreciated the prior product offer of the brand and who could instead abandon it in order to find something that feels more familiar and safe.

The guideline of keeping and investing only on realistic goals is crucial for eco-friendly beauty companies that want to embrace this new favorable trend, so that they adapt their offer and, most of all, the method they chose to communicate it to their consumers in a
coherent and consistent way that should intrigue and convince the existing consumers and at the same time attract new ones. Through all these means it will be possible for a company to build a strong brand receiving all the benefits coming from that status (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003), and especially in the aim of generating greater customer loyalty and reducing of vulnerability to competitive action.

6.2. Discussion

The research has thus outlined how the trend of green, sustainable and natural beauty products is increasing day by day, and it helped defining that the way market players are trying to outshine competition is through the shaping of a unique consumer experience. This consumer experience can be achieved in different ways and through several points of contacts and forms of communication, but it seems to be particularly successful when it is associated to products whose eco-friendly origins come in an appealing, premium shape which seems going far from the “extra green” and sometimes even unpleasant textures and perfumes of the original wave of vegetal beauty products. The study thus suggests how companies that want to take advantage of this favorable trend should shape their 360 degrees product offer in order to make their products look appealing and tempting even to the eyes of consumers whose interests were never caught before by this product category.

In order to do so, quality of the products have to be associated with a distinctive retail experience, as the POS is still the place where half of the client’s subjective brand experience takes form through touchpoints, sale process and personal advice (Spengler & Werner, 2009). However, it can be argued that such a strategical move could confuse the brand positioning and even weaken the brand equity, especially for companies operating on the market for years and thus owning already a group of loyal consumers.

It is indeed crucial that companies operate this shift in communication only after a detailed and careful study of the market situation, evaluating all possible alternatives and testing their consumers’ ideas before any perceivable change. In this sense, it is useful to mention the last of the steps presented by Hogan et al. as the keys for a company to build and maintain a strong brand: the constant monitoring of the
market standards and of competitors’ offer, not only prior the choice of the marketing mix, but also after being installed on the market. High sensoriality and perception of effectiveness seem to be the attribute that, in the current market state, are pushing sales and increasing the consumer base by getting former clients of perfumeries and specialized beauty saloon. However, companies need to monitor the trends constantly because an attribute that was considered before as a crucial advantage towards competitors could turn rapidly into a normal standard that does not offer anything more than what is offered by other brands: in such a situation the most successful would become the brand that managed to construct the most convincing and appealing set of images and perceptions and that could install them in the consumer base’s minds through the right touchpoints.

Another one of the key findings of the research is the effectiveness of social media tools to both communicate with existing consumers, enhancing their loyalty directly and indirectly, and to attract new ones. However, an investment on social media as well has to be backed up by a solid planning of resources which need to be well spread on all steps of organizing, monitoring and shaping of an online brand image and presence. Indeed, once online the brand has of course a bigger potential in terms of communicating directly and in a more direct and personal way to its consumers and potential new ones, but at the same time it achieves a very delicate position which could endanger the positioning reached so far. Many are the cases of brands that had to rebuild completely their brand equity because of a wrong step taken online which spread rapidly through the massive sharing of online users or disappointed “supporters” of the company. Such a consideration is even more valuable for items like the eco-friendly beauty products, which touch two very personal sets of interests and concerns for individuals. When ethics and social concern are involved, any mistake could affect seriously and on a long term base the brand reputation, and this is why taking the step of social media should be advised only to companies with a structure allowing, for instance:

1. A constant monitoring of the content shared by users;
2. Answers to comments and questions;
3. A playful and qualitative sharing of content linked to the brand core themes;
4. Recalls on the brand initiatives offline also to facilitate the location of the nearest store;
5. Promoting of interactions with bloggers and social influencers.

6.3. Direction for future research

The trend of beauty products with natural origins and inspiration is rather new, especially in the terms of reaching a wider target audience, which was before limited to small groups of consumers looking for eco-friendly products for specific reasons and who were not interested instead in the mass market products or perfumeries’ offer.

Being the market quite young, the phenomenon of its expansion still provides ample opportunities for further scientific research, especially because years of experience could give the researcher empirical data on the most effective touchpoints.

