

Employing netnography approach to describe brand image from customers' perspectives - The case of The Cocoon Original Vietnam

Xuan Thi Thanh Le^{1*}, Uyen Bao Ly¹

¹Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

*Corresponding author: ltxuan@hcmut.edu.vn

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ABSTRACT

The present study is proposed based on two important practical issues. First, brand image is one essential aspect of building the brand of a business. Second, with the development of the internet, social media has become a revolution for people worldwide to communicate, connect, create, and share their content and opinions in a dynamic and flexible way. Customers use their social networks to discuss online their reviews, and recommendations regarding product quality and customer service of a brand. Based on these two practical issues, the present study employs Netnography as the research method to explore aspects of the brand image of Cocoon from customers' perspectives, with the following objectives: (1) explore aspects of Cocoon's brand image, (2) describe customers' perspective of these aspects, and (3) propose suggestions for Cocoon to improve its brand image from the viewpoint of customers. The study is conducted by combining in-depth interview data and Netnography data. Then the thematic analysis is undertaken as an approach to Analysing data. The research findings result from the interviews with 07 customers and Netnography data from 49 posts on 08 communities on Facebook. Among 15 explored aspects of Cocoon's brand, there are 08 aspects of Cocoon, which are reviewed and discussed frequently, including quality, reputation, price, packaging, brand aspects, usefulness, influencer marketing, and seeding. Based on the research findings, several solutions are proposed to improve its brand image for Cocoon.

1. Introduction

Statista states that the number of social media users, updated in April 2022, is 4.65 billion (Statista, 2022). The reasons for using social media include staying connected with family and friends, filling spare time, looking for inspiration, and reading news stories. They are also the reason leading firms use social media as a marketing tool. Many firms are employing social media as a channel to promote marketing campaigns to boost brand awareness. Among social media, Facebook is a mostly-used platform, not only in Vietnam but also around the globe (Datareportal, 2022; Statista, 2022). The most updated data in January 2022 by Statista shows that Vietnam is one of the ten leading countries based on Facebook users, with 70.4 million accounts. With such a development in internet and social media uses, the online brand community is a platform that brings many benefits to users. These allow customers to communicate with each other and share their brand experiences with other customers. Studies have been conducted on consumers' identification, participation, and communication in a brand community (Huang & Hsu, 2010, as

cited in Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013). In particular, online communication provides customers with new forms of interactions (e.g., many-to-many) communications (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeck, 2013). With these communications via many platforms, such as electronic discussion forums, bulletin boards, chat rooms, social networks, blogs, and webpages, customers are enabled and facilitated new and extended forms of their experiences. From these communications, aspects of a brand image are discussed and reviewed by customers. From the consumer's perspective, brand image is one of the critical aspects of brand development that businesses need to pay attention to (Wijaya, 2013). Brand image could be conveyed positively or negatively, even both (Wijaya, 2013). Therefore, if a brand does not pay much attention to the issue of brand image in the minds of consumers through communication in the online community, it will easily lead to customers turning away if the image is conveyed negatively.

Similar to other types of products and services, cosmetics are products that customers usually search for information before purchasing. According to a survey conducted by Q&Me (2020) - a market research service in 2020, information sources that customers find about cosmetics include Facebook (69%), friends (48%), websites (36%), Youtube (30%), Web community (23%), TVC and Instagram (19%). It can be seen that most of the information sources for cosmetic information are from social media. The cosmetic market in Vietnam is potentially developing, with revenue reaching 2.3 billion USD in 2018 (Thai Trang, 2019). In this report, even though the market has potential, local cosmetic brands are not so competitive, with 10% of the market share only. The Cocoon Original Vietnam is one of the domestic brands that has left many imprints when continuously launching vegan products taking advantage of natural ingredients. This has created a unique brand in the market. Cocoon is usually mentioned through reviews on social networking sites, especially Facebook. Therefore, brand image is a big concern for Cocoon's effective marketing campaigns to retain existing customers and attract potential customers.

