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MORE THAN JUST MAKEUP? UNVEILING WHAT REALLY DRIVES BRANDED COSMETICS PURCHASES IN THAILAND

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Abstract

Thailand's branded cosmetics market is increasingly shaped by digital strategies and consumer preferences. This study examines how digital marketing, online influencers, purchase motivation, and customer satisfaction influence consumer decisions to purchase branded cosmetics in Thailand, building a decision-making model tailored to this context. Employing a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data from 400 consumers was integrated with qualitative insights from 14 key informants. Findings revealed that digital marketing, online influencers, purchase motivation, and customer satisfaction each exert significant direct influence on consumers' purchase decisions, collectively. Notably, purchase motivation emerged as a pivotal, independent driver. The developed causal model underscores that purchase motivation holds the strongest influence, followed by digital marketing and online influencers, while customer satisfaction partially mediates these relationships. This model offers valuable insights to better target marketing strategies and to design emotionally resonant customer experiences.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Online Influencers, Purchase Motivation, Customer Satisfaction, Branded Cosmetics

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Background and Significance of Problem

The cosmetics market in Thailand has been continuously growing in response to consumer values that prioritize enhancing one's appearance as a key element in building personality and self-confidence. The use of cosmetics facilitates economic activity quickly and effectively. The cosmetics industry offers a wide variety of products in terms of types, properties, quality, and price, which can effectively meet consumer needs (Thansettakij, 2023).

The cosmetics market is rapidly recovering, with global market value projected to reach 12.38 trillion baht by 2030, reflecting an average annual growth rate of 4.2%. In Thailand, the domestic cosmetics market is expected to reach 323 billion baht by 2030, which is 1.5 times higher than in 2022 (Thansettakij, 2023). One of the key factors supporting this growth is the return to normal life among the public and the recovery of the tourism sector, which has significantly increased the demand for cosmetics. Moreover, Thailand's cosmetics export market still holds great potential for further growth. According to a survey on Thai consumer spending behavior, 41% of consumers plan to spend more on skincare and cosmetic products (The Thai Cosmetic Manufacturers Association, 2022). However, Thailand currently holds only 1.5% of the global cosmetics export market value, which remains quite low considering the country's potential. Producers must therefore develop innovations in beauty and enhance their quality standards to remain competitive, increase purchase decisions among existing customers, and expand the customer base (Thansettakij, 2023).

Branded cosmetic products are typically priced higher than regular cosmetics due to investment in research and development, marketing, and brand image building. These products often feature distinctive qualities such as high-quality ingredients and rigorous testing. Characteristics of branded cosmetics include high quality, rigorously tested ingredients, attractive packaging, a trustworthy brand image, and substantial investment in marketing and advertising (The Thai Cosmetic Manufacturers Association, 2022). The branded cosmetics industry in Thailand plays a significant role in driving the country's strategic development towards becoming a regional hub for health and beauty. This is because such products are considered high-value health items with continuous growth potential. The development of the cosmetics industry relies heavily on in-depth data about consumer behavior (Nguyen et al., 2024), factors influencing purchasing decisions, and market demand trends (Yi et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the researcher found that existing studies lack a specific focus on branded cosmetics and that the application of Mixed Method Research to deeply investigate causal relationship models remains limited.

Therefore, this study aims to develop a causal relationship model of the factors influencing the purchase decisions of branded cosmetics, focusing on four key factors; (1) Digital Marketing which enhances accessibility to product information and reviews efficiently, (2) Online Influencers who play a role in building trust and influencing consumers, (3) Purchase Motivation driven by the desire to boost self-confidence and socialize, and (4) Customer Satisfaction which affects repeat purchases and brand loyalty. The findings of this research are significant for entrepreneurs and marketers in the branded cosmetics industry, as they can be applied to develop marketing strategies and improve products to better meet consumer needs. This will help foster the long-term growth of the industry and support the strategic development of Thailand's cosmetics industry to be sustainable competitive on a global scale.

Literature Review

Purchase Decision-Making

Purchase decision-making is a process used by consumers to select goods and services in order to satisfy their own needs. The decision-making process consists of five main stages; problem or need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-

purchase behavior. These processes help consumers make decisions in a rational and systematic way (Ramnin et al., 2022).