Once current top players have finalized their strategical adaptation to this sudden market growth and learned how to interact with a whole new group of consumers which they didn’t deal with before (less product focused and more interested in the brand experience), more data will be available for empirical analysis.

Particularly, it would be interesting to conduct a research on consumers that bought an eco-friendly product for the first time in the last year and test their perceptions and qualitative feedbacks, most of all to investigate the reasons that brought them to such a shift from more traditional products. Along with these findings, the focus could be moved to the strategical leverages that brought them to the purchase.

Linked to this aim, a deeper research on the consumer behavior side would be interesting in order to associate its findings to the company’s perspective, which was taken into account in this study.

Indeed, digging through advanced research behavior techniques into the sets of values and preferences that push consumers to chose not only eco-friendly beauty products instead of regular ones, but also a particular brand instead of another one, could add to the completeness of the research and contribute to a better understanding of the
consumers’ expectations. This, even if placed again in the frame of the company’s perspective which is carefully selecting the right touchpoints to implement.

Another interesting avenue for future research would be to try and assess how much of the success of the eco-friendly beauty products has to be inscribed in the general “sustainable” trend that is embracing all types of consumer goods for some time now, especially food and fashion items. Indeed, basing a success only on a short-term trend can’t be the key for success (Makower, 2014). The findings of a study focused on this question could help companies establish the best long-term strategy, selecting the right mix of touchpoints and moments of contact between consumers and brands aimed not only at increasing sales in the short term but also on the long-lasting presence of the brand in the consumers’ minds through the right associations and images.
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8. Appendices

8.1 Questback database
8.2 Key Elements of POS Best Practices

- Build recognizable brand mission and values
- Know your shoppers
- Foster a retail culture and skills
- Balance product knowledge with service and sales techniques
- Attract customers with appealing store merchandising


8.3 Five steps in the beauty shopper POS’ journey

1 | Welcome
   - Identification and orientation
   - Initiate a relationship

2 | Atmosphere
   - Ambiance
   - Shop and counter layout
   - Signage
   - Grooming and uniform

3 | Touch and feel
   - Staging
   - Access
   - Information
   - Testing

4 | Advice
   - Needs and habits
   - Answers
   - Objections
   - Offer additional sales and services
   - Customization

5 | Checkout
   - Payment and delivery
   - Registration
   - Invitation to come back
   - Satisfaction check

8.4 In-depth Interview

The interview took place on the 25th of July 2014, a week after the mystery-shopping visit to Caudalie’s monobrand store in Via Fiori Chiari 14, in Milano.
The first contact with the interviewee happened straight outside Caudalie’s store, when the researcher decided to stop people leaving the shop in order to ask their availability in answering some questions about their relation with the brand and the product typology.
Before starting to stop people and ask about their willingness to participate in an interview, the researcher communicated to the store manager of the shop the intentions and the reasons behind the investigation: this extra check was done so that sales associates would not think that the presence of a person interacting directly with their consumers outside the shop could damage them in any way.
It was explained that one of the first statements to the persons stopped would be that no connection existed between the research and Caudalie.

The researcher waited outside the shop for about an hour, during which a total of nine people entered the store.
Of the nine people who stepped inside the shop, only four got out with a Caudalie bag, indicating that they made a purchase during the time of the shopping visit.
The person chosen for the interview was one of the four who bought a product. Her name is Rita Rizzola, she is 52 and she is a Caudalie consumer for around 3 years.
Once she agreed to respond some questions, it was given her the opportunity to chose the moment of the taking place of the interview, and the place as well.
A direct appointment was preferred to a Skype call or phone interview, and the meeting was planned for the week after in a café in the center of Milan.
The following paragraphs will present the transcription of the relevant bits of the interview that took place, starting from the first question related to the subject matter. The moments that do not concern the purposes of the research were left aside by choice.
The interview was held in Italian, but it is here directly translated into English.
Total length: 34 minutes.

So, first things first: what did you buy last week when I stopped you at the entrance of Caudalie’s store?
True, I actually bought that day! I went there because I was having a walk in the area and I was supposed to meet a friend afterwards. As I was early to the appointment I decided to get in and have a look in case they had anything new. I just saw on a magazine an article about a new anti-age product and I was hoping to get some samples at the store. Eventually however I ended up buying a make-up removal milk cream. I know the product very well and I always buy it, so once I was inside the store I remembered that it was going to finish soon and I decided to re-buy it before it was over.

