

The Impact of Social Media Beauty Influencers on the Image and Purchasing Decisions of Cosmetic Customers Living in Suratthani Province

Chutipas Kaewpetch¹, Pimprae Srisawat², Siyathorn Nakphin³

Abstract

The Internet has an important role in product decision-making; therefore, influencers are a popular tool for creating brand images and influencing decision-making, especially in the cosmetic business. This research aims to study the relationship between online beauty influencers and brand image and purchasing decisions of cosmetic consumers in Surat Thani Province. The population consists of consumers in Surat Thani who purchased cosmetic products influenced by online beauty influencers. The sample size consisted of 400 respondents, and combined sampling methods (purposive and snowball) were applied. Data were collected via questionnaires regarding beauty influencers on social media, brand image, and purchase decisions, with reliability coefficients of .867, .814, and .869, respectively. The data were analysed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and structural equation modelling (SEM).

The research results indicate that the influence of beauty influencers on social media has a positive relationship with brand image and purchasing decisions at a statistical significance level of 0.001. The structural equation modeling results show that the measurement model is consistent with the empirical data. The fit indices are at a very good level (Chi-square (χ^2) = 589.731, p-value = 0.001, χ^2/df = 1.573, RMSEA = 0.038, GFI = 0.917, CFI = 0.984, NFI = 0.958). Therefore, marketers should utilize online influencers to build brand image.

Keywords: Brand Image; Cosmetic; Online Beauty Influencer; Purchasing Decisions; Social Media

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ผลกระทบของผู้ทรงอิทธิพลด้านความงามบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ต่อภาพลักษณ์และการตัดสินใจซื้อเครื่องสำอางของผู้บริโภคในจังหวัดสุราษฎร์ธานี

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บทคัดย่อ

อินเทอร์เน็ตมีบทบาทเป็นอย่างมากต่อการตัดสินใจซื้อสินค้า ส่งผลให้ผู้ทรงอิทธิพลจึงเป็นเครื่องมือที่นิยมนำมาใช้ในการสร้างภาพลักษณ์และการตัดสินใจซื้อโดยเฉพาะในธุรกิจเครื่องสำอาง การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาผลกระทบของผู้ทรงอิทธิพลด้านความงามบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ต่อภาพลักษณ์ตราสินค้าและการตัดสินใจซื้อเครื่องสำอางของผู้บริโภคในจังหวัดสุราษฎร์ธานี ประชากรวิจัยคือผู้บริโภคในจังหวัดสุราษฎร์ธานีที่เคยซื้อผลิตภัณฑ์เครื่องสำอางโดยมีผู้ทรงอิทธิพลด้านความงามบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์เป็นแรงขับเคลื่อน ขนาดตัวอย่างจำนวน 400 คน เลือกสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบผสม คือแบบเจาะจงและแบบบอกต่อ เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลโดยใช้แบบสอบถาม มีความเชื่อมั่นด้านผู้ทรงอิทธิพลด้านความงามบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ 0.867 ภาพลักษณ์ตราสินค้าเครื่องสำอาง 0.814 และการตัดสินใจซื้อเครื่องสำอาง 0.869 วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยใช้สถิติพื้นฐาน ได้แก่ ค่าความถี่ ค่าร้อยละ ค่าเฉลี่ย ส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน และทดสอบสมมติฐานวิเคราะห์โดยโมเดลสมการโครงสร้าง

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ความสัมพันธ์ของผู้ทรงอิทธิพลด้านความงามบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์มีอิทธิพลทางบวกต่อภาพลักษณ์ตราสินค้าและการตัดสินใจซื้อเครื่องสำอางของผู้บริโภคในจังหวัดสุราษฎร์ธานีอย่างมีนัยสำคัญที่ .001 ผลการวิเคราะห์โมเดลตามสมมติฐานโมเดลพบที่มีความสอดคล้องกับข้อมูลเชิงประจักษ์เป็นอย่างดี โดยค่าดัชนีความสอดคล้องอยู่ในระดับดีมาก (Chi-square (χ^2) = 589.731, p-value = 0.001, χ^2/df = 1.573, RMSEA = 0.038, GFI = 0.917, CFI = 0.984, NFI = 0.958) ดังนั้น นักการตลาดควรใช้ผู้ทรงอิทธิพลด้านความงามบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ในการกระตุ้นการตัดสินใจซื้อผ่านภาพลักษณ์ตราสินค้า