To explore the brand image of one specific cosmetic brand (Cocoon) from customers' perceptions and reviews on online communities, the present study is undertaken with the following objectives. The first objective is to explore aspects of Cocoon's brand image from customers' perceptions based on their reviews and discussions on online cosmetic communities. The second objective is to describe these aspects in detail. Last but not least, from the findings, implications are suggested for cosmetic firms to improve their brand image in customers' minds. Netnography is the research method employed to conduct the present study. Data collected include Netnographic and in-depth interviews. The study focused on social media sites, and data was collected from 07 Vietnamese beauty communities and 02 Vietnamese review communities on Facebook. Interviewees are the ones who know about cosmetic brands, especially Cocoon.

2. Literature review

2.1. Brand and brand image

The brand is defined by many scholars and practitioners. According to the American Marketing Association, "a brand is a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers." (American Marketing Association, 2023). Scholars also mention brands as "good brand", "brand communication", etc. From those studies, brand can be considered as initial views to identify products by Kotler (2000) (as cited in Wijaya, 2013), a relationship involving trust by McNally and Speak (2004) (as cited in Wijaya, 2013), added values by Post (2005) (as cited in Wijaya, 2013), a mark left on the minds and hearts of consumers by Wijaya (2011) (as cited in Wijaya, 2013). Išoraitė (2018, p. 121) defines a brand as "a word, or a symbol, a letter, a digit, a design, an emblem, a slogan, spatial characteristics of the product itself (image, packaging, shape, color), etc." Even though a brand is

defined in different ways, it is in memory of customers as a brand image, which is understood as part of the process, as the information disseminated by the organization (Išoraitė, 2018).

Similarly, many scholars also study and define brand image in brand literature. Wijaya (2013) explains brand image relates to customers' perception to form a certain image of the brand in their mind with two involved factors: time and intensive communication. A review by Išoraitė (2018) shows that brand image is differently explained in the literature, including part of the process is associated with emotions and the information disseminated by the organization. Even though brand image is defined differently in studies, these definitions have common issues. Firstly, brand image is the perception of the brands customers perceive in their minds and memories. Secondly, brand image can be any part(s) of a product or service. These parts are product attributes, which are descriptions of the traits of a product or service. These attributes include product/service-related qualities, such as physical compositions or the type of service, and non-product/service qualities, such as price information, packaging and product design, and information about users, community, or celebrity users of the product. In short, brand image can be considered a consumer-generated perspective and an intangible asset of the firm (Išoraitė, 2018; Wijaya, 2013).

The review of the literature on brand image shows that the aspects of brand image in studies are not similar. In a study conducted by Riaz (2015), brand image includes the Uniqueness of brand association, Strength of brand association, and Favorability of brand association. In his study, Wijaya (2013) lists brand image, including brand identity, brand personality, brand association, brand behavior and attitudes, brand competence, and benefits. Because of different descriptions of brand image in the literature, the present study employs qualitative methods to explore Cocoon's customers' perceptions of brand image.

2.2. Brand communities and online brand communities

Brand community was introduced by Albert and O'Guinn (2001) based on the concept of "community", then "consumption community." Their study defines brand community as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured site of social relations among admirers of a brand" (Albert & O'Guinn 2001, p. 412). They also stated some critical implications for the brand community. One of these implications is that a strong community can result in consumer loyalty and brand commitment. There are three elements of brand community, including (1) the brand (the source of a community's development), (2) the members (based on their relationship with the brand), and (3) the communities (Lee, Lee, Taylor, & Lee, 2011).

