

## The meanings of 'organic' branding in the Russian skincare industry

### Abstract

This paper will discuss the evolution in marketing communications characterised by the emergence of social media and the spread of online communities, as a result of which, consumers have become active co-constructors of brand identity in the market. The present research aims to bring companies' attention to the process of brand co-construction with their customers, by considering different organic brand perceptions. It will specifically discuss how organic skincare online communities in Russia perceive and understand 'organic' branding and it will identify four major groups of members, who authorize, construct, analogize or abandon organic labels. The research will use the netnographic approach and thematic data analysis to examine online forums discourses. It will categorise different label interpretations into groups according to the meanings that online members assign to them.

### Introduction

The Marketing Communications field has dramatically changed over the last 60 years. It has shifted from being purely focused on mass media towards more data-driven systems (CRM) and finally to digitally -driven, interactive approaches (Schultz et al., 2017). The most dramatic changes occurred with emergence of the Internet and the World Wide Web. Those innovative digitally -driven interactive communication systems altered the old-fashioned marketer-controlled communication into a networked marketing, which nowadays stands as marketing of the 21st century (Schultz et al., 2017). In networked marketing, consumers actively engage with each other on different social platforms, sharing and discussing their brand experience (Cova, 1999). As a result of those discussions, different brand interpretations and brand perceptions emerge on the market (Mühlbacher and Hemetsberger, 2008). Marketers are not able anymore to control constantly emerging consumer- generated content on social media, but instead they can use it as a rich source of data for constructing a mutual brand understanding and establishing a two- way communication with their customers (Pitt et al., 2006 cited in Berthon et al., 2009). This paper will specifically focus on how online communities' discussions formed around organic skincare reveals the diversity in members' understandings and perceptions of organic as a label and organic skincare products.

As a form of certification, an organic label is an economic sign, proving a quality of a product and its production process that complied with environmentally friendly criteria. However, from a consumer standpoint, the label evokes varied associations (Larceneux et al., 2012). Thus, consumers' perceptions of organic certificates in most cases tend to be subjective (Janssen& Hamm, 2012). Janssen and Hamm (2011) also showed that level of knowledge about organic labelling schemes is usually very low. Most consumers for example are not aware of a control system that underlies organic production, or the differences between different types of organic certificates. Considering the ambiguous nature of organic as a label, it is thus, assumed to be a salient example to demonstrate the complexity of consumers' brand interpretations in that area. The Russian market is selected as a socio-cultural context that is expected to have a significant growth in the share of the organic cosmetics. That trend makes this study especially relevant for this market and for the local companies operating in the organic industry (Zhuplev, 2016). To define the socio-cultural context is also important, as brand meanings change across social, community and cultural boundaries (Berthon et al., 2009).

## **The evolution of marketing communications**

In the 1990-es, the main focus of marketing communications (MCs) was placed on delivering a coherent brand identity to ensure consistent customers' brand perceptions in the market. It was believed that marketers played a major role in managing communication strategies and shaping customers' brand perception. A company tried to bring its communications functions under a single managerial umbrella to integrate the flow of organisational and marketing communication across and outside a company. According to Kwang-Tong Shin (2013) '[...] the driving force of MCs is the acceptance level of MCs theory from internal MCs participants or the internal members of organization, who directly or indirectly influence the effect of the strategy implementation [...]' (p.43). The similar trend was also seen in Brand literature, where companies' had a power to control customers' brand perceptions. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) for example states that '[...] The image of a brand established in the mind of the customer is determined by the identity of the brand [...]' (p. 265). From this perspective, successful brands are those brands where consumers' brand perception matches a company's one.

Even the CRM approach (customer relationship marketing) in the 90-es was 'relationship' controlled by the marketer. A company searched and analysed different types of customer information, such as the customer's actual marketplace behaviours and then used it to construct more customised marketing communications strategies and techniques. The most common ones were test and control mailings (Mehta and Sivadas, 1995), predictive analytics and scoring models (Malthouse, 2003), which enabled to differentiate between different customers' groups and to improve their segmentation and personalization. Information about the financial value of individual customers also helped with allocation of financial resources to the most promising customers. However CRM approach was still mainly based on mass marketing, where companies kept controlling the media and distribution channels. Though, marketers were aware of what customers were purchasing and how they were reacting; customers in their turn did not know what companies were doing and why they were doing it in a certain manner. Despite the rise and popularity of CRM in the late 80-es and early 90-es, it was still the period of traditional marketer-controlled marketing (Schultz et al., 2017).

The real changes in marketing communications started happening when the popularity of commercial uses of the Internet and the World Wide Web began to spread (Ho, 1997). Those innovative and interactive forms of communication took a place of an old-fashioned controlled way of marketing and represented the marketplace of the 21st century. Customers started proactively receiving and exchanging marketplace knowledge and companies had no more control of those processes (Schultz et al., 2017).