คำสำคัญ: ภาพลักษณ์ของแบรนด์; เครื่องสำอาง; ผู้ทรงอิทธิพลด้านความงามบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์; การตัดสินใจซื้อ; สื่อสังคม

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1. Introduction

Consumers today are paying more attention than ever to their looks. As a consequence, cosmetics have become a popular consumer product and play an important role in daily life. This is true for not only female consumers, but nowadays, it is also expanding to a large number of male and LGBTQ consumers who care about their image and want to look their best. In 2017, the total value of Thailand's cosmetic industry was approximately 251 billion baht, with the domestic market at 168 billion baht, an increase of 7.8 percent. Skincare products make up the largest share of the cosmetics market, accounting for 46.8%. At the same time, the export of Thai cosmetics to the world market is estimated at 83 billion baht (Kasikorn Research Center, 2018). Digital media has started to play a significant role in people's lives; therefore, social media is an important tool for marketing in today's era. An investigation of current online media consumption behavior found that 93% of internet users worldwide watch online videos and 51% view vlogs of celebrities and social media influencers (Mahitthiwannitcha, 2019). Additionally, it found that 70% of consumers find information through online media before making a decision, and 47% from reviews of blogs (Positioning, 2019). Reviews are online word of mouth, from the real experience of reviewers. Therefore, it has an easier and faster impact on the decision-making process (Yamutai, 2015). As a result, influencer marketing has increased implicitly (Tanachote, 2020) and is becoming a favorite among digital marketers and business entrepreneurs.

Surat Thani is the center in the upper southern region of Thailand with a population of 1,063,501 (Surat Thani Provincial Statistical Office, 2019) indicating the high potential for all products and services. This province has an average income per household ranked 1 in 5 in Thailand, up to 38,026 baht per household (Smart SME, 2018) and an average expenditure per household is 24,743 baht (Surat Thani Provincial Statistical Office, 2019). Moreover, the usage of internet by people in Surat Thani was approximately 880,920 cases in 2020, 82.83% of the population (Surat Thani Provincial Statistical Office, 2021). While, culture impact setting marketing strategies as well as celebrity or online influencers. The question then arises about how people in Surat Thani use the internet and how influencers are chosen which will benefit online marketers to focus Suratthani area.

Modern marketers emphasize applying online influencers in digital marketing strategies. It is due to online influencers playing a more significant role as spokespersons when compared to the use of traditional celebrities. Online influencers are characterized by many loyal and dedicated social media followers. Influencers are distinguished from traditional celebrities; they can create massive fan communities via online social groups and platforms, as well as build close connections and trust among their fans. Normally, influencers are real-life consumers with in-depth knowledge or expertise in certain products or services, especially cosmetics. Therefore, this empowers them to motivate their followers toward desired behaviors. The influencers play an important role in changing the attitudes, thoughts, values, beliefs, behaviors, and decision-making of customers in the digital era (Saito et al., 2015; Ennaji et al., 2018; Watthanaruengnan, 2015; Umanachai, 2013). Current cosmetics businesses, therefore, use beauty influencers mostly to build brand awareness, create engaging content, and

announce giveaways. Beauty influencers can also increase brand awareness by creating hashtags or keywords. Moreover, influencers can provide vast visibility and reach target customers according to most people's distaste for intended advertising. Marketers also apply influencers to build a good image for both companies and brands and recover brand image. Trust and authority can be improved by applying the right influencers. When they post some content, it can create a sense of instant credibility from vast followers. Influencers can also boost sales and stimulate consumer decisions. Consequently, beauty influencers on social media are playing a huge role in targeting consumers (Mahasamut & Khruichit, 2016).