Because of "non-geographically bound communities," brand communities can be offline or online. Through online outlets such as websites, chat rooms, forums, and, most recently, social media, consumers may build connections with other consumers to satisfy their feeling of community (Huang & Hsu, 2010, as cited in Sloan, Bodey, & Gyrð-Jones, 2015). More specifically, an online brand community is defined as "specialised brand communities that take place in a virtual setting where members' interaction is primarily Internet-mediated" (Brogi, Calabrese, Campisi, Capece, Costa, & Pillo, 2013, p. 2). The viewpoints of the online brand community are very different, from passive to active participation of members. For example, it is considered "a forum where customers consume content passively" (Kamboj & Rahman, 2017, p. 306). However, Brogi et al. (2013, p. 2) mention that online brand communities give members abilities "to interact with each other, to exchange information and knowledge on the brand or simply to express their passion for it, then influencing their relationship with the brand." From a marketing perspective, an online brand community supports a new product launch, enables social interactions, and facilitates brand relationships and long-term loyalty (Hanson, Jiang, & Dahl, 2018).

2.3. A brief of Netnography

The method to study online cultures and communities was first employed by American scholars in 1995 (Morais, Santos, & Goncalves, 2020). After that, in 1996, the term “virtual ethnography” was used by Mason to conduct studies on virtual interactions. Then, in 1997, Kozinets published the first article, which was conducted by “Netnography”, which is an entirely online approach (as cited in Kozinets, 2015). Costello, McDermott, and Wallace (2017, p. 4) as cited the definition by Kozinets in 2002 as follows: “a new qualitative research method that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging through electronic networks.” Data collected in Netnography is from a human being’s perspective. Hence it requires researcher’s cultural understanding and online experience, such as identity, language, values, etc. and especially meaning (Morais et al., 2020).

In general, it classifies Netnography into 04 types, including auto-Netnography, symbolic Netnography, digital Netnography, and humanist Netnography. Data for auto-Netnography is from a particular “local” site: one’s own identity and story. Symbolic Netnography is helpful for marketing managers, and data is from decoding the everyday words of people/consumers. Digital Netnography helps to understand cultures based on data analytic techniques from social media. Finally, humanist Netnography focuses on the changing nature of human social existence and is guided by social issues of great importance. Based on the types of Netnography classified by Kozinets (2015), it can be seen that firms can employ symbolic Netnography to understand customers. Moreover, Netnography is useful for getting to know a customer’s needs and wants, choices, symbolic meanings, and more (Xun & Reynolds, 2010). It can be employed in many fields, such as customer research, marketing, and branding through discussions from blogs, social media, websites, and virtual communities (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018). In particular, Heinonen and Medberg (2018) stated that Netnography is a popular method commonly used in market research to study and understand brand-related phenomena to gain customers’ insights through online communities. In short, Netnography is a thick description of the lived experience of consumers (Langer & Beckman, 2005).

Employing Netnography to conduct a study can have some advantages. First, Netnography is suitable for approaching sensitive topics discussed in online communities, which cannot be easily collected by surveys or other approaches (Costello et al., 2017). Second, the Netnographic method is faster and more affordable with computer aid (Toledano, 2017) while also being natural and unobtrusive (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018). Last but not least, Netnography can be the only method in a study or combined with other methods (Costello et al., 2017). For example, in their study, Brodie et al. (2013) performed Netnography combined with qualitative in-depth interviews with community members (as cited in Costello et al., 2017). Besides these advantages, Netnography also makes researchers face some challenges (Morais et al., 2020). One challenge is that a lack of control over the sampling and structure of the study population could lead to some sources of bias in the results. Another one is that the boundaries of the study are determined based on researchers’ perceptions of what to include and not to include (Kulavuz-Onal, 2015, as cited in Morais et al., 2020). One more challenge of Netnography should be considered in conducting ethical research with the agreement of the online community (Morais et al., 2020).