The marketing system of the 21<sup>st</sup> century represents one enormous network, where marketers need to learn how networks emerge, develop, contract and change over time. In such a networked marketplace, the old-fashioned marketer controlled approach is bound to fail. Companies cannot anymore treat customers as passive receivers of information and continue sending out messages, offers, etc. They need to be able to engage with customers and respond appropriately to the consumer-generated contacts emerging on the market. In most cases, these are contacts that a company did not initiate nor with which it might agree. In other words, the company needs to take a position of an "external listener," instead of an "external talker". Taking that position is not an easy task for most selling-oriented organizations, where marketing communication strategies are still composed of inward, linear, stimulus-response approaches (Schultz et al., 2017.) However, it should be considered, that in the marketplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and in the era of social media, information about products and

services originates in the market. Marketing communications enters into the area of the business of meanings, where the consumer is a partner in the creation of meaning (Hackley and Kitchen, 1998). The key differences differentiating social media from the traditional media (newspapers, magazines, television, radio, etc.) are characterized by the active engagement of the consumer: rising consumer activity, readiness for participation, immersion (voting, commenting and sharing information), a proactive exchange of information between information sender and receiver and high chances for emergence of various communities with diverse interests. A company needs to be aware of a recipient's knowledge base before formulating a targeted communication. 'Customers are holistic. They take in, assemble and activate the knowledge they need, when they need it, in the form they need it. Integration will be a key skill for marketers going forward, but, not integration of what they do, it must be integration of what their customers [...] and all the others in the marketing network do [...] It is this form of integration that will be important in the future [...]' (Schultz et al., 2017, p.478).

That shift in marketing communications associated with the spread of social media, consumers' active engagement in sharing their brand experience and expectations online, highlights the importance to consider consumers as active interpreters of brand perceptions and also co-partners in the process brand construction. This theme is especially relevant for obscure labels that arise controversial discussions of what exactly they stand for and what they mean for consumers. For example, the meaning of the term 'organic' leaves it open to many interpretations bringing into the spot of discussion of how to position and communicate the brand accordingly. There is lack of research on how 'organic' labels are being interpreted in the market and what implications they have for branding. However, being aware of different organic labels interpretations in the market and their impact on brand perceptions could enable companies to communicate their brand to their customers in a more integrated way.

### **Brand labelling**

Labels are defined as social acts of giving a name or assigning a label to something or someone in order to fulfil certain social functions, such as expressing or negotiating identity or affiliation with a specific community (Jayyusi, 1984 cited in Dinhopl et al., 2015). In other words, labels to some extent are "common sense units for referring to people" that work as member identification within a given group or community (Wowk, 1984, p. 76 cited in Dinhopl et al., 2015). However, there is scarce research that has been exploring the complex nature of brands and perception of brand labelling. To study the perceptions of labels in the market is also overcomplicated by that fact that labels are contextually embedded and meaningful only in their situational context (Potter, 2003 cited in Dinhopl et al., 2015). The brand labelling research field is very much underdeveloped. A few studies have analysed the impact of labels on brand interpretations. There is even less studies in the area of organic branding. Bauer et al. (2013) investigated the role of 'organic' labels in shaping customers' brand perceptions. A strong interaction between branding and labelling in the case of organic products has been highlighted. Their findings also show that organic labels from the customers' point of view add value to the brand. However, owners of well-established brands should be cautious about adding an organic label to their products, as in some cases the organic logo might outperform the brand itself. To fill in the discussed research gaps, this paper will aim to provide insight into customers' perceptions of organic logos in skincare industry.

## Methodology

Netnography is a method for studying different areas in the fields of consumer behaviour and marketing (Kozinets 2002 cited in Zhang and Hitchcock, 2017). It is ‘based primarily on the observation of textual discourse’ and involves gathering data from various online sources such as social net -working sites, chat forums, weblogs and blogs (p.320). This study is based on systematic observations of online discourses on three different local Russian forums organized around organic skincare themes. The observations have been made at a specific point in time for the period of three months (from November 2016-January 2017), which defines this study as exploratory and cross-sectional (De Vaus and De Vaus, 2001). This paper follows the procedure of the netnographic approach that shapes the research design and methodology of this work. The netnography encompasses of six main stages: research planning, entrée, data collection, interpretation, ensuring ethical standards, and research representation, presented in Fig. 1 and discussed in a detail in sections below (Kozinets, 2010).