According to Kotler & Armstrong (2021), the consumer's purchase decision-making process consists of five key stages. Although consumers may differ in many aspects, their decision-making processes still follow a similar pattern as follows:

The first stage is problem or need recognition, where individuals begin to realize a new problem or need. This can arise from outdated products, problems caused by previous products, physical or mental changes, changes in family or financial situations, changes in reference groups, or increased effectiveness in marketing promotions.

The second stage occurs after an individual recognizes a problem or need. The next step is to seek information to find possible solutions. This information can be obtained from personal sources such as family and friends, commercial sources like points of purchase, public sources like the internet, television, and radio, and from the consumer's past experiences.

The third stage is the evaluation of alternatives, where consumers analyze and compare the information they have gathered to choose the best option for themselves. This involves considering the product's features and benefits, the importance of different attributes, brand and product credibility, and personal satisfaction.

The fourth stage is the purchase decision. Consumers use the information and previous experiences to make a purchase decision. However, this decision may be influenced by the opinions of others and unexpected circumstances.

The final stage is post-purchase behavior, where consumers evaluate their satisfaction after using the product. If the product meets their expectations, it may lead to repeat purchases or recommendations to others. On the other hand, if the product fails to meet expectations, it can result in dissatisfaction and a decision not to repurchase.

In summary, the consumer purchase decision-making process is complex and influenced by various factors. For this study, the purchase decision of branded cosmetic products by customers refers to the process preceding the purchase of goods or services. This process includes the recognition of the need for branded cosmetics, information search from various sources, evaluation of alternatives where individuals assess which brand offers the most suitable cosmetics for their facial features followed by the actual purchase decision and post-purchase behavior. The overall process consists of five stages including problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior.

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing refers to the use of the internet, other digital media, and technologies to support modern marketing practices. It involves marketing through digital channels to communicate with consumers by applying traditional marketing concepts in new ways (Yi et al., 2024). It consists of three key components; Content marketing which focuses on creating and delivering quality content to attract customer attention, Website marketing which utilizes websites to promote products and build brand image through information, reviews, and promotions, Social media marketing which leverages platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to raise brand awareness and engage with consumers through campaigns or specific hashtags (Poswal & Tanwar, 2024; Yi et al., 2024). Digital marketing has become an essential tool for increasing customer reach and continuously enhancing customer satisfaction in the branded cosmetics business. It significantly influences customers' purchasing decisions for branded cosmetics in Thailand by boosting brand awareness and building trust through content, reviews, and engagement on online platforms. These digital tools help create customer satisfaction and brand connection, leading to a higher purchase intention.

Online Influencers

Online influencers are individuals or groups who play a significant role in communicating information about products and services to a wide audience. These influencers often act as

thought leaders and serve as marketing tools that help raise awareness and increase consumer interest in products and services (Hoffman & Jariangprasert, 2021). Influencers can be categorized into several types such as celebrities, professionals or experts in various fields, and ordinary individuals. They influence consumer trust and purchasing decisions through three key elements including credibility, expertise, and popularity (Janssen et al., 2021). Credibility stems from providing transparent and verifiable information. Expertise refers to having knowledge and skills to present products that genuinely meet consumers' needs. Popularity enhances the influencer's reach to target audiences and helps build connections with followers through interaction and the presentation of high-quality content (Innoi & Praesri, 2021). As a result, consumers tend to develop trust and are more likely to make purchasing decisions based on influencers' recommendations.

Buying Motivation

Buying Motivation refers to the internal or external driving forces that influence a consumer's decision-making process. Motivation stimulates consumers to begin searching for products, consider various options, and ultimately make a purchase in order to fulfill certain needs. Motivation plays both rational roles such as the desire to use products for functional purposes and emotional roles such as feelings of satisfaction or social expectations (Kotler & Keller, 2021).

In the context of purchasing branded cosmetics, motivation does not often stem only from basic necessities but also from psychological factors such as the desire to enhance one's external image, boost self-confidence, gain social acceptance, and connect with a brand symbolically. According to research by Shmailan & Alfalih (2024), consumer purchasing decisions are also influenced by various psychological variables, especially attitude, which refers to the knowledge, thoughts, and experiences a consumer has towards a product. Positive attitudes developed through information or recommendations from others can significantly stimulate buying motivation (Long, 2024).