From the literature reviews, it was found that online influence has been widely investigated. However, a neglected research gap was noticed. There are prevalent studies on the impacts of online influencers and brand image (Hermenda et al., 2019; Dreifaldt & Drennan, 2019; Nurhandayani et al., 2019; Putri & Trenggana, 2021; Tamara et al., 2021), purchase decision making (Jarusvasunt, 2016; Putri & Trenggana, 2021; Tamara et al., 2021; Rattanachat & Chairasit, 2014; Ananda & Wandebori, 2016; Takoolsom, 2019; Sa-ngardam et al., 2020; Hermenda et al., 2019), and brand image and decision making. (Chinosuntrakorn, 2010; Hiranprateep, 2016; Siritwong et al., 2017; Thaihan et al., 2019; Prabandari et al., 2018; Hermenda et al., 2019; Nurhandayani et al., 2019; Tamara et al., 2021). Most previous research emphasized the direct impact of influencers on other factors, whereas indirect effects have been overlooked. Although there is a paper concerning the mediating of the brand image between positive word-of-mouth and purchase intention (Prabandari et al., 2018), however, online influencers were not included in this research. Obviously, the indirect effects of online influencers on decision-making through brand image as a mediator have been of less concern. Furthermore, consumer behaviors are influenced by many factors, especially culture. As a result, diverse areas may cause different effects of online influencers on brand image and decision-making. As a consequence, this study not only looked to confirm the direct impact of online influencers on brand image and decision-making but also to investigate the indirect effect of online influencers on decision-making mediated by brand image. Therefore, the results can clarify the important role of online influencers in promoting brand image or decision-making, or both. Consequently, the research contributions can provide practical implications for both academics and online marketers.

2. Objectives

- 2.1 To study the impact of social media beauty influencers on cosmetic purchase decisions.
- 2.2 To study the impact of social media beauty influencers on cosmetic brand image.
- 2.3 To study the impact of cosmetic brand image on purchase decisions.
- 2.4 To study the mediating effect of brand image between social media beauty influencers and purchase decisions.

3. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework and Research Hypothesis

3.1 Literature Review

3.1.1 Beauty Influencers on social media

Beauty influencers on social media are people who create brand content and describe the brand's value of cosmetic products. Normally, the influencers have a huge fan community and followers and they get a great number of 'Likes' on their Fanpages and video views (Ryan & Zabin, 2010). Social media includes all types of internet platforms such as Blog, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Therefore, the influential level of the influencer depends on the number of views and followers. It found that applying celebrities in branding requires consideration of five key attributes and is known as the TEARS Model (Georgantopoulos et al., 2018). The model includes 1) Trustworthiness. This is the consumer's perception of celebrities' honesty, and correctness, the celebrities must create credibility and professionalism leading to consumer confidence (Nurhandayani et al., 2019; Senchaowanich, 2013). 2) Expertise. This refers to the capability of the spokesperson in specific areas of beauty, who have the modern knowledge, experience, or other skills that show how to use cosmetics effectively, therefore, consumers believe in the presented information. 3) Attractiveness. This attribute is in reference to the appearance, personality, and communication skills of the influencers. 4) Respect and recognition. The influencers must receive positive recognition and respect from their followers, have a successful life, be good role models, and be an inspiration to other people. Lastly, 5) Similarity. Beauty influencers on social media have similar characteristics or are representative of consumers: such as personality, lifestyle, skin color, or preference for similar styles.

3.1.2 Brand Image

Keller (1993) defined brand image as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand association held in consumer memory". These associations refer to any brand aspect within the consumer's memory (Aaker, 1996). The brand's image describes the consumer's thoughts and feelings toward the brand. In other words, brand image is the overall mental image that consumers have of a brand, and its uniqueness in comparison to the other brands. Brand image is related to the consumers' use of the brand to reflect their symbolic meaning of consumption and identity in self-expression (Lau & Phau, 2007). Consumers ascribe a high quality to esteemed brands (Rubio et al., 2014). A brand image that is familiar to the consumer's perspective can help the companies to propose new brands and increase the sales of current brands (Burt & Davies, 2010; Diallo et al., 2013; Martenson, 2007; Wu et al., 2011). Additionally, Keller (1998) explained that the information node associated with the brand and its meaning in the memory of consumers plays an important role in creating brand value as follows: 1) Attribute means physical characteristics or functions of the products or services with the brand, the product must be of good quality. (Chinosuntrakorn, 2010; Suksatiean, 2016; Tangpradit et al., 2017; Robinson, 2018; Thaihan et al., 2019; Tharakan et al., 2019) and must have a reasonable price, be worthwhile and worth the price (Chinosuntrakorn, 2010; Suksatiean, 2016; Robinson, 2018; Samridnan, 2018; Thaihan et al., 2019; Nurhandayani et al., 2019). Additionally, the development of