### Six Steps of Netnography

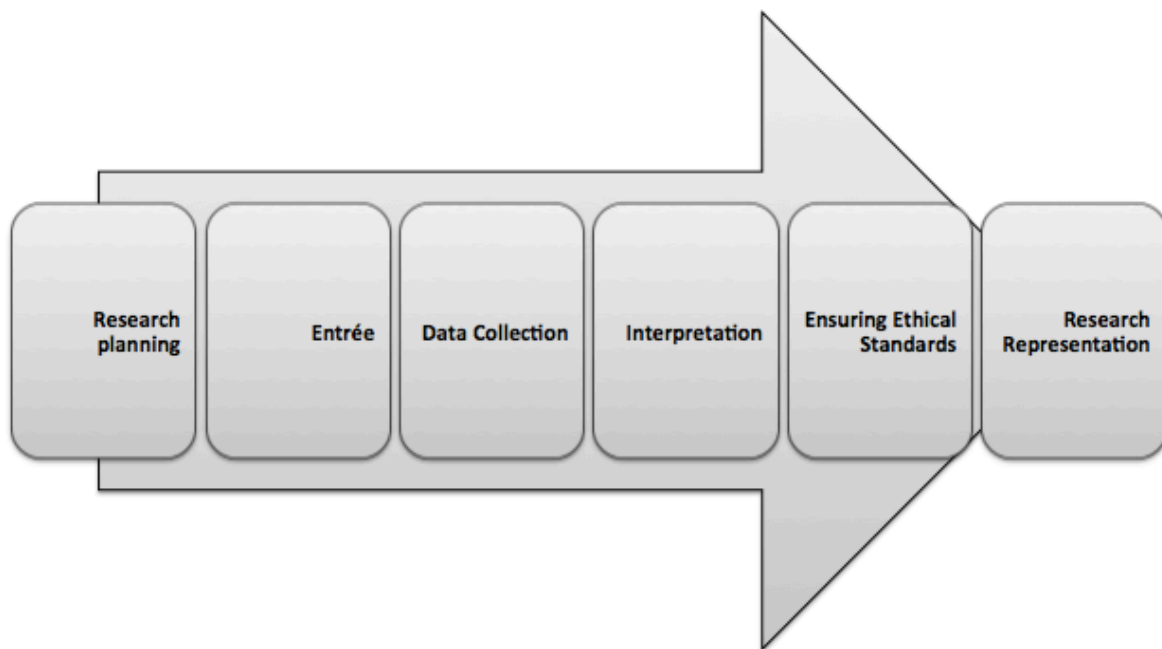


Figure 1 (Kozinets, 2002)

### 1. Research Planning

Kozinets (2010) encourages researchers to raise one or two main research questions accompanied by no more than seven related sub-questions, keeping the research focus on a single phenomenon or concept. He also suggests formulating the research questions with the words “what” or “how” to keep an open-ended and emergent research design (Bowler Jr, 2010). Taking these suggestions into account, this research aims to provide insight into the

area of consumers' interpretations of organic skincare by targeting the following research questions: How is organic skincare perceived in the market? What are the main interpretations of organic labels in skincare? How do online members understand and define the notion of 'organic' in skincare? And finally, how can skincare companies co-construct a mutual organic brand perception with customers?

## 2. Entrée

Having identified the main research questions, the next stage was to decide on particular online communities appropriate to the research questions and objectives of this research (Kozinets, 2002). At entrée stage it was important to get familiar with the potential communities (group membership, market-oriented behaviours, interests, and language) and their individual participants, before initiating contact and starting data collection. During that stage of the identification of relevant communities, online search engines proved to be invaluable (Kozinets, 2002). This research used Yandex.ru engine to roam around different discussion forums and groups. The starting search position was to search any form of social interaction among customers regarding their understanding, perception, knowledge and experience about organic cosmetics and organic skincare brands in general. It investigated a variety of social platforms: sites, forums, blogs and podcasts that had any relations to the field of research area - Organic skincare. The main criteria in search of suitable online communities were 1) a more focused and research question appropriate segment, topic or group (relevance) 2) higher "traffic" of postings (activity) to ensure that these messages have sufficient descriptive richness and are considerable analytic depth and insight 3) a more detailed or descriptively rich data provided by a sufficient amount of members (substantiality) and 4) active engagement of members of the type required by the research question (interactivity).

Having examined over 20 different types of organic cosmetics discussions on Russian social platforms (See Table 1), a number of online communities were excluded for three reasons: insufficient interaction between members; off-the topic discussions and finally, a very limited focus of discussions. For instance, Ecogolik based around eco-oriented lifestyle, does not bring sufficient interaction between customers. Organics skincare discussions take the form of ranking, and feedbacks for different organic brands by bloggers or other experts in that field without further development of that discussion with customers' engagement. As one of the main objectives of this research is to explore the way customers perceive organic skincare and co-construct its meaning through sharing their understanding, experience with others, social communication that lacked sufficient interaction between customer members was considered to be irrelevant for this research. Another limitation was that some discussions were based around only one particular organic skincare brand (Herbals.ru). The scope of such discussions was considered to be too narrow for the purpose of this research, which aims to explore customers' perception of organic skincare in general, rather than specifically analysing particular brands on the market. The last category that was found to be less relevant than others was about customers' exchange of recipes of natural skincare cosmetics prepared in home settings (Chistota-Vekov.ru., Krasotulya.ru.) This type of communities was not of particular interest to this research that aims to investigate customers' perception of organic skincare in the Russian market.