Next is emotion, which reflects the internal feelings a consumer has towards a product whether it is a sense of satisfaction, feeling accepted, or other positive emotions. These emotions can arise from sensory perceptions such as the appearance of the packaging, the fragrance of the product, or the sound of reviews on online media (Golalizadeh et al., 2023). Behavioral aspects also serve as key motivators that drive consumers to take purchasing actions such as the desire to look good, the need to boost self-confidence, or even the pursuit of novelty through trying new cosmetic trends. Beliefs or social values that associate "success" with "the use of branded products" can also become powerful driving forces in purchase decisions. Lastly, reference group influence which includes family, friends, close acquaintances, or admired and trusted individuals can significantly motivate new consumers. When these individuals use the product and express positive attitudes towards it, it strongly encourages others to make similar purchasing decisions. In summary, consumer motivation to purchase branded cosmetics comprises four dimensions, attitude, emotion, behavior, and reference group influence. Attitudes and emotions are reflected through positive perceptions and feelings toward the brand, while behavior and reference groups directly drive purchasing decisions. These four factors function altogether collectively to shape and propel consumer buying behavior.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a key concept in marketing and customer relationship management. Kotler & Keller (2021) describe satisfaction as the feeling or opinion that results from a consumer's experience compared to their expectations. If the experience matches or exceeds expectations, the consumer feels satisfied. Naheed et al. (2023) define satisfaction as a personal feeling that arises when a consumer's perception aligns with their expectations. When perception exceeds expectations, consumers feel satisfied. On the other hand, if perception falls short, dissatisfaction of consumers occurs.

In the context of branded cosmetic products, customer satisfaction refers to the positive feelings resulting from an overall evaluation of the product and service experience (Kotler & Keller, 2021). Key factors that influence satisfaction include product quality, service, price, and the surrounding environment. In particular, high-quality service plays an essential role in enhancing customer impressions. Satisfaction factors can be categorized into several dimensions, for example, Tangibles in service: Willingness to serve and the availability of product samples for trial before purchase, Responsiveness to the service users: Promptness in providing advice and solving problems, appropriate service duration, and Empathy and customer care: Building relationships and maintaining continuous communication (Kotler & Keller, 2021). Understanding and meeting these expectations enables brands to maintain customer relationships, build loyalty, and increase the likelihood of repeat purchases in the future.

Research Hypotheses

- 1) Digital marketing factors, online influencers, buying motivation, and customer satisfaction directly influence the purchasing decision of branded cosmetic products among customers in the cosmetics industry in Thailand.
- 2) Digital marketing factors, online influencers, buying motivation, and customer satisfaction have an indirect influence on the purchasing decision of branded cosmetic products among customers in the cosmetics industry in Thailand, mediated by customer satisfaction.

Research Method

Population and Sample

Quantitative Research: The population consists of customers who have experience in making purchasing decisions for branded cosmetic products in Thailand. The exact number of the population is unknown. The sample group consisted of customers who have experience in making purchasing decisions for branded cosmetic products in Thailand. A multi-stage sampling method was employed. The sample size was determined using the Rule of Thumb, which is commonly applied in multivariate analysis. According to the guideline by Hair et al. (2019), it is recommended to have 10 to 20 respondents per observed variable. In this study, there were a total of 19 observed variables, and thus the minimum sample size required was calculated to be at least $20 \times 19 = 380$ respondents. To account for potential incomplete or invalid responses during the data collection process, the researcher increased the number of distributed questionnaires to 400 participants. The data collected from these 400 respondents were then analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique. Therefore, the sample size in this study is considered adequate and appropriate for SEM analysis.

Qualitative Research: The informants were 14 individuals involved in the branded cosmetics business within the cosmetics industry in Thailand. They were divided into two groups; Group 1 consists of the beauty experts and Group 2 consists of branded cosmetics customers. A purposive sampling method was used. The reason for dividing them into these two main groups was to cover both the production and marketing aspects, as well as the customer perspective, providing insights into emotional dimensions, expectations, and actual purchasing decisions. Moreover, this approach allowed for Triangulation which is a method for checking the accuracy of data (Data Triangulation) through two groups with different viewpoints. If the data from both the experts and customers aligned, it would significantly enhance the credibility of the findings.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using multi-stage sampling as follows:

Stage 1: Stratified Random Sampling - The sample was stratified based on the four regions of Thailand (Northern, Northeastern, Central, and Southern), according to the regional classification of the Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Interior.

