

# EMBRACING DIVERSITY: DESIGNING AN ONLINE COMMUNITY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH NATURALLY CURLY HAIR IN CHINA

## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the design of an online community to address challenges faced by individuals with naturally curly hair in China.

A mixed methods approach including a 150+ person survey and in-depth interviews explores this group's unique needs. Findings reveal multifaceted struggles stemming from societal biases, lack of representation, inadequate expertise, and limited products. An online platform is proposed to provide tailored education, support, and resources.

User testing and refinement inform the design of specific features including hair type test, discussion forum, salon finder, and an online shop based on user insights. Original interface designs contribute actionable insights to academia and industry.

Ultimately, this thesis exemplifies the potential of user-centred design and technology in driving social change by giving voice to marginalized perspectives through empathy and understanding.

### Central Research Question:

How can an online community be effectively designed to support individuals with naturally curly hair in China, addressing their unique challenges and needs?

### Sub-questions:

1. What are the unique **challenges** and unmet **needs** experienced by Chinese with naturally curly hair, and how do **underlying factors** and societal conditions contribute to these obstacles?
2. How could an online community function as a **viable solution** to address the specialized challenges faced by Chinese with naturally curly hair?
3. What particular **features, content**, and interactive elements would best fulfil these needs, while fostering a cohesive and engaging community environment?
4. How can the online community's interface **design be evaluated** and refined to ensure it effectively meets the target users' needs and expectations?

## INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE RESEARCH

### 1. Hair Diversity Beyond Ethnic Categories:

- Ethnic-based hair categorization perpetuates stereotypes, hindering accurate hair diversity understanding
- Colonial Era: "Good" vs. "Bad" Hair Distinctions
- Nuanced classifications like the Four-type Hair System challenge ethnic oversimplification
- Asian participants break the notion of universal straight hair, highlighting varied hair types

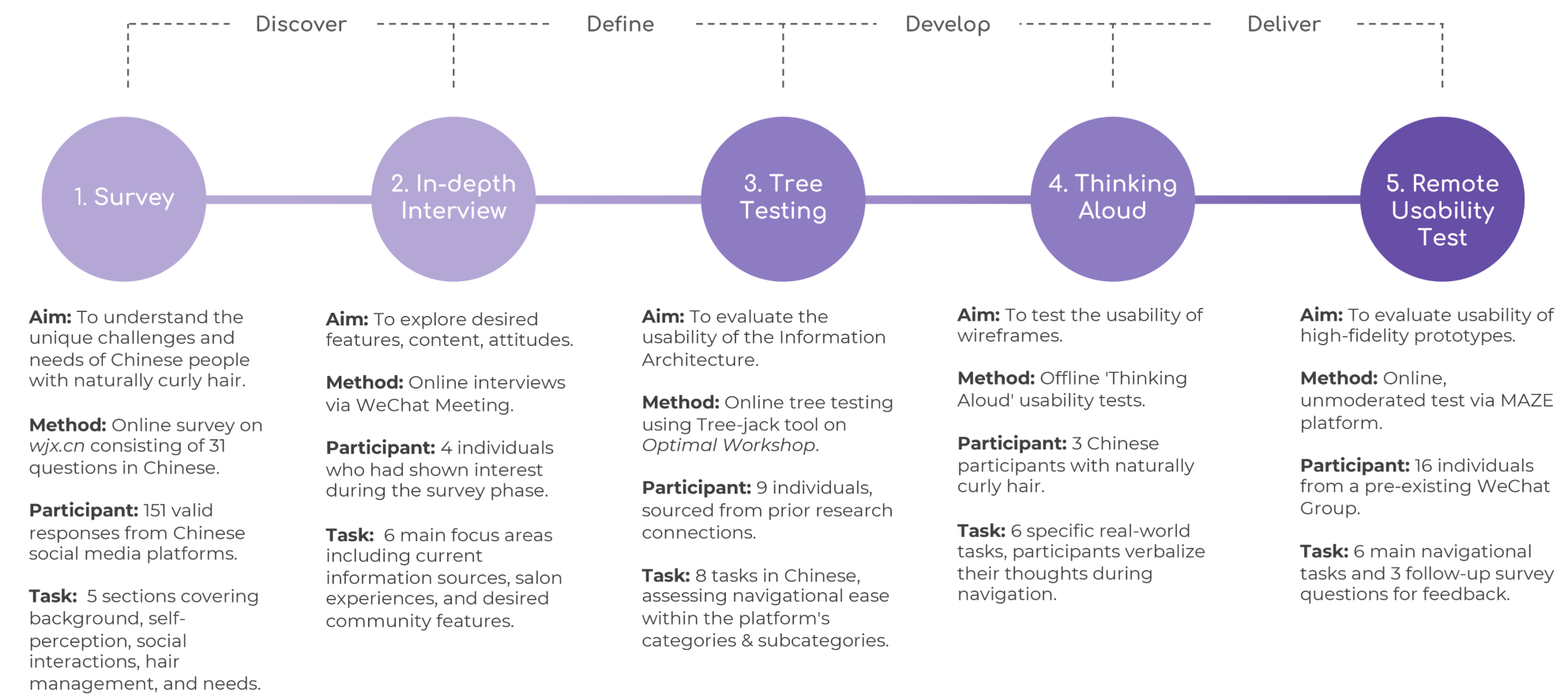
### 2. Curly Hair & Beauty Standards in East Asia:

- East Asian hair standards, rooted in tradition and global influence, marginalize curly hair
- Literary traditions in East Asia have perpetuated the idealization of straight hair, which persists today.
- The rigid beauty norms have psychological impacts, such as low self-esteem, exacerbated by the lack of representation and familial pressures, underscoring the need for inclusive beauty approaches

### 3. State of the Art:

- Online Communities are vital for transitioning to natural hair care, fostering trust. Studies showcase **successful international platforms**.
- China Lacks specific curly hair resources despite a robust global landscape. Existing local platforms are **fragmented and inadequate**.
- Chinese platforms focus on sharing experiences, **lacking practical solutions**. This hinders reliable curly hair care resources.
- A tailored online community platform addressing China's unique needs is **essential**.
- Learning from international platforms (e.g., *NaturallyCurly*) offer **insights for design**, emphasizing community building, comprehensive content, and cultural inclusivity.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



## RESULTS: SURVEY & INTERVIEW

### Root Causes:

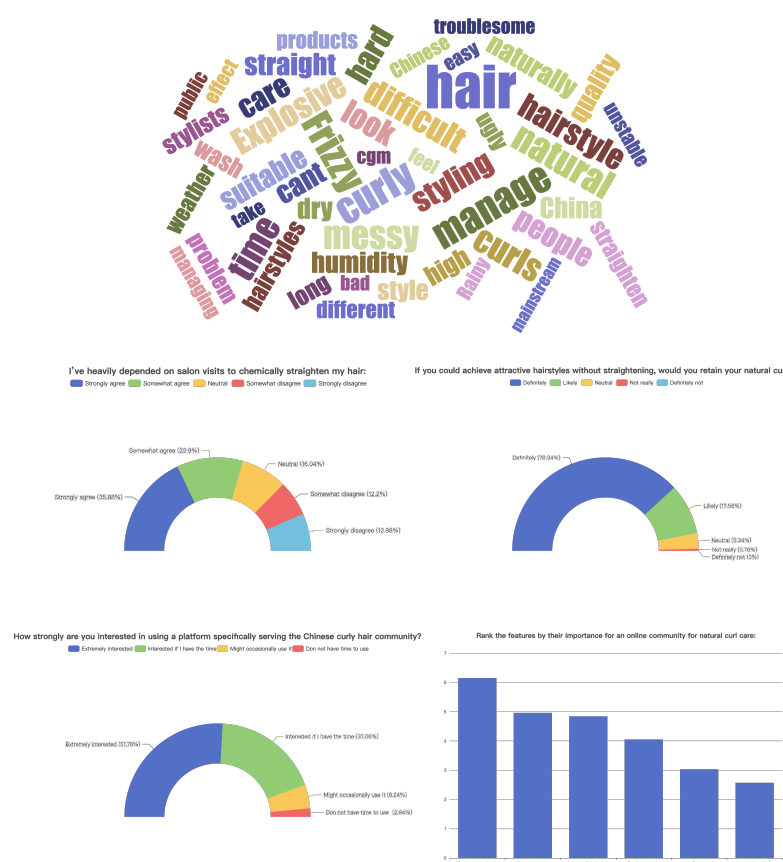
- **Cultural norms:** prioritize straight hair, while resources for curly hair education are lacking.
- **Familial pressures:** emphasize straight hair, and parental advice shapes self-perception.
- **Salons:** lack curly hair services and stylists' knowledge is limited.
- **Internet regulations:** hinder global information access, relying on domestic platforms.
- **Market limitations:** scarce specialized products & insufficient styling guidance.