In recent years, there have been several studies employing Netnography to examine experiences/perceptions of customers/public/related stakeholders through collecting information in online communities on social media and virtual forums in different sectors, such as political, educational, fashion, etc. For example, in their study, Mehta, Sarvaiya, and Chandani (2022), Netnography is employed to examine how community engagement can be influenced by the

Covid-19 pandemic. In the fashion sector, Loureiro, Serra, and Guerreiro (2019) employed Netnography to analyze and compare how fashion brands (Zara, H&M, Prada, Gucci, Nike, and Adidas) communicate on Instagram. In another study conducted in the educational sector by Fujita, Harrigan, and Soutar (2017), Netnography is used to analyze the Facebook fan page of a leading Australian university to explore the co-creation process between relevant social actors, such as page administrators (marketers), students, and staff; and to identify key tactics used to help co-creation value and university brand meanings. It can be seen that Netnography can be used to explore “customers” opinions/perceptions of products/services in virtual platforms. The present study also employs Netnography to explore Cocoon’s customers’ perceptions of its brand image, consequently.

3. Methodology

This study employs symbolic Netnography (Kozinets, 2015) as the method of combining Netnographic data with in-depth interview data. Firstly, semi-structured interviews with members of selected communities were undertaken to explore the aspects of Cocoon. There are 07 members aged between 20 to 31 from the selected communities interviewed. Each in-person conversation lasted around 30 - 45 minutes. All interviewees have known well about Cocoon brand. The purpose of these in-depth interviews is to let the participants have a chance freely talk about the Cocoon brand. Therefore, questions are always about “What (aspect) comes to your mind when the Cocoon is mentioned?” and then “Could you please describe/explain this aspect?” All answers were analyzed by following the thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). The result of analyzing interview data has found 11 themes (with 55 sub-themes) of Cocoon image, including Quality (with 07 sub-themes), Price (with 02 sub-themes), Reputation (with 10 sub-themes), Packaging (with 12 sub-themes), Promotion (with 01 sub-theme), Usefulness (with 03 sub-themes), CSR activities (with 01 sub-theme), Distribution (with 01 sub-theme), Influencers marketing (with 02 sub-themes), Scent (with 02 sub-themes), and Brand aspects (with 14 sub-themes). Then, based on these 11 themes of Cocoon’s brand image, Netnographic data is collected from online beauty communities.

According to Kozinets (2002), one online community, which can be selected in Netnography, should have (1) a segment, topic, or group which are *relevant* to research questions; (2) higher “traffic” of postings, (3) larger numbers of discrete message posters; (4) more detailed or descriptively rich data; (5) more between-member interactions of the type required by the research question. These are five (5) criteria employed to choose online beauty communities to conduct Netnography. There are nine (9) beauty communities (with 49 postings, and 450 comments of Cocoon users) selected in total (Table 1).

Table 1

The selected beauty communities

No.	Communities name	Code	No. of Members	Duration	No. of posts	No. of comments
1	Skincare - review mỹ phẩm có tâm (authentic VN)	P1	861,000	6	17	184
2	Beauty house-skincare holic	P2	164,000	4	04	24
3	Beauty tips & review (Vietnam)	P3	211,000	3	02	93
4	Đẹp chanh sả	P4	1,225,000	2	02	14

No.	Communities name	Code	No. of Members	Duration	No. of posts	No. of comments
5	Bí kiếp dưỡng nhan	P5	288,000	2	03	11
6	Review chân thật + beauty tips	P6	975,000	1	03	16
7	Chị em mần đẹp	P7	163,000	1	08	30
8	Supporting communities (Thánh riviú)	P8	1,800,000	> 3	10	78
9	Supporting communities (Badi Nulo)	P9	618,000			
Total					49	450

Source: The researcher's data analysis

In terms of Netnographic data, Kozinets (2015) classified into three types, including (a) archival data, which can be found from social media communities, (b) elicited/co-created data, which can be created through the researcher's own social interaction, and (c) produced data, which is created by the researcher, such as fieldnotes, recording, or video files. In this study, archival data and produced data are used. This study aims to explore the brand image aspect of Cocoon and describe the customer's perceptions of these aspects, so that thematic analysis is selected to proceed. The thematic analysis processes qualitative information and can be generated from raw information or from theory (Boyatzis, 1998).