up-to-date innovations that make the product beautiful, elegant, and modern (Nurhandayani et al., 2019). 2) Benefits, it is the functional benefits of products or services. This indicates the rationale to buy products and services of customers. The product must be reliable, quality is guaranteed, does not cause harm to consumers, as well as having to provide solutions that meet the needs of customers. 3) Attitude. This arises from beliefs and affecting behavior which can be expressed both positively and negatively on the brand. Different attitudes arise from learning and can be modified. According to Prabandari et al. (2018), it is explained that if a brand image has a positive reputation in consumer's minds, it is the unique characteristic of the brand that differentiates them from competitors, the products are widely known by the people, and lastly, the brand keeps up with the development or changes over time as a way for maintaining the brand image.

3.1.3 Purchasing decisions

At this juncture of the digital age, a massive number of customers have migrated to social media platforms. Consumers can find information easily to make a purchase and it's an ideal platform for marketers to communicate with consumers. Complex decision processes often involve multiple elements; therefore, marketers are interested in consumer behavior (Kotler, 2003). Before customers decide to buy or use a product or service, there are 5 steps that consumers take into consideration: Firstly, 1) problem or need recognition, in this stage consumers have a problem or a need and they are looking for a product to solve their problem/fulfill their needs. Consumers' need recognition may arise from internal or external factors, moreover, the need may vary by individual. Online influencers, an external factor, are also motivation factors causing consumers to conform, believe, and desire to have what the influencers present. 2) Information Searching, in this stage consumers search for more information before making a decision, they want to know about the product such as benefits, price, promotion, user reviews, etc. (Prabandari et al., 2018). Sources of information may be different for each person. The various sources may be from asking relatives and friends, advertising - from both primitive and online media, official websites, agent websites, online agents, social media, etc. 3) Evaluation of alternatives after consumers find information, alternatives are classified and then each alternative is assessed. Alternative criteria of each person depend on the person and circumstance, for instance, brand image, cost, promotion price, packaging, influential person, etc. This may depend on taste, belief, or faith in that brand. 4) Purchase Product selection, is the outcome of making the decision. Therefore, the final solution informs consumers on what to buy, when to buy, and how many. Comparing expectation and experience has occurred in this stage leading to customer's attitude, dissatisfaction, or satisfaction causing behaviors after using the products/service. Lastly, 5) Post Purchase Behavior; this occurs after consumers have used or consumed the product, a comparison between the consumer's expectation and experience occurs-leading to an outcome attitude consisting of satisfaction or dissatisfaction which causes behavioral intention further. Post-purchase behaviors might be telling/recommending to others (Thaihan et al., 2019; Prabandari et al., 2018; Nurhandayani et al., 2019; Poturak & Softic, 2019), positive posting and comments (Tanapun, 2016), repurchase (Thaihan et al., 2019), and brand loyalty (Thaihan et al., 2019).

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In addition, Table 1 presents a summary of the study of Beauty Influencers on Social media, which found that the relevant factors were Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, Expertise, Respect, and Similarity. Table 2 presents a summary of the Brand Image Factor study, which found that the relevant factors were Attributes, Benefits and Attitudes. Table 3 presents a summary of the Purchasing Decisions study, which found that the related factors were Problem Recognition, Information Search, Evaluation of Alternatives, Purchase and Post-purchase.

Table 1 A Summary of the Beauty Influencers on Social Media Literature by Authors.

	Authors												
	Sivesan (2013)	Chaovalit (2014)	Ananda and Wandebori, (2016)	Putri and Wandebori (2016)	Selfarianda (2016)	Rahmi et al. (2017)	Wright (2017)	Nurhandayani et al. (2019)	Widyanto and Agusti, (2020)	Isyanto et al. (2020)	Rattanachai and Chalprait (2014)	Na Ranong et al. (2016)	Jarusvasunt (2016)
Beauty Influencers on Social Media													
Attractiveness	X	X	X		X		X		X		X	X	X
Trustworthiness	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Expertise	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Respect				X			X						
Similarity	X		X	X			X				X		