Online Communities	Relevance	Activity	Interactivity	Substantiality
Terra Aromatica	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vseocosmetike	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cosmo	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lady Mail	✓	✗	✓	✗
Cosmetsovet	✗	✗	✓	✗
Woman.Ru	✓	✓	✓	✓
Herbals.Ru	✗	✓	✗	✓
Ecogolic	✗	✓	✗	✗
Nardan	✗	✗	✓	✓
Milomarket	✗	✗	✓	✓
Maybe.Ru	✓	✗	✓	✗
Chistota-Vekov	✗	✗	✓	✓
Vladimirka.ru	✓	✓	✗	✓
Aromarti.ru	✗	✓	✓	✓
Krasotulya.ru	✗	✓	✗	✓
Yasdnepa.com	✗	✓	✗	✗
Cosmetics-nature.ru	✗	✓	✗	✗
Cosmeticf.ru	✗	✗	✓	✗
Zhenskoe-mnenie.ru	✗	✗	✓	✗
Aromarina.ru	✗	✓	✓	✓
Justlady.ru	✓	✗	✗	✓
Mycharm.ru	✓	✗	✗	✗
Sp-club03.ru	✓	✓	✓	✗
Calorizator.ru	✗	✗	✓	✓

Table 1

The Process of Forums Selection Only three forums: Terra Aromatica, Vseocosmetike and Cosmo complied with the set up criteria and thus were selected for this research. Threads from those forums were also extracted on the basis of the same criteria: relevance, activity, substantiality and interactivity of online communities. Table 2 represents the choice of forums and threads with regards to the thematic discussion, a number of posts, main participants and generators of discussions.

The Sample of the Forums/Threads

Forum/Thread/ Category/Sub- section/Topic	Relevance/ Thematic Discussion	Activity How many posts Nov. 2016-Jan. 2017	Interactivity Who participates in discussion	Substantiality Who generates discussion
<a href="#">Terra Aromatika</a> Natural Cosmetics/"Green Cosmetics"/Different Manufacturers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organic <i>manufacturers</i></li> <li>Regulations/Rules</li> <li><i>Policies</i> across different countries</li> </ul>	53,114	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newbies</li> <li>Active members</li> <li>Users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newbies</li> <li>Active Members</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Vseokosemetike</a> Cosmetics/Natural Organic Cosmetics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organic skincare personal <i>usage</i> reasons to try/ limitations</li> </ul>	6,164	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guests</li> <li>Newbies</li> <li>Users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newbies</li> <li>Guests</li> </ul>
<a href="#">CosmoForum</a> Perfumes/Makeup, Beauty/Natural Cosmetics/Organic Cosmetics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organic Skincare <i>Brands</i> on the Market critiques/ expectations/ comparison</li> </ul>	365,915	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Groups:</li> <li>Iron</li> <li>Bronze</li> <li>Silver</li> <li>Gold</li> <li>Platinum</li> <li>Diamond</li> <li>Star</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Platinum</li> <li>Diamond</li> <li>Star</li> </ul>

Table 2

CosmoForum encompasses the highest amount of posts- 365,915 messages devoted to the discussion of *organic skincare brands in the market*, expectations from those skincare brands and comparison of the most famous skincare companies and organic products. The forum has approximately 147, 267 users, where members are grouped in accordance with their activity level. Iron group needs to have at least 1,000 messages, while the Star group has to reach 15,000 messages. While different representatives of established groups participate in discussions, the richness of discussion is generated by the most enthusiastic, devoted and long-term users: Platinum, Diamond and Star users. Based on the discussion about the use of different organic brands, the forum has a high amount of long-term and experienced organic skincare users. It could be assumed that these groups represent insiders, who have strong ties to online activities and also the consumption experience of organic brands. Terra Aromatika represents the next highest amount of posts of 53,114 messages. It approximately has 6,486 forum users. The forum encompasses three main groups: newbies, active members and users. Newbies are new on the forum, active members are users who actively post but not registered and, finally, users are registered members with a different level of posting activities. Newbies and active members are the main groups that mainly generate interesting and in-depth comments. The discussion is mainly devoted to *organic policies and 'Green' cosmetics regulations and organic manufacturers*. The posts about specific organic skincare brands are less often than they are on CosmoForum. Newbies and active members actively share knowledge and factual data about the differences in organic labels, sometimes citing different sources of information. In terms of the content, this forum probably represents the most detailed and knowledgeable discussion organic regulations. The communities have social and informational goals and knowledge sharing.

Vseokosmetike has the lowest level of 6,164 messages in comparison to the previous two forums. There is no exact information on the total amount of users, but it approximately encompasses around 1,468 users online daily. The discussion on the forum is more general and does not have a specific focus in comparison to Terra Aromatika and CosmoForum. The posts cover a broader spectrum of topics as *personal experience with organic brands*, the difference between organic products and conventional products, the benefits and limitations of using organic skincare. The forum defines three main groups of its users: newbies, users and guests. Newbies are new to the forum, users are registered members and guests are unregistered members. Newbies and guests generate the most substantial discussion.

## 2.1 Forum choice entrée

Having identified the forums that fit within the four main criteria of online communities: relevance, activity, substantiality and interactivity; the research further considered the structure of those communities (how communities are organized); and compliance with being localized in Russia (defined by the flow of the traffic). These criteria are discussed in the sections below.

Rodríguez-López and Diz-Comesaña (2016) state that depending on ‘who organizes the community’ affects the rules of these communities, the discussion topics and the flow of communication. Communities that are run by a company usually have a hierarchical structure, with clearly defined rules and administrators who make decisions based on authority and in a centralized manner (Rodríguez-López and Diz-Comesaña, 2016). The flow of commercial and informational communication from the company’s side to customers is prevailing. The owner of the group initiates the choice of topical discussions and the members are limited to interacting with the proposed topics (Rodríguez-López and Diz-Comesaña, 2016).