4. Aspects of Cocoon's brand image from Netnography

The data collected from in-depth interviews (11 themes with 55 sub-themes) plays as the frame for collecting Netnographic data. Data from Netnography is also thematically analyzed. There are some new sub-themes found in online communities (see Table 2). More importantly, 04 new themes were found in discussions on online communities, including: Conformity (with 06 sub-themes), Customer service (with 04 sub-themes), Value (with 02 sub-themes) and Seeding. The research findings show 15 aspects (themes) of the Cocoon brand. Table 2 summarises all aspects of the Cocoon brand from customers' perceptions (from both in-depth interview and Netnography).

Table 2

Aspects of Cocoon's brand from customers' perceptions

No.	Theme (Aspects)	Code	Sub-theme	Interview frequency	Netnography frequency
1	Quality	Q1	Effectiveness	1	67
		Q2	Benign	3	61
		Q3	Natural ingredients	4	28
		Q4	Safety for skin	7	21
		Q5	Ingredients list	3	12
		Q6	Inconsistency		10
		Q7	Adapting product function	3	7

No.	Theme (Aspects)	Code	Sub-theme	Interview frequency	Netnography frequency
		Q8	Appropriate concentration		3
		Q9	Fresh ingredients	3	1
		Q10	Generality		29
2	Reputation	R1	Country of origin (Vietnam)	6	120
		R2	Vegan cosmetic	3	80
		R3	Coffee body polish	3	35
		R4	Vietnam high quality good	2	29
		R5	Popular brand	3	18
		R6	Reviewing on social media	3	14
		R7	Environmentally friendly brand		14
		R8	Local ingredients	2	10
		R9	Favorable	6	4
		R10	Diverse product line		3
		R11	Ethical business	2	2
		R12	Awards	2	
3	Usefulness	U1	Useless	2	49
		U2	Improvement	1	13
		U3	Skin gets worse		5
		U4	Acceptance		1
		U5	Advertisement and quality	3	1
4	Price	P1	Cheap	2	37
		P2	Affordable price	5	35
		P3	High price		9
5	Packaging	PK1	Beautiful packaging design	4	25
		PK2	Simple packaging	1	9
		PK3	Firmly	1	7
		PK4	Attractive packaging	3	6
		PK5	Clear information		4
		PK6	Careful packaging	2	3
		PK7	Luxury packaging		3
		PK8	Bad packaging		1
		PK9	Environmentally friendly	4	1

No.	Theme (Aspects)	Code	Sub-theme	Interview frequency	Netnography frequency
			packaging		
		PK10	Excess paper craft	1	
		PK11	Reuse	4	
		PK12	Impressive label	2	
		PK13	Enduring packaging	2	
		PK14	Convenience	1	
		PK15	Meaning of colour	1	
6	Promotion	PM1	E-Voucher		8
		PM2	Advertising		3
		PM3	Coupons	4	1
7	Scent	SC1	Natural	1	6
		SC2	Relax	1	6
		SC3	Herbal		5
		SC4	Fresh		4
		SC5	Comfortable		2
		SC6	Generality		14
8	Distribution	D1	Retail	3	4
		D2	Ecommerce		2
9	Brand aspects	B1	Cruelty free	6	17
		B2	Non harmful preservatives		3
		B3	100% vegan ingredients	2	2
		B4	Clear origin of materials	2	2
		B5	Environmental protection	1	
		B6	Pretty brand name		1
		B7	Creativity brand name	1	
		B8	Memorable brand name	2	
		B9	Honest brand	1	
		B10	Social brand	3	
		B11	Nature brand	1	
		B12	Slogan	1	1
		B13	Culture	2	
		B14	Uniqueness	2	