Table 2 A Summary of the Brand Image Literature by Authors

	Authors						
	Chinosuntrakorn (2010)	Hiranprateep (2016)	Suksatiean (2016)	Siriwong et al. (2017)	Samridhan (2018)	Rojanavitskul (2018)	Thaihan et al. (2019)
Brand Image							
Attributes		X		X	X		X
Benefits		X		X	X		
Attitudes	X		X		X	X	

Table 3 A Summary of the Purchasing Decisions Literature by Authors

	Authors										
	Chuensuksorn and Phaengkasorn (2013)	Nakto (2014)	Aisyah (2015)	Tanapun (2016)	Kempao (2017)	Meng (2018)	Binsuwan and Thongchin (2018)	Sriboonak and Phongsataya (2019)	Seangphanich (2019)	Jiang (2019)	Gomes et al. (2020)
Purchasing Decisions											
Problem Recognition	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Information Search	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Evaluation of Alternatives	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Purchase	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Post-purchase	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

3.2 Conceptual Framework

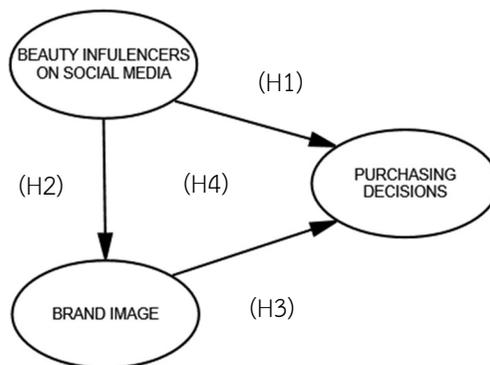


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

(H1) social media beauty influencers positively affect cosmetic purchase decisions

(H2) social media beauty influencers positively affect cosmetic brand image

(H3) cosmetic brand image positively affects the decision to purchase cosmetics

(H4) social media influencers positively affect cosmetic purchase decisions mediated by brand image

Source: The authors

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3.3 Research Hypothesis

The relationships among the studied factors are found in previous research. Many research confirmed that social media influencers have a significant effect on purchase intention (Putri & Trenggana, 2021; Tamara et al., 2021; Rattanachat & Chaiprasit, 2014; Jarusvasunt, 2016; Ananda & Wandebori, 2016; Takoolsom, 2019; Sa-ngardam et al., 2020). Conversely, the relation between social media influencers and purchase intention was not found (Hermanda et al., 2019). The social media influencer's ability to influence consumers' purchase intention was not given a significant impact in the research paper of Nurhandayani et al. (2019). It can be concluded that the relationship between influencers and purchase decisions in previous research is contradictory. Then, H1 is proposed to re-check the relation.

(H1) social media beauty influencers positively affect cosmetic purchase decisions

In the case of brand image and influences, many finding found the positive correlation between social media influencers and brand image (Hermanda et al., 2019; Dreifaltdt & Drennan, 2019; Nurhandayani et al., 2019; Putri & Trenggana, 2021; Tamara et al., 2021). Then, H2 is proposed to confirm the relation.

(H2) social media beauty influencers positively affect cosmetic brand image

Most papers revealed the positive relationship between brand image and purchase decision (Chinosuntrakorn, 2010; Hiranprateep, 2016; Siriwong et al., 2017; Thaihan et al., 2019; Prabandari et al., 2018; Hermanda et al., 2019; Nurhandayani et al., 2019; Tamara et al., 2021). This means that the better the brand image in the mind of consumers, the higher the intention of consumers to purchase them. Consequently, H3 is projected to confirm the relationship in the context of cosmetic products.

(H3) cosmetic brand image positively affects the decision to purchase cosmetics

Lastly, regarding the relationship among influencers, brand image, and purchase decisions, there are fewer intentions of mediating the brand image between influencers and purchase decisions and no universal correlations. There is a paper concerning the mediating of the brand image between the positive word-of-mouth on purchase intention (Prabandari et al., 2018). It is not a decision-making process; word of mouth is just a post behavior. Hermanda et al. (2019) found that social media influencers have no significant influence on purchase intention, but have a significant positive influence on the brand image. Additionally, brand image has a significant positive influence on purchase intent. Nurhandayani et al. (2019) confirm that social media influencers have a huge positive impact on brand image building. However, social media influencers did not have an impact on the purchase intent of the consumer. Isyanto et al. (2020) found that online influencers impacted purchase intent and image

affected purchase intention, significantly. Simultaneously, influencer marketing and brand image affected the purchase intention significantly. Therefore, H4 was proposed to investigate the indirect impact of social media to purchase decisions through brand image.