Before initiating data collection, this research checked the discussed forum regulations to ensure that members of the selected communities are allowed to express their opinions flexibly without restrictions imposed by administrators. In the “information” section of the selected forums, there are references to the absence of authority, free access and participation and topic initiation as well as the absence of norms other than the basic norms of behaviour. Members of the group freely decide what issues to discuss and what to share.

The final criterion for the selected communities was compliance with being local Russian communities. Considering that this research analyses the perception of consumers of organic skincare in the Russian market, checking the location of online representatives was important. For that reason, the decision was made to find the origins of the traffic flow of each of the selected forum. Using [www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com), website traffic engine, it was estimated that all three selected forums had a relatively high level of traffic coming from Russia: Terra Aromatika (64%), Vseocosmetike (93%) and Cosmo (47%).

## 4. Ensuring Ethical Standards

To ensure that netnography is conducted ethically, this research will consider the following points. The confidentiality and anonymity of all informants were ensured. The researcher also had to contact and obtain the permission of members (informed consent) to use any specific



postings that are to be directly quoted in this research. In addition, the postings from the used forums are publicly available, reducing the private medium issues (Kozinets, 2002).

### **Data Collection**

Netnography uses the same conventional methods as ethnographic studies: participant observation and non-participant observation are the most common approaches. Kozinets (2002) suggests that netnography is “based primarily on the observation of textual discourse (cited in Xun and Reynolds, 2010, p.4), which does not necessarily require the active role of a researcher. That approach is also known as ‘lurking’ (Zhang and Hitchcock, 2017). Likewise, this research adopted a non-participant observation method. The main reason for employing such approach was to minimise the risk of interference on on-going discussions so as not to affect or ‘contaminate’ the data in any way (Zhang and Hitchcock, 2017).

Members’ discussion was analysed in accordance with inductive thematic coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes or patterns within data were indicated using an inductive or „bottom up“ way. This is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding categories, or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). An inductive or „bottom up“ way means that the indicated themes are strongly linked to the data (to some extent this form of thematic analysis has some similarity to grounded theory). The textual data from forums has been analysed manually along with the help of qualitative software Nvivo 11. The selected texts were first downloaded in a sequence based on time starting from November 2016, December 2016 and January 2017. Then the data was translated from Russian to English.

The coding procedure started with line-by-line coding, where the initial codes were indicated and then imported into Nvivo 11 to proceed with the focused coding. To stay close to the data, the coding with gerunds (instead of themes) was preferred for this research. Such way of coding helps to go deeper into the studied phenomenon and enables to explicate it (Charmaz, 2014).

At that stage of focused coding, the most ‘telling codes’ were selected, which overall comprised of 421 codes-gerunds altogether. Each of the codes represented the thoughts, ideas, feelings, experiences, and opinions that online members expressed with regards to organic skincare brands.

Those codes were not initially defined, but emerged as a result of examining the data. They were then labelled with both theoretical codes and Nvivo codes (Glaser, 2007) resulting in a ‘tree’ illustrating the relationships between coding categories. Fig. 2 shows an example of the coding procedure for one of the themes of organic perception in skincare by online members.