### Defining Challenges:

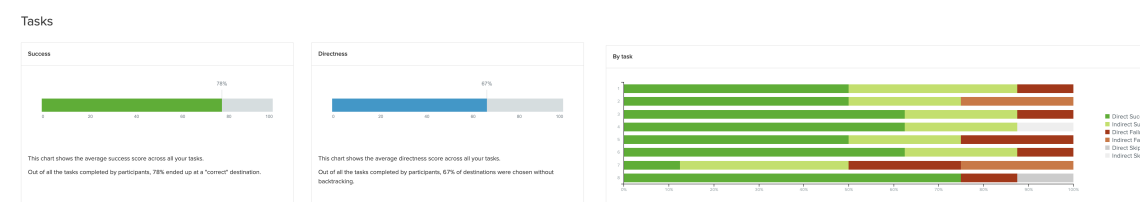
1. Lack of comprehensive hair education
2. Inadequate personalization in hair care advice
3. Challenges in professional hair management
4. Isolation and limited community engagement
5. Limited availability of suitable products
6. Limited inclusivity and accessibility
7. Fragmented and inefficient information retrieval

### Solutions (Key Feature):

1. **Content:** offer inclusive, science-based educational content for curl care
2. **Hair type Test:** personalized product and style recommendations.
3. **Salon Finder:** a user-driven salon directory to guide individuals to experts in curl care.
4. **Forum:** shared experiences and support.
5. **Shop:** offer curly hair products online.
6. Collaborate with local & international resources.
7. Integrate diverse content with advanced search and categorization features.



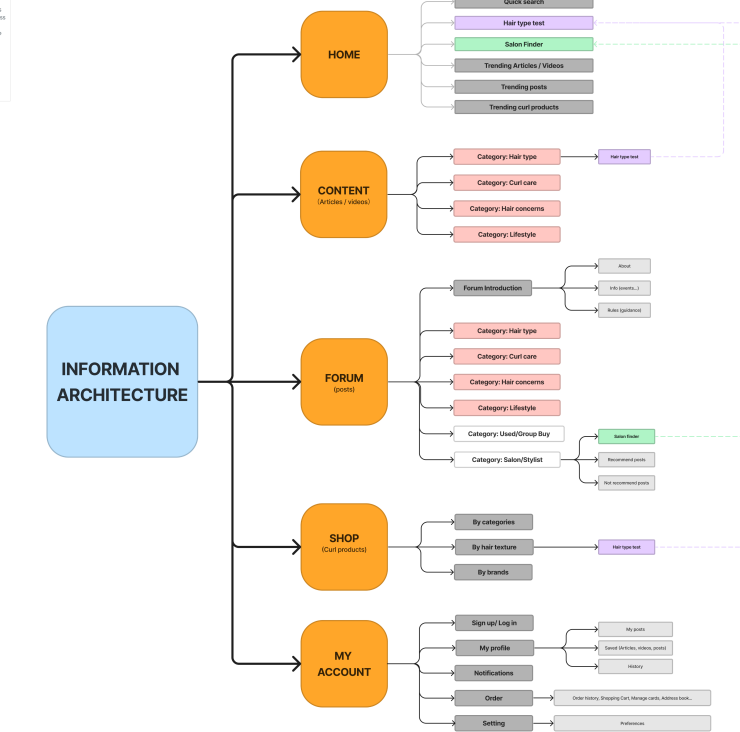
## RESULTS: TREE TESTING



**High Performance:** in Tasks 1, 3, 5, 6, and 8 indicates a generally robust and intuitive information architecture. (Areas: hair type determination, curly hair methods, salon experiences sharing, product finding, forum participation)