No.	Theme (Aspects)	Code	Sub-theme	Interview frequency	Netnography frequency
		B15	Elegant	1	
		B16	Colour	5	
10	Influencer marketing	I1	Reviewing	1	10
		I2	Limited edition	3	1
11	CSR activities	C1	Environmental campaign	3	7
		C2	Animal protection campaign		1
12	Conformity	CF1	Normal skintype		7
		CF2	Gentle skintype		2
		CF3	All age		2
		CF4	Vietnamese skin		2
		CF5	Environment		1
		CF6	Sensitive skin		1
13	Customer service	CS1	Fast feedback		2
		CS2	Supportiveness		1
		CS3	Empathy		1
		CS4	Unsupportive		1
14	Value	V1	Price consistency with quality		9
		V2	Waste money		3
15	Seeding	N/A			48

Source: The researcher's data analysis

After analyzing the data from in-depth interviews, there are 11 aspects stated by respondents (from aspects No. 01 to 11 in Table 2). Data from postings on online beauty communities are collected based on these aspects. The result shows that there are 04 more aspects found on Netnography that respondents do not mention, including Conformity, Customer service, Value, and Seeding (from aspects No. 12 to 15 in Table 2). Netnography frequency is calculated based on the number of comments. The higher the frequency mentioned, the more prominent the brand image is.

4.1. Quality

Quality is the most-mentioned aspect of in-depth interviews and in communities. There are 05 main items of quality, which can be counted over 20 times, including *Effectiveness* (67), *Benign* (61), *Generality* (29), *Natural ingredients* (28), and *Safety for skin* (21). Cocoon is famous as a popular vegan cosmetic brand in Vietnam. Therefore, besides *Effectiveness* - mostly mentioned, *Natural Ingredients* are highly recognized by consumers. Cosmetics with natural extracts contain a full range of nutrients from nature, so *Benignity* is almost absolute. One user commented that “*All Cocoon products are benign and highly effective*” (Netno, P3.2, 2022). Many opinions

say that Cocoon is a brand with many quality products, but not specifically mentioned. For example, as commented by consumers on this aspect “*Cocoon is a very quality cosmetic brand*” (Netno, P3.2, 2022), or as another commented “*It is a Vietnamese branded product, but the quality makes users want to continue using*” (Netno, P3.2, 2022) or “*This brand is good, cheap, and safe*” (Netno, P5.3, 2022).

4.2. Reputation

Reputation is the next aspect that is mentioned frequently. It can be understood that a brand’s *Reputation* is significant to customers. There are 04 main items in this aspect, including *Country of origin (Vietnam)* (120), *Vegan cosmetic* (80), *Coffee body polish* (35), and *Vietnam high-quality goods* (29). Cocoon is famous as a vegan cosmetic brand from Vietnam. A review of the customer found in one beauty community is “*I am very proud because the Cocoon is a Vietnamese cosmetic brand*” (Netno, P1.13, 2022), Cocoon was also mentioned in other consumer’s comment “*Cocoon has been and is asserting that made in Vietnam*” (Netno, P3.2, 2022).

Cocoon has built its impressive reputation among consumers with the image of *Vegan cosmetics*, which was mentioned by one commenter, “*I am impressed with the brand because it is vegan*” (Netno, P3.2, 2022). Another comment supporting this *Reputation* is “*Cocoon is the best vegan cosmetic I have ever seen*” (Netno, P8.8, 2022). Moreover, *Coffee body polish* has successfully brought fame to Cocoon. Customers mentioned this: “*The coffee line body polish is the best line of Cocoon because thanks to this line, I knew the Cocoon brand*” (Netno, P1.4, 2022). Other commented “*When Cocoon is mentioned, everyone would think of a coffee scrub (Coffee scrub is one product type in coffee body polish)*” (Netno, P1.17, 2022). Finally, the *Reputation of High-quality Vietnamese goods* is perceived by consumers when referring to the brand; for example, “*Cocoon is a good brand to use. It is a high-quality Vietnamese product*” (Netno, P6.2, 2022).

4.3. Usefulness

Although there are some positive items mentioned in this aspect, 49 comments in two postings complained products of Cocoon do not work. Many people think that the product does not help them to improve their current condition. This item is *Useless* from both in-depth interviews and Netnography. For example, one interviewer said, “*I think Cocoon brand has many useless products, it does not work for me, especially facial products*” (Interview 3, 2022). Similarly, one of 49 comments on this issue states, “*In general, I think the Cocoon product is useless. Some are fine. Some ... frankly, are boring to mention to*” (Netno, P1.3,2022).