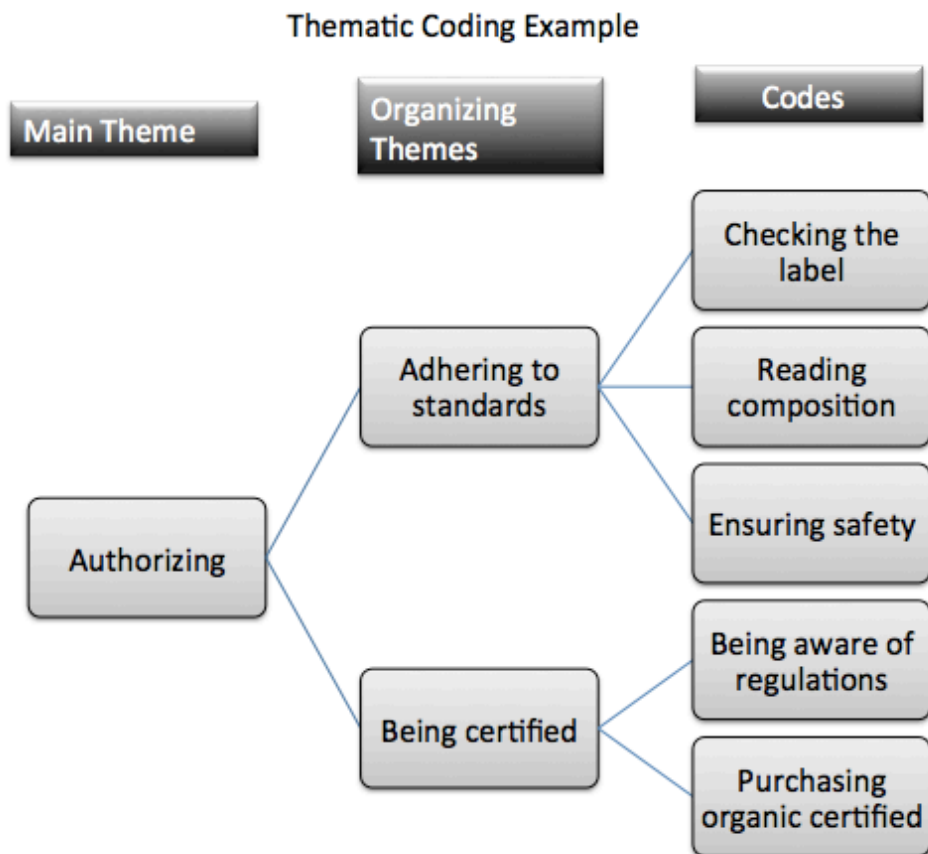


Figure 2

The codes-gerunds selected at the stage of focused coding were grouped into two main categories accounting for the meanings of the codes. The first category was named as ‘*adhering to organic standards*’. The category encompasses the codes of members’ activity in: checking the label, reading composition and ensuring safety. The second category was labelled as ‘*being certified*’. That category consists of the codes that emphasise the importance of consumers being aware of organic regulations and purchasing organic certified skincare.

Having identified the main categories, the final stage in coding involved organizing those two categories into the main themes. Both categories (being certified and adhering to standards) highlight that organic label in skincare has to be regulated by law. However, consumers play a key role in checking the label, reading composition and ensuring whether organic skincare adheres to standards and certified. Thus, these are consumers themselves who make *an act of authorising* organic labels, skincare brands and products.

### **Research Representation and Interpretation**

The research has classified online members’ perceptions and interpretations of organic label in skincare into four main themes of meaning creation: *an act of authorizing, constructing, analogizing and abandoning* (See Table 3). Each of these themes represents a high analytic importance considering a considerable amount of codes grouped in those themes. For example, out of 421 codes that emerged at the stage of focused coding, 136 codes were allocated in *constructing* category, which forms the biggest theme; 85 codes were placed in

*authorizing* group; 69 codes were grouped in *analogizing* theme and finally 57 were located in abandoning category. Table 3 represents a typology of organic skincare perceptions on the market. There are two main processes in the perception of the meaning of organic in skincare-acceptance and rejection.

A Typology of Organic Skincare Perceptions in the Market

<p><b>Abandoning</b></p> <p><b>Organic concept is rejected by being considered vague and broadly-defined. It has expanded to the limits, where it lost its original meaning and value</b></p>	<p><b>Analogizing</b></p> <p><b>Organic concept is rejected, because it has no particular meaning in skincare. It is narrowed down to being an analogy for food products</b></p>
<p>Constructing</p> <p>Organic concept is accepted by being expanded to the level of organic skincare practices</p>	<p>Authorizing</p> <p>Organic concept is accepted by being specified to the level of certification, regulations and law</p>

Table 3

Accepting the notion of organic means that members recognise and approve organic label in skincare. Rejecting, on the opposite, means the denial and/or disapproval of any value of organic term in skincare. Table 3 shows that members either accept or reject the notion of organic by either specifying the meaning of the term or expanding it.

*Specifying* means that members take a very narrow perspective on the term organic strictly defining what organic should represent. For example, some members state that organic means being certified and regulated by legislation. However, it is equally consumers' responsibility to be able to read the label and composition of a product. It is consumers themselves who *authorise* skincare brands and products by checking the compliance of labels and products with policies. Consumers should be aware of chemicals and harsh ingredients that organic skincare brands should avoid according to regulations to be called organic. Thus,

members of this category take *an act authorizing* organic label. According to this group, organic is what the label says:

*COSMOS ORGANIC has at least 95% of organic ingredients...But COSMOS NATURAL can have only 20% of its organic composition....For some types of products it is allowed a 10% content organic ingredients. Always check the label when you buy a face cream...Standards vary.*

According to this group, the label should include the percentage of organic ingredients and the overall composition of the product. Online members in this group evaluate organic as being free from substances such as paraffins, the SLS, parabens, silicone, preservatives and other petrochemicals any aggressive compounds and mineral oil. Organic from their perspective means compliance with the requirements and regulations. The discussion in that group is mainly devoted to the comparison of different certificates (Cosmos Organic, Cosmos Natural, EcoCert) and the percentage of organic compounds that these certificates are required have. In discussion, some members shared detailed information of what different organic certificates stand for and which ones are the most trustworthy ones:

*According to Global Cosmetic Industry (2009) “Soil Association (UK), BDiH (Germany), Ecocert (France), CosméBio (France), ICEA (Italy) and Ecogarantie (Belgium) are the leaders in the European cosmetics market.*

Other members *specify* the meaning of organic by *making an analogy* with food products for the natural ingredients and with detergents for the avoidance of toxic substances. They do not differentiate organic term in skincare from organic label for food products and describe it as being without pesticides, organically grown, being home-made.

*“Green cosmetics are manufactured without chemicals in the same way as food without phosphates”.*

In their view, green products are not tested on animals, and of course they are free of any type of animal extracts, as it has to be for organic food products. Members consider green cosmetics as having fewer chemicals and more natural products such as plant extracts and essential oils. However, apart from that, they do not assign any additional meaning for organic in skincare.