### Areas for Refinement:

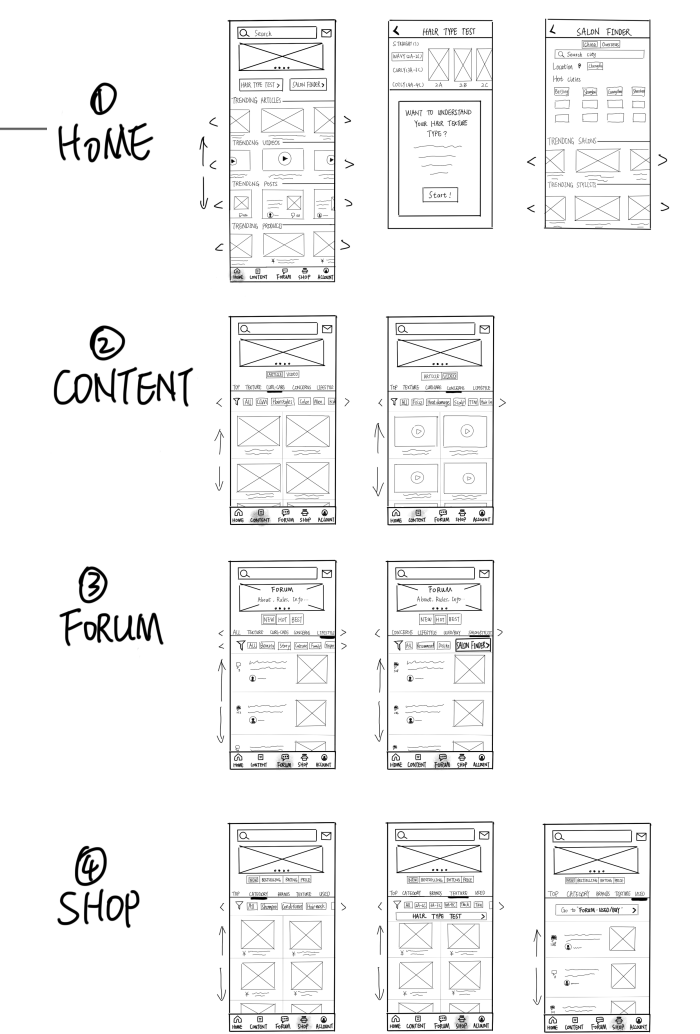
- Task 2: Salon Finder in A Specific City** (Difficulty in locating the "salon finder")  
Insight: Enhance the prominence of this feature on the homepage through colour and size adjustments to improve navigation.
- Task 4: Second-hand Selling** (Ambiguity between the "forum" & "shop" for transactions)  
Insight: Introduce direct links between these two features to clarify and streamline pathways for second-hand transactions.
- Task 7: Emotional Support Content** (struggle to find specific content by label)  
Insight: Refine classification & labelling system from international professional curl care websites.



## RESULTS: THINK ALOUD

### Areas for Refinement:

1. **Homepage:** Remove top banner for enhanced user accessibility. Prioritize "Hair type test" and "Salon finder" in top space. Streamline "Hair type test" page. Implement meticulous language translation for technical terms.
2. **Content:** Relocate and redesign content filter for better usability. Introduce layout selection icons for personalized viewing.
3. **Forum:** Position post filter for optimized usability. Introduce a clear "New Post" button. Integrate comprehensive salon/stylist directory to "Salon finder" feature.
4. **Shop:** Move product filter for efficient browsing. Resize "Hair type test" reminder for visual consistency. Add jump icon linking to second-hand transactions in the forum.