(H4) social media influencers positively affect cosmetic purchase decisions mediated by brand image

4. Research Methods

4.1 Details of Population and Sample size

This study is quantitative research. Data were collected from a sample of the infinite population. The population was consumers living in Surat Thani who had purchased cosmetic products because of online beauty influencers. Cochran (1977), significant at 0.05 was used to calculate the appropriate sample size, the sample size was 385 respondents. However, this study applied the Structural Equation Model: SEM to analyze the hypotheses, therefore having an appropriate sample size was considered critical. As proposed by Kline (2010) recommended 100-200 for a minimal sample or 5 per free parameter. Furthermore, Hair et al. (2010), the sample size used in the research should be 300 with the models having 7 or fewer constructs. The 385 samples were adequate. However, to protect any errors from collecting data and incomplete data, the final number of samples where data was collected was 400.

4.2 Sampling Techniques

According to the research objectives and the sample's contexts, combined sampling methods both purposive sampling and snowball sampling were applied to collect data. Purposive sampling was conducted to conform to the research criterion, who had experience buying cosmetic which was influenced by online influencers. While, applying snowball is applied when samples are difficult to find and need referral networks (Cooper & Schindler, 2013: 360)

4.3 Data Collection, Analyzing Methods and Interpretation of Results

According to research tool development, there were 4 steps undertaken. These consist of 1) synthesis variables to construct a measurement model from previous findings and others. 2) Index of Item-Objective Congruence was checked via 2 academic experts and a marketing expert. All IOCs were ≥ 0.67 , there were no deleted items, but sentence correctness was done. 3) Considering Human research ethics was employed through the committee of Suratthani Rajabhat University, IRB code SRU-EC2021/025. Lastly, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire were tested by applying a pilot test with 30 respondents excluded from the research sample, the Cronbach's Coefficient Alphas of each variable; influencer = .867, product image = .814, and decision to buy cosmetics = 0.869 were higher

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than 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978; Hair et al., 2010; Panayides, 2013). Additionally, Corrected Items–Total Correlation were > 0.3 (Field, 2005).

The questionnaire was separated into 5 sections; demographics, influencers, image, the decision to buy cosmetics, and lastly, recommendations. Close-ended and open-ended questions were in demographics (10 questions) and recommendations sections. While, the Likert scale with 5 scores was applied to influencers (23 items) (Sivesan, 2013; Chaovalit, 2014; Ananda & Wandebori, 2016; Putri & Wandebori, 2016; Selfarianda, 2016; Rahmi et al., 2017; Wright, 2017; Nurhandayani et al, 2019; Widyanto & Agusti, 2020; Isyanto et al., 2020; Rattanachat & Chaiprasit, 2014; Na Ranong et al., 2016; Jarusvasunt, 2016), images (15 items) (Chinosuntrakorn, 2010; Hiranprateep, 2016; Suksatiean, 2016; Siritwong et al., 2017; Samridnan, 2018; Rojanavitskul, 2018; Thaihan et al, 2019), and the decision to buy cosmetics (17 items) (Chuensuksorn & Phaengkasorn, 2013; Nakto, 2014; Aisyah, 2015; Tanapun, 2016; Kempao, 2017; Meng, 2018; Binsuwan & Thongchin, 2018; Sriboonak & Phongsataya, 2019; Seangphanich, 2019; Jiang, 2019; Gomes et al., 2020). A likert scale with 5 levels was applied, 1 means the lowest agreement and 5 means the highest agreement.

Online Collecting data via Google form was applied to collect data from cosmetic customers living in Suratthani and had online purchasing influenced by influencers. The data were collected online during January–March, 2021.