Even though the *Usefulness* aspect of the brand is based on the difference of each customer, especially in cosmetic products, Cocoon must pay attention to these comments to improve its quality.

4.4. Price

Price is also an item reviewed by beauty communities’ members, even though customer’s perceptions of *Price* are very different, such as *High price*, *Cheap price*, and *Affordable price*. However, most of the comments from Netnography or opinions from in-depth interviews state that *Prices* of Cocoon products are accepted by customers with 37 comments mentioning *Cheap price*, and 35 comments mentioning *Affordable price*.

4.5. Packaging

The mostly-mentioned item in *Packaging* is *Beautiful packaging design*. This item is mentioned by 4 per 7 interviewees and 25 times in postings. There are many more items to describe this aspect, such as *Clear information*, *Careful packaging*, *Impressive label*, *Reuse* etc. It can be seen that Cocoon pays great attention to the product's external appearance. This is recognized by an interviewee's response, "*The brand takes great care and invests in packaging design*" (Interview 4, 2022). Similarly, a consumer commented on a post about Cocoon, "*I recognize the packaging of Cocoon is beautiful and flawless from inside out*" (Netno, P1.5, 2022). Cocoon brand also receives the trust of customers thanks to the use of *Environmentally friendly packaging*, which is less harmful to the environment. This aspect helps to enhance Cocoon's reputation for showing great concern for the health and environment of its customers.

4.6. Seeding

Seeding is an aspect which is not found in in-depth interviews but in online beauty communities. From the data collected, customers think that Cocoon has too many interactive seeders to protect the brand on postings to discuss this brand product. There are 48 mentions and discussions in online communities. The opinions of communities members are different in this aspect. On the one hand, some people think that *Seeding* is normal and does not affect customers too much. For example, a customer commented, "*If Cocoon does not do seeding, why is the brand known by many people? You have to promote whatever you sell*" (Netno, P1.11, 2022). On the other hand, one of the most typical comments from a customer is, "*Cocoon's seeding is too much. I hate it, so I do not buy it*". Another customer also left one comment "*Seeding is too much, so frustrating with this brand, so this is the reason why I hate the brand*". From the data collected, it can be seen that *Seeding* is creating negative influences on customers rather than positive ones. This is one issue that should be considered by Cocoon.

4.7. Discussion

Brand image is everything in customers' reflections when they recall a brand. The research findings show 15 aspects of Cocoon, including 11 and 04, from both in-depth interviews and Netnography, and from Netnography only, respectively. From the data collected, some crucial issues can be recognized.

Firstly, the mostly-mentioned/reviewed item is *Country of origin* with 120 mentions. Many comments in postings mention and highlight this item as one main characteristic of Cocoon. Obviously, it can be seen that Cocoon won the hearts of consumers because raw materials have taken a right in the provinces of Vietnam. By prioritizing ingredients from Vietnam, the company has created more output for farmers and built a good image in the minds of customers. One more item, which is also mentioned many times (80) is *Vegan cosmetic*. This interest shows that nowadays, Vietnamese customers have increased their animal protection concerns. Using ingredients that are not only from Vietnam but also vegan to produce cosmetics can be considered as an ethical business. Moreover, this can be supported by customers. These items are also reported in many reports conducted by MarketingAI, Q&ME, GMP Consulting Co., etc. to present the tendency of cosmetic consumption.

Secondly, like any other type of product, *Effectiveness* and *Benign* (pleasant feeling when using) are two items, which are also mentioned frequently. In particular, in the context of cosmetics, these two items are essential to consumers. Many experts in the industry, such as GMP Consulting Co., or Q&ME, etc. have pointed out the tendency of cosmetic consumption. For

example, consumers have the requirement for “on-demand” beauty. With this requirement, they are required to see the result at the soonest time when using cosmetics.