As a result, this group of members *reject* organic term in skincare itself, considering that all ingredients can be purchased by a consumer himself in any grocery shop and prepared at home for any skin purpose.

*At least 99% of the main ingredients can easily be purchased in a grocery shop: olive oils, clay powder or plant extracts. Mix them as the recipe says and the mask is ready to use...*

*Expanding*, in contrast, to specifying means that members of this category tend to define organic by emphasising its beneficial properties (anti-aging, curing, purifying, uplifting) and incorporating organic skincare products into skin care routine. Organic becomes *an act of* taking care of oneself, a process of developing and maintaining a beauty regime. Members in this group share their experience how they use organic skincare products, they describe a sequence of steps they take daily, and experimentation with mixing different organic brands. Organic in this group acquires an act of indulgence, relaxation, pampering or a simple hygienic routine. Members in this group *construct* different practices of how they use organic skincare for different purposes.

*I love creating my own organic skincare....I add a few drops of argan oil to my mosituriser before going to bed.*

*I burned my skin a month ago and purchased a cream with plant extracts... I added a few drops of calendula oil in it...My skin healed after a few days.*

Members in this category do not try to limit or set up the boundaries what organic should mean, but instead they expand the term by embracing different organic skincare practices.

However, while some members accept the term by expanding its meaning, other members reject it considering that it has expanded to the limits, where it has lost any meaning and has become general, vague and loosely-defined. For that reason, the category of those members do not recognise any substantiality of organic label or some of them even refuse to admit its existence in skincare. In discussion, they diminish the importance of organic label by arguing that organic has no particular meaning or value, as companies are manipulating the term for marketing purposes:

*Organic is being too much raved...Does it make any difference apart from price whether it has 20% or 25% of organic in it?*

From the perspective of this group, organic has been invented purely for marketing purposes to promote a product or sell it at a higher price. The most frequent words that have been mentioned in the discussion of that group are: being overhyped, fabricated and fake. Considering that this group of members state that organic does neither represent anything nor it differentiate a product or a brand in anyway, members of this group take *an act of abandoning the concept* and evoke other users to do the same:

*Nowadays every single skincare brand calls itself organic... Seems to be all fake...Do not be fooled by the logo!*

More coding examples are summarised in Appendix Table.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed four main perceptions of ‘organic’ label among different online members. These findings show that the ‘organic’ label term is complex and subject to interpretations. It raises the importance for companies to decide how exactly they want to communicate organic labels to customers and whether they necessarily benefit from it, considering the possibility of abandoning the concept. As it has been highlighted, online members either try to specify or expand the meaning of the term, accepting or rejecting the notion of organic skincare. Some members specify the term by discussing organic concept in the light of regulations, certificates and legislation. They, thus, authorize and accept the label by checking, ensuring and reading the label. Other members specify the term by making an analogy of organic skincare with the concept of organic for food products. They describe organic as being organically grown and free from pesticides. These members reject that organic term has a different and unique meaning in skincare. Another group of members expand organic term by constructing different practices with organic skincare products. In that sense, organic becomes as practice of taking care or yourself, curing, pampering and treating yourself. This group accepts that organic has a special place in skincare. However, likewise in previous cases, expanding the meaning of organic also gets a negative dimension.

Some members consider that organic has lost its meaning by becoming a general and a vague terms. These members abandon the concept.

A company, thus, needs to decide how exactly they want to represent and communicate the notion of organic to customers as well as being able to develop marketing strategies according to organic users' perceptions in the market.

This paper has discussed organic skincare perceptions of online members and demonstrated different organic interpretations and as a result, the emergence of various organic meanings on the market. First, this paper challenges the overestimating idea of Marketing Communications to control brand perceptions in the market. Second, the findings show that online communities represent a useful source of information that reveals different perceptions of organic in the Russian market.

## Appendix

The Typology of Meanings	Coding Examples
Authorizing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I believe the only way to check whether skincare is organic or not is to read the label. Organic is proved by the label. Go and read about <i>Ecocert</i>, and <i>Cosmos Organic</i>....</li> <li>2. ... Yes, to be organic ...Skincare has to have at least 20% of components....For other certificates the proportion of organic components is much higher</li> <li>3. You should only use skincare free from any nasty chemicals and with a good amount of organic ingredients to stay safe.</li> </ol>
Constructing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I love creating my own organic skincare....I add a few drops of argan oil to my moisturiser before going to bed.</li> <li>2. I get exotic essential oils... mix them with any base and do a facial and a body massage... Enjoy relaxing like that...And it is cheaper than a Spa or aromatherapy</li> <li>3. I burned my skin a month ago and purchased a cream with plant extracts... I added a few drops of calendula oil in it...My skin healed after a few days.</li> </ol>
Abandoning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Organic is being too much raved...Does it make any difference apart from price whether it has 20% or 25% of organic in it?</li> <li>2. You can buy conventional products that stand for quality and are reasonably priced. No all chemicals are harmful likewise not everything that is organic is safe</li> <li>3. Nowadays every single skincare brand calls itself organic... Seems to be all fake</li> </ol>
Analogizing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If you want organic skincare then go to the supermarket and buy what you need... You can make any mask or a moisturiser you want. No need for fancy skincare brands</li> <li>2. Home-made skincare products are the most organic and definitely have no additives...</li> <li>3. I take skincare receipes from the internet, make a list of ingredients I need and purchase the while also doing grocery shopping.</li> </ol>