Statistics both descriptive and inferential were employed to analyze the data. The Structural Equation Model by the AMOS program was conducted to test the research hypotheses. The criterions for fit indices from the literature was explained. Chi-square (χ^2) is higher than 0.05 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). Relative Chi-square: χ^2/df is lower than 2.00 (Schermelele-Engle et al., 2003). The goodness of fit index (GFI) should be ≥ 0.90 being good fit (Schumacker & Lomax, 1996); Hair et al., (2010). Normed Fit Index (NFI) ≥ 0.95 = very good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005; Schermellele-Engle et al., 2003). The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is ≥ 0.95 being very good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Schermellele-Engle et al., 2003). Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) ≤ 0.05 = very good fit Kline (2005); McDonald & Ho (2002); Schumacker & Lomax (1996).

5. Research Results and Discussion

5.1 Research Results

5.1.1 Respondent's Data

Most respondents were female, aged 21-30 years, single, with education being in bachelor's degree, and income <10,000 baht per month. Mostly, they lived in Muang district, Surat Thani. The top three online media for searching for beauty influencers are Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Most of them used body and facial treatment products. People influencing purchasing beauty products were beauty influencers followed by friends and social recommendations, and actors/actresses/singers.

5.1.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Firstly, there was checking data normality according to SEM's condition. It found that data was of a normal distribution, Skewness in a range of -1.003 to -.298, which was acceptable, $< \pm 2$ (Hair et al, 2006), and Kurtosis in a range of -.604 to .607, $< \pm 8$ (Kline, 2005). A generally accepted range of skewness and kurtosis for normal distribution determination values between -2 to +2 is acceptable (George & Mallery, 2010; Khan, 2015). The statistic showed that skewness and kurtosis were close to zero, therefore it was a normal curve. Additionally, relations between variables were in the acceptable range, 0.293-0.790, 0.8 (Young, 2017; Belinda & Peat, 2014), and there was no multicollinearity. Consequently, the data was suitable to analyze CFA and SEM further.

According to Confirmatory Factor Analysis, firstly, First-order CFA was conducted, followed by Second-order CFA. The measurement model was adjusted to increase model fit, there were 23 items deleted from a total of 55 items to improve the fit of the measurement model. Three components of influencers consisting of expertise, similarity and attractiveness, and benefit in brand image were deleted in order to improve the model. Finally, it found that the measurement model was well harmonious and consistent with empirical data. The fit indices were in acceptable range, $\chi^2 = 647$, Degrees of Freedom (df) = 386, p-value = 0.00, $\chi^2/df = 1.676$, RMSEA = .041, GFI = .911, CFI = 0.981, TLI = 0.975, NFI = 0.954, and IFI = 0.981.

The reliability and validity of the measurement model were verified. Factoring loadings of observed and latent variables were higher than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010), in a range of 0.721-0.915, and Standard Error (SE.) in a range of 0.016-0.063. T-values of all variables were higher than 1.96 and significant at 0.000.

Table 4 Statistics of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Factor	Factor Loading	SE	t-value	e
Beauty Influencers on Social Media (INFU)				
Trustworthiness (TRUS)				
Trus1- Beauty influencers are reliable.	.821	.034	12.011	.67
Trus2- Beauty influencers have a wide variety of cosmetics.	.857	.026	11.129	.72
Trus4- Beauty influencers can freely express their opinions on reviewed products.	.808	.034	12.146	.65
Trus5- Beauty influencers are sincere, and do not lie to get sponsorships.	.770	.044	12.583	.59
Respect (RES)				
Res1- Beauty influencers are recognized and loved by many followers.	.893	.034	6.678	.80
Res2- Beauty influencers have a large number of interactive video/content followers such as Like, Share and Comment.	.881	.036	7.198	.78

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Table 4 Statistics of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (Continue)