I see, and what about the new product, did you manage to try it in the end?
Yes, they gave me some samples and I didn’t even have to ask for it because apparently they were giving them to anyone buying anything. Actually I had tried the product already in store, it was put in a central position so I could easily find it and there was a tester. My main concern was the type of texture, as it is a “serum” and I never tried those before I wanted to check the feeling it could leave on the skin.
I still have to decide whether it convinces me or not though… the perfume is very nice and all feedbacks seem to be extremely positive and encouraging, just that I’m not sure I would find the constancy to use it daily. Call me lazy but I got used by years of use of creams and it feels hard for me now to change my habits.
I understand you, I also saw that these serums are spreading very fast recently, many brands are making new ones, but I never tried them and I don’t know if I would leave the cream to pass to one of those.
But you are too young for those! Serums are more specifically aimed at aging skins, and they should be applied directly on wrinkles… which you don’t have yet! Even if what they say is that it’s better to prevent than to have to cure later on.
And I agree with that! But now back to your relationship with Caudalie, do you remember how you started to use it and when?
Well, it’s been years now since I bought the first piece… I think at least three years. I got to know about the brand in my pharmacy, I remember that I was happy because they were starting to increase their offer in terms of natural products, which I always liked. Caudalie was one of the new brands they had, and the pharmacy invited me to try something because they said they were sure I would love it. I think the first item I bought was a soap…nothing expensive or particular, I just wanted to try the perfume and the feeling on the skin. I think I went on buying that soap for many more times after that first one, and I
still buy it now! It is made of olive oil and it is very basic, with no artificial strong smell. The skin seems very soft to me after I use it. It became a classic for me!

**And after that soap how did you pass to other products from the brand?**

It all came very naturally. Before Caudalie I sometimes bought some natural products at my pharmacy...they always had a corner with biological cosmetics from small brands that I always liked, I don't know why but I thought I could trust them more than the usual artificial ones. However there was no product I bought constantly, they were more of a sudden purchase that I sometimes added to my chart when I went to the pharmacy to by meds.

For instance I recall that I used to buy a deodorant and an after sun body cream made of almond oil. But if you ask me the name of the brand, I do not remember it. I even think that over the years I always bought different ones with the same ingredients... if you notice, natural brands always use the same kinds of ingredients: honey, lavender, fruits, natural oils...so I was buying products more for the product characteristics and their properties, which I was starting to understand and remember, more than because of a specific brand.

I think the purchase of that soap, always the same kind, caused the fact that my attention was grabbed by the other products...also because they were physically placed close to the famous soap! So I started to buy products for the daily routine, which were the kind that I kept buying for the longest time... make-up removal, hydrating cream, shower gels...

I think I tried them all. Eventually I ended up buying the make-up removal all the time because it turned out to be both efficient and delicate, not bothering my eyes at all.

**So you would say that the very first contact was caused by the advice of the sales person, but later it was the products’ disposition that facilitated your next purchases?**

I guess so...even if it is the first time I think about it. However for many months I think I kept buying the products just because I liked them, it took me some time to actually start realizing that I was always buying the same ones!

I think that the moment I started to follow the brand a bit more was when the first articles about it came on magazines...that’s when I also recognized it and became more interested when I went back to the pharmacy, so every time I would check if anything new was out.

**And when was that? Could you place in time when was the first time you saw Caudalie on magazines?**
I think it’s more than a year ago… I remember it because it was straight before I was leaving for a trip to France, and once I was in France I saw Caudalie everywhere… I guess it is very big there, because pharmacies had a lot of space just dedicated to the brand. That and Nuxe as well, but in general they have a bigger space for the offer on natural products, indeed if you think about it many of the brands we have in Italy are from France, or at least inspired by France (I’m thinking particularly about lavender).

If it seems to me you really are interested in nature and all different ingredients and their origins…do you agree? And why do you think it is like that?

It is strange because I never really realized it, but it has to be like that in a way… however I do not consider myself like a “nature integralist”. I know that there are people who seek products and buy them only if they meet some precise standards in terms of origins of the ingredients, while I am not that informed. I consider myself more of a “curious” consumer, I like to try what I never tried before so that I can see if it is something I might like.