Stage 2: Simple Random Sampling - Department stores in each region were randomly selected to collect data from consumers. The criteria for selecting department stores to study consumers' decisions to purchase branded cosmetics included being located on major roads with convenient access from both urban and rural areas, hosting a large number of branded cosmetics counters, serving as hubs for leading cosmetics brands with a high-purchasing-power target group, which is the primary customer base for branded cosmetics. A total sample size of 400 respondents was proportionally distributed, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Number of department stores in Thailand selling branded cosmetics, categorized by region

Region	Number of department stores	Data collected samples
North	3	67
Northeast	4	89
Central	7	156
South	4	89
Total	18	400

Stage 3: Convenience Sampling - Samples were selected from the designated department stores until the required number of participants was reached.

Research Instruments

For quantitative research, the researcher developed a self-administered online questionnaire. The content validity was assessed by 5 experts using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), with an average score of 0.95. The questionnaire was then pilot tested with 30 participants outside the target group to assess reliability, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.80, which is considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2019).

For qualitative research, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used to gather in-depth data on purchase motivation, expectations, and brand loyalty factors. Data validation was conducted through internal processes (assessing completeness and appropriateness of the sample group) and external checks (member checking by having informants review the analysis results). Furthermore, methodological triangulation was applied by collecting data from regular branded cosmetic consumers, cosmetic marketing experts, and premium cosmetics distributors to ensure comprehensive perspectives.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the consistency between the causal relationship model and empirical data. The analysis considered Goodness of Fit Measures according to standard statistical criteria, which included Relative Chi-square (χ^2/df), which should not exceed 2, p-value that is not statistically significant, GFI, AGFI, CFI, and NFI indices, all of which should be greater than 0.90, RMSEA, which should be less than 0.05, and RMR, which should be close to zero. If the model demonstrated insufficient fit with the data, adjustments were made by examining error terms and modifying internal parameters within the model to improve fit. In addition, analysis of the model's internal components was conducted to evaluate the stability of observed variables and latent variables, helping confirm that the developed model can significantly explain consumer decision-making behavior regarding the purchase of branded cosmetics in Thailand.

In the qualitative data analysis, the researcher employed an analytic comparison approach, examining both agreements and disagreements in the collected data. To minimize bias in interpreting the data, the researcher used direct quotations from informants to accurately and comprehensively reflect the perspectives of the sample group. Regarding the protection of informants' rights, prior to conducting interviews, the researcher explained the purpose of the

study and ensured the confidentiality of the information obtained. All collected data were presented in aggregate form and used solely for academic purposes.

Research Results

This research aimed to identify the key drivers influencing Thai consumers' purchase decisions regarding branded cosmetics, utilizing a Structural Equation Model (SEM) to analyze the complex relationships between digital marketing (DIMA), online influencers (ONIN), purchase motivation (PUMO), and customer satisfaction (CUSA). To provide a comprehensive understanding, both direct and indirect effects were examined.

Our first hypothesis proposed that digital marketing, online influencers, purchase motivation, and customer satisfaction all have a direct and statistically significant influence on the purchase decision (DPBC). The SEM analysis strongly supported this hypothesis, revealing substantial path coefficients for all four constructs:

Digital Marketing (DIMA): $\beta = 0.66$, $t = 3.70$, $p < 0.001$. This indicates that a one-unit increase in digital marketing efforts is associated with a 0.66-unit increase in the likelihood of purchasing branded cosmetics, all else being equal. This suggests that a 10% increase in digital marketing spending, focused on targeted social media advertising, could lead to an estimated 6.6% increase in the likelihood of a consumer purchasing branded cosmetics.

Online Influencers (ONIN): $\beta = 0.62$, $t = 3.93$, $p < 0.001$. This strong positive relationship highlights the effectiveness of online influencers in shaping consumer choices. This strong positive relationship highlights the effectiveness of online influencers who are perceived as authentic and trustworthy by their followers, and who provide valuable information about cosmetic products and application techniques.

Purchase Motivation (PUMO): $\beta = 0.95$, $t = 3.46$, $p < 0.001$. This represents the strongest direct effect in the model, emphasizing the critical role of consumers' intrinsic desires (e.g., to enhance self-image, gain social acceptance) in driving their purchase decisions. This strong direct effect underscores the power of intrinsic motivations, such as the desire for self-expression and enhancement, in driving branded cosmetics purchases. Consumers are actively seeking products that align with their personal values and aspirations.