Factor	Factor Loading	SE	t-value	e
Res3- Beauty influencers are gaining popularity in the cosmetics industry.	.768	.063	9.851	.59
Res4- Beauty influencers are famous and have a huge number of followers.	.770	.037	12.234	.59
Brand Image (BRIM)				
Attributes (ATB)				
Atb1- Beauty influencers make you feel that cosmetics are of good quality.	.876	.023	10.499	.77
Atb2- Beauty influencers let you know that the products are diverse, with different attributes.	.863	.023	10.865	.74
Atb3- Beauty influencers reflect you the social status	.743	.045	12.417	.55
Atb4- Beauty influencers reflect your desired personality.	.762	.039	12.669	.58
Atb5- Beauty influencers make you know about beauty/luxury/modern cosmetic packaging.	.837	.029	10.786	.70
Atb6- Beauty influencers organize various activities/programs	.721	.049	12.909	.52
Attitudes (ATU)				
Atu1- you feel satisfied after watching videos of beauty influencers	.905	.016	10.780	.82
Atu2- you have a good feeling about beauty influencers who present a good reputation for the cosmetics products	.907	.017	10.750	.82
Atu3- you conform to beauty influencers who give positive information about cosmetics	.900	.018	11.091	.81
Purchasing Decision (PURD)				
Problem Recognition (PRO)				
Pro1- You want cosmetics because you get reviews from beauty influencers.	.848	.028	10.741	.72
Pro2- You need cosmetics because you desire to look like beauty influencers.	.844	.026	10.317	.71
Pro3- You want cosmetics because you get promotion information from beauty influencers	.832	.031	10.591	.60
Information Search (INF)				
Inf1- You find out more information about cosmetics from beauty influencers before making a purchase.	.915	.019	8.191	.84
Inf2- You find information from various channels before making a purchase.	.914	.016	10.423	.84

Table 4 Statistics of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (Continue)

Factor	Factor Loading	SE	t-value	e
Inf3- You find information from people using the products.	.906	.028	10.741	.82
Evaluation of Alternatives (EVA)				
Eva1- You decided to buy cosmetics based on price and quality.	.777	.032	11.005	.60
Eva2- You decided to buy cosmetics based on the reputation and credibility of beauty influencers	.867	.022	10.230	.75
Eva3- You decided to buy cosmetics based mainly on the reputation of the cosmetic brand.	.823	.025	11.729	.68
Purchase (PUR)				
Pur1-You decided to buy a cosmetic product because of online influencers	.886	.019	10.301	.79
Pur2- You decided to buy a cosmetic product because you agreed with what influencers persuade and build customer relationships technique	.847	.023	11.500	.72
Pur3- You decided to buy because of advertising via various media.	.863	.020	11.168	.74
Post-purchase (POS)				
Pos1- You feel satisfied after using the cosmetics based on the beauty influencers.	.909	.016	9.180	.83
Pos3- You will recommend your friends or acquaintances to buy cosmetic products as social media influencers suggested	.830	.028	11.516	.69
Pos4- You will repurchase the used products recommended by beauty influencers.	.875	.021	10.541	.77

Table 5 Reliability and Validity of the Measurement Model

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	BRIM	INFU	PURD
BRIM	0.948	0.902	0.865	0.948	0.950		
INFU	0.940	0.886	0.839	0.954	0.916	0.941	
PURD	0.973	0.877	0.865	0.977	0.930	0.851	0.936

Remarks; BRIM= Brand Image, INFU = Beauty Influencers on social media, PURD = Purchasing Decision, and Sig. at 0.00

According to table 4 and 5, the statistical results supported the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The reliability and convergent validity were verified, Composite Reliability (CR) of all variables was > 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014), BRIM=0.948, INFU = 0.940, and PURD= 0.973. The Average Variance

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Extracted (AVE) of each variable was higher than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2014), BRIM=0.902, INFU = 0.886, and PURD = 0.877. Additionally, the discriminant validity of the measurement model was confirmed, considered from $MSV < AVE$ (Hair et al., 2010), $BRIM = 0.865 < 0.902$, $INFU = 0.839 < 0.886$, and $PURD = 0.865 < 0.877$.

5.1.3 Structural Equation Model and Hypothesis Testing

The SEM's findings showed that the hypothesis model was consistent and harmonious with empirical data. The fit indices were good; $\chi^2/df = 1.573$, $RMSEA = .038$, $GFI = .917$, $CFI = 0.984$, and $NFI = 0.958$ which were very close to 1. The structural equation model is demonstrated in figure 1.

According to figure 1, the finding revealed that cosmetic buying decisions were influenced by influencers and product image. Influencers had a significant positive impact on the product image and buying decisions. Interestingly, the impact of influencers plays a more critical role in product image (0.92) rather than that in buying decisions (0.20). It can be interpreted that influencers can sufficiently create positive product images more so than stimulate buying decisions. Additionally, product image had a high positive impact on buying decisions (0.75) of cosmetic's consumers.