## References

- Alexa (2017) Find Website Traffic, Statistics, and Analytics. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.alexa.com>. [Accessed 3 November 2016].
- Bowler Jr, G. M. (2010). Netnography: A method specifically designed to study cultures and communities online. *The Qualitative Report*, vol.15,no.5, pp.1270.
- Bauer, H. H., Heinrich, D. & Schäfer, D. B. (2013). The effects of organic labels on global, local, and private brands: More hype than substance? *Journal of Business Research*, vol.66,no.8, pp.1035-1043.
- Berthon, P., Pitt, L. F. & Campbell, C. (2009). Does brand meaning exist in similarity or singularity? *Journal of Business Research*, vol.62,no.3, pp.356-361.
- Burmam, C. & Zeplin, S. (2005). Building brand commitment: A behavioural approach to internal brand management. *Journal of brand management*, vol.12,no.4, pp.279-300.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, vol.3,no.2, pp.77-101.
- Catterall, M. & Clarke, W. (2001). Why we need to reassess focus group research. *AP-Asia Pacific Advances in Consumer Research Volume 4*.
- Cova, B. (1999). From marketing to societing: When the link is more important than the thing. *Rethinking marketing: Towards critical marketing accountings*, pp.64-83.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*, Sage.
- De Vaus, D. A. & De Vaus, D. (2001). *Research design in social research*, Sage.
- Dinhopl, A., Gretzel, U. & Whelan, A. (2015). Labeling as a social practice in online consumption communities. *Psychology & Marketing*, vol.32,no.3, pp.240-249.
- Felix, R., Rauschnabel, P. A. & Hinsch, C. (2017). Elements of strategic social media marketing: A holistic framework. *Journal of Business Research*, vol.70, pp.118-126.
- Hackley, C. & Kitchen, P. (1998). Imc: A consumer psychological perspective. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, vol.16,no.3, pp.229-235.
- Ho, J. (1997). Evaluating the world wide web: A global study of commercial sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol.3,no.1, pp.0-0.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined*, SAGE Publications.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of marketing Research*, vol.39,no.1, pp.61-72.
- Larceneux, F., Benoît-Moreau, F. & Renaudin, V. (2012). Why organic labels do not always promote sustainable consumption? Marginal labelling and brand equity effects.

- Lockstone, M. R., Olga Junek, Leonie, Hudson, S. & Hudson, R. (2013). Engaging with consumers using social media: A case study of music festivals. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, vol.4,no.3, pp.206-223.
- Maclaran, P. & Catterall, M. (2002). Researching the social web: Marketing information from virtual communities. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, vol.20,no.6, pp.319-326.
- Malthouse, E. C. (2003). Scoring models. *Kellogg on integrated marketing*, pp.227-249.
- Mehta, R. & Sivadas, E. (1995). Direct marketing on the internet: An empirical assessment of consumer attitudes. *Journal of Direct Marketing*, vol.9,no.3, pp.21-32.
- Mühlbacher, H. & Hemetsberger, A. (Year) Published. What the heck is a brand? An attempt of integration and its consequences for research and management. *Proceedings of the 7th International Congress of Marketing Trends, Venice, 2008*.
- Rodríguez-López, N. & Diz-Comesaña, M. E. (2016). Toward a taxonomy of virtual communities from a value cocreation perspective. *Psychology & Marketing*, vol.33,no.12, pp.1166-1173.
- Rodríguez-López, N. & Diz-Comesaña, M. E. (2016). Toward a taxonomy of virtual communities from a value cocreation perspective. *Psychology & Marketing*, vol.33,no.12, pp.1166-1173.
- Rodríguez-López, N. & Diz-Comesaña, M. E. (2016). Toward a taxonomy of virtual communities from a value cocreation perspective. *Psychology & Marketing*, vol.33,no.12, pp.1166-1173.
- Schultz, D., Malthouse, E. C. & Pick, D. (2017). Understanding the new, negotiated phase of relationship marketing: A proposed research agenda. The customer is not always right? Marketing orientations in a dynamic business world. Springer.
- Sinkovics, R. R., Penz, E. & Molina-Castillo, F. J. (2014). Qualitative analysis of online communities to support international business decisions. *Handbook of strategic e-business management*. Springer.
- Xun, J. & Reynolds, J. (2010). Applying netnography to market research: The case of the online forum. *Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing*, vol.18,no.1, pp.17-31.
- Zhang, Y. & Hitchcock, M. J. (2017). The chinese female tourist gaze: A netnography of young women's blogs on macao. *Current Issues in Tourism*, vol.20,no.3, pp.315-330.
- Zhuplev, A. (2016). *Doing business in russia, volume ii: A concise guide*, Business Expert Press.