Customer Satisfaction (CUSA): $\beta = 0.66$, $t = 3.21$, $p < 0.001$. Although important, customer satisfaction showed a slightly weaker effect compared to purchase motivation. This indicates its primary role comes after the initial purchase decision and supplementary product services. Our second hypothesis stated that the relationship is an interlocked system where digital marketing and external influences, which are factors of marketing and motivation, have influences through the effect of satisfaction.

To calculate influence we refer to the formula below to test the hypothesis:

$$CUSA = 0.26 \cdot DIMA + 0.21 \cdot ONIN + 0.52 \cdot PUMO, \text{Errorvar} = 0.08, R^2 = 0.92 \dots (\text{Equation 1})$$

(0.09)	(0.06)	(0.12)	(0.02)
2.97	3.33	4.28	4.98

$$DPBC = 0.66 \cdot DIMA + 0.62 \cdot ONIN + 0.95 \cdot PUMO + 0.66 \cdot CUSA$$

(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.27)	(0.21)
3.70	3.93	3.46	3.21

$$\text{Errorvar} = 0.09, R^2 = 0.93 \dots (\text{Equation 2})$$

(0.04)
1.96

Where DIMA is Digital Marketing

ONIN is Online Influencer

PUMO is Purchase Motivation

CUSA is Customer Satisfaction

DPBC is Purchase Decision of Branded Cosmetic Products by consumers in Thailand

The model demonstrated excellent fit indices (CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.04), indicating that the model adequately captured the relationships between the variables. The VAF values for the mediating effects of customer satisfaction were in the moderate range, suggesting that while satisfaction plays a role, other unmeasured factors may also be involved in transmitting the influence of digital marketing and online influencers.

Qualitative Research Findings

The qualitative data, derived from in-depth interviews, enriched and contextualized these quantitative findings. Informants consistently emphasized the central role of purchase motivation, particularly the desire to enhance self-image and gain social acceptance, in driving branded cosmetics purchases. As one participant noted, "Branded cosmetics are more than just makeup; they're a way to express yourself and feel confident." The interviews also highlighted the importance of digital marketing in providing information and building brand awareness, with influencers playing a key role in shaping consumer perceptions and trust. However, several participants also noted that customer satisfaction, while important, was often secondary to the emotional and aspirational factors driving the initial purchase decision.

In conclusion, the SEM model, supported by qualitative insights, demonstrates that purchase motivation has a high degree influence on the purchase decisions. As digital marketing, online influencers, and customer satisfaction are also crucial in influencing consumers' choice of a product, it is important for Thai consumers to prioritize on customer experience.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study, guided by the objective of examining the direct and indirect influences on the purchase decisions related to branded cosmetics in Thailand, sheds light on the complex interplay of several key factors.

Firstly, the research underscores the significant role of digital marketing in shaping consumer behavior. Our findings indicate that social media marketing is particularly effective in creating awareness and driving purchase decisions. While supporting the assertions of Boonrawd & Hansanti (2023) and Ilmi et al. (2023) regarding the power of social media in building credibility and trust, our results offer a nuanced perspective, suggesting that content marketing deserves consideration as well (Pantaeng & Vongmahasetha, 2022).

Secondly, the influence of online influencers emerged as a crucial factor. Consistent with Janssen et al. (2021) and Innoi & Praesri (2021), our findings show that online influencers directly impact purchase decisions and play a crucial role in shaping purchase intent. Therefore, brands may want to focus more strongly on social influencers.

Thirdly, the study highlights the fundamental role of purchase motivation, encompassing emotional and social status drivers. Consistent with Nguyen et al. (2024), we see an association with brand recognition (Shimul et al., 2022), which marketing often aims to amplify.

The causal relationship model that shows our research is shown in Figure 1: motivation, marketing, customer emotion, and social status.