Thirdly, one aspect which has been reviewed in much details is *Packaging*. There are 15 items discussed in this aspect with 59 mentions, and the mostly-mentioned detail is *Beautiful packaging design* with 25 times. Some other items are also similar to this, such as *Attractive packaging*, *Luxury packaging*, etc. According to Tomorrow Marketer (2022), customers tend to have more specific requirements relating to *Packaging* and they also pay more attention to any improvements in *Packaging* from firms. Or on the webpage of GMP Consulting Co, this firm uses the term “more than just skincare” to refer to customers’ requirement for *Packaging*, which is friendly-environmental and sustainable.

Lastly, *Seeding* is a tool in Digital marketing nowadays. There are many reasons to explain employing *Seeding* in marketing. One of them is to “help with branding,” or “get real feedback” (IMP Digital, 2019). However, over-using this tool can become a “double-edged sword.” The analysis of Netnographic data shows that the viewpoints of online communities’ members are very different with support and not-supports. The fact is that the content of Cocoon *Seeding* is not perceived correctly by customers. They even make customers feel bored because of poorly answered comments/reviews.

5. Conclusion and managerial implications

The purpose of this paper is to explore aspects of the brand image of Cocoon by employing Netnography as the main research method. The study is conducted in a combination of in-depth interviews and Netnography. The research findings identify 15 aspects of Cocoon’s brand image, including 11 from both in-depth interviews and Netnography and 04 from Netnography only. 06 significant aspects are mentioned/reviewed many times in online beauty communities, including *Quality*, *Reputation*, *Usefulness*, *Price*, *Packaging*, and *Seeding*. From these aspects, some managerial implications for cosmetic brands are proposed as follows:

Firstly, cosmetics are a type of product that is perceived as expensive. *Price* is always a consideration of customers. Moreover, with the current tendency in cosmetics consumption, which is mentioned above, if firms combine two items, *Country of origin* and *Price*, they can reduce the price and make customers more satisfied with local cosmetic products.

Secondly, *Effectiveness* of cosmetic products depends much on the types of persons. This is also an issue that firms need to pay attention to advertisements. A clear message should be delivered to make customers understand the use of products correctly. In particular, the uses of different product lines should be instructed carefully to customers.

Finally, *Seeders* of brands should employ the AISAS (Attention-Interest-Search-Action-Share) model to improve digital marketing activities. Cosmetic brands can select *Influencers* that match the campaign’s goals and existing budget, the choice of *Influencers* also needs to consider their images (good image and few scandals, trusted by many customers/fans), and the content of *Influencers* needs to be consistent with the message of the marketing campaign. The choice of channels to promote these contents should also be considered carefully. Moreover, brands should have specific guidelines on interactions as well as messages conveyed to selected influencers to avoid misinterpreted information transmission.

6. Limitations and future research

Although it successfully addresses research objectives, the study has some limitations. Firstly, most of the respondents in in-depth interviews are young (between the age of 20 - 31) and

living in Hochiminh City. Obviously, they have more chances to approach many sources of information/channels. This can explain why they have more knowledge of cosmetic products. Therefore, further study should extend to many ranges of respondents to have a better image of the brand.

Secondly, as mentioned in the section on Netnography, the structure of sampling cannot be controlled and cannot distinguish between reviews/comments of seeders and those of communities members. This limitation can be avoided if the firm can send someone from the marketing department to participate in the study.

Thirdly, although themes from Netnographic data are revised in some rounds to describe more precisely the meanings of comments on postings, some images and short comments are hard to interpret. Hence, future studies should validate the explored aspects in the present study in other formats, such as surveys and focus groups, to have a better explanation of brand image.

Finally, data collected from both in-depth interviews and Netnography is qualitative hence the research findings cannot be generalized. Based on the themes found from the present study, future research should be employed a quantitative method to approach the large number of respondents, so that the research finding can be tested in the larger sample size.

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