## RESULTS: REMOTE USABILITY TEST

### Areas of Excellence:

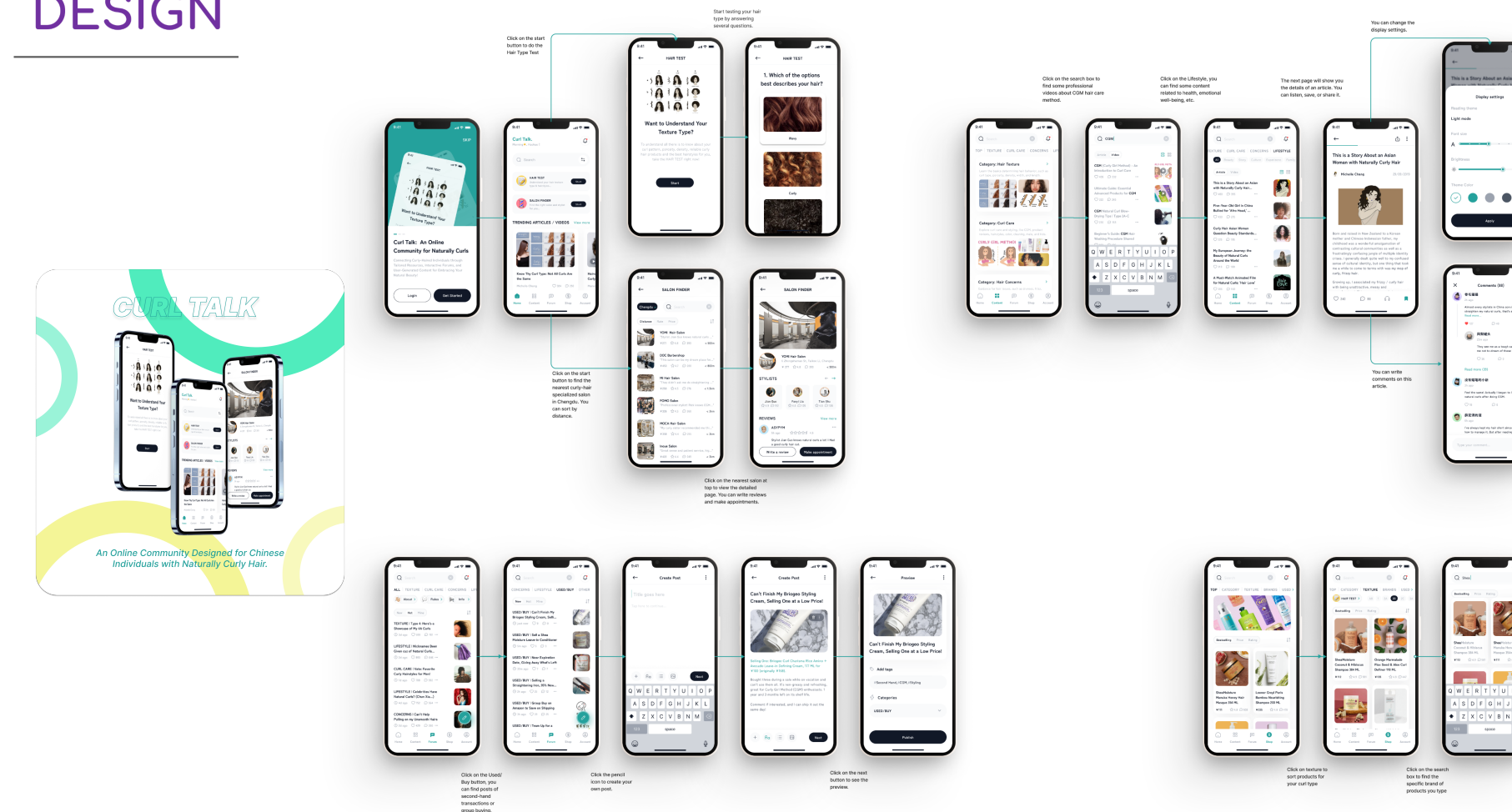
1. **High User Engagement:** Tasks related to "hair type test," "salon finder," and identifying hair product categories received high success rates (above 87%).
2. **Quick Interactions:** Average interaction times for these successful tasks were notably short (5.5s-10s).
3. **User Satisfaction:** Participants expressed unanimous eagerness to use the fully developed application, highlighting the "hair type test," "content," and "shop" as most beneficial features.



### Actionable Insights:

1. **Content Categorization (Task 3)**  
Challenge: confused by the current categorization, affecting their ability to navigate content section efficiently.  
Insight: Add a landing page with visual cues and brief descriptions to simplify navigation and reduce confusion.
2. **Forum Navigation (Task 4)**  
Challenge: Compact categorization bar led to user confusion.  
Insight: Increase spacing between category selections and remove redundant tags to declutter.
3. **Post Creating (Task 5):**  
Challenge: Users overlooked the category selection step, indicated by a high mis-click rate.  
Insight: Enhance visual cues for it in size or colour.
4. **Application-wide Navigation:**  
Challenge: Feedback showed the bottom bar lacks prominence and clarity.  
Insight: Adjust colour and iconography for better visibility.

## DESIGN



## CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the creation of an online community to address the challenges faced by Chinese with naturally curly hair. Through a mixed methods approach, the research investigated the unique needs of this demographic and proposed tailored solutions to foster inclusion and self-acceptance.

### Key Findings:

1. Chinese with naturally curly hair experience multifaceted struggles stemming from societal biases, lack of representation, inadequate professional expertise, and limited product availability.
2. An online community platform presents a viable solution to provide tailored education, support, and resources.
3. Specific features like hair type test, forums, salon finder, and an online shop address users' needs. Iterative user testing and refinement are critical to optimize usability and align with user expectations.

### Limitations & Future Research:

1. The predominantly female sample overlooked potential male perspectives. Future studies could pursue more gender-balanced data.
2. Prototype size restrictions during remote testing may have impacted user experience. Alternative higher-fidelity testing platforms could be explored.