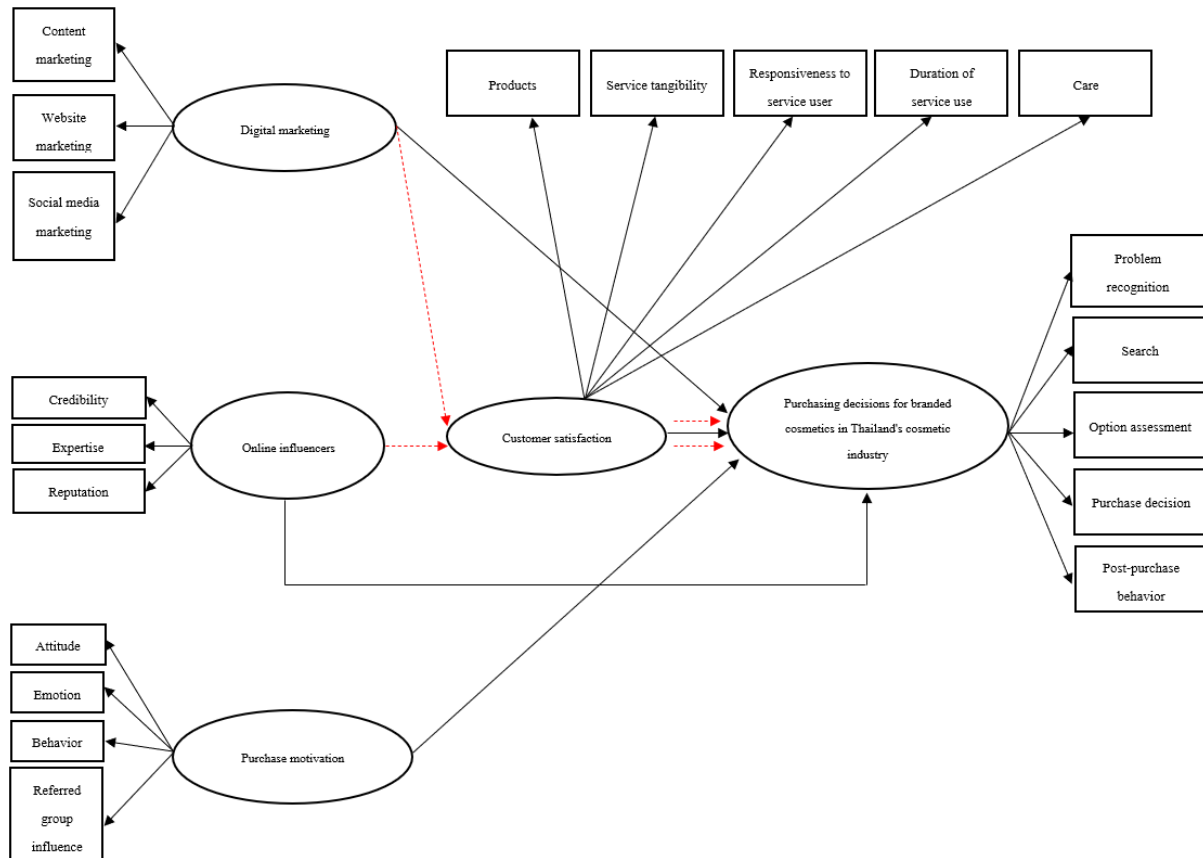


Figure 1 Causal Relationship Model of Factors Influencing the Decision to Purchase Branded Cosmetic Products in Thailand

In closing, this research elucidates key decision-making processes for the Thai cosmetic industries. It also demonstrates those industries' reliance on influencers and how those external sources may assist or hinder with purchases. Finally, key steps will need to focus on engagement tactics that make them more likely to lead to the sales and retention.

Recommendations for Applying Research Findings

Based on the data from research findings and prior studies, we may consider the importance of several important concepts that lead to purchasing outcomes:

- 1) Advertising and Brand Development - A targeted approach, taking into account customer needs and with a specific goal.
- 2) Data Mining and Enhanced Online Experiences - By mining social media and purchasing choices, brands can tailor data to improve outcomes.
- 3) Engaging with Customers Directly - Through effective marketing, it is possible to determine and build value.

Recommendations for Future Research

The main factors as outlined above may have several routes to improve brand and business outcomes in Thailand. To proceed, studies should use some of these factors:

- 1) Test brand growth from data on trends.
- 2) To test customer decisions, it's critical to evaluate behavior across long time periods.
- 3) Finally, a test of more factors should take place, as well as how customers value business practices and new tech that could help drive value.

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