For instance with natural products, I started buying them because I was interested in understanding whether their perfumes and textures were as good as the ones of regular products one can find normally in stores and supermarkets. Then of course the fact that they are good for the skin and for the environment is a big plus, but I have to say that I am a fan of their perfumes and textures…sometimes I feel like I want to eat them! While with the products coming from leaves, flowers and vegetals, I really have a nice feeling of using something natural and good for the body.

However it is true that I don’t see why I should buy a product made of artificial ingredients and chemical mixtures when I can find something similar made in a natural way.

I wouldn’t give up effectiveness for natural ingredients, but the products available now are very effective even in terms of correction of skin issues: Caudalie is doing some anti-aging products that really seem to be working…and the price is increasingly accordingly! It is not that far now from the anti-aging products you can find in perfumeries.

Already before you said that Caudalie’s products are effective…do you say it because you saw it on your skin or is it because of other reasons?

I think that I can see my skin reacting positively to the products I use, especially when I do not forget to do it daily and I follow my beauty routine. However I also think so because of what I read on magazines: Caudalie is winning a lot of awards because of its innovation in the study of the properties of wine and grapes, and it’s often present on magazines with
dedicated articles. Also, I became fan of the brand some time ago on Facebook: it was the sales associate from the shop where we met that gave me the advice of go and check out the page, she told me that it was a good place where I could find info on new products. Since I became fan I keep reading comments from enthusiast people who share their experiences and say that the products are really working for them. I remember I bought a product after I read so many comments about it… and in the end I didn’t like it! But it just wasn’t the right one for my skin, a bit too oily… while so many other people on Facebook loved it. I guess it shows how personal also social media are.

You just mentioned the sales associate of Caudalie’s monobrand: when was the first time you went there and why? What do you think of that shop? Do you think it shows you other sides of the brand, compared to what you can see in the pharmacy?

I went there for the first time not that long ago…. I think it was December and I was having a walk in Brera when I saw it. I didn’t know it was there so I was surprised. It was the beginning of the month and I remembered I though it would be the perfect place where to find my Christmas gifts, which I did! I remembered I was quite surprise because back then I was starting to hear more about Caudalie both on magazines and in the pharmacy, where the products were increasing more and more, but I didn’t expect the brand to be so developed and rich in terms of product lines and history! When I got in I really felt like I was stepping inside a museum… one of those new modern ones which are interactive: the videos about the brand history, images of the south of france, explanations about the process to get the products, products to try and test everywhere. Additionally, the sales associates were extremely kind from the very beginning and they started to tell me about the brand history as soon as they noticed my surprise. I told them I had already bought Caudalie before but that I was never informed about all that in the pharmacy.

Most of all I think I was attracted by the way things were placed inside the shop, and the kind of furniture and architectural style: everything was very classy, clean and elegant. I didn’t expect that from a natural brand, I don’t know why… I guess in my mind I associated it immediately to Bottega Verde, which I never really liked especially because of those sad, green stores that all look the same and which I think are so cold.
In this case instead, visiting this store pushed even more my curiosity towards the products…I guess I finally understood why magazines were speaking about it so much, it almost was a fashionable brand! I even felt a bit proud because I was using it “before it was cool”.

**So you do think that it shows something more than what you can see in pharmacies?**

I think so. Again, I didn’t notice by myself, but now that I think about it I guess that when I just got to know the brand in the pharmacy I was more focused on the products and the brand didn’t really matter. It’s good for Caudalie that I liked the products, because I could have easily moved to another brand if only my pharmacist had chosen to add some more offer! While after I saw the shop I felt immediately like the brand started to be like a warrant that made me trust the products more. And now I consider myself a fan!

Also because I became quite “close” with the sales advisors… they are so kind when I get back, they remember me and they always give me the right advice keeping in mind my past purchases.

However I do not go there very often, and even more rarely I buy. I told you, I like going there, having a look and a talk with them cause they are better in explaining than my pharmacy’s ones…but when I have to buy I often do it where it’s more practical!
8.5 Store Atmosphere

Source: IMC lecture in Marketing Communications Course, CBS, 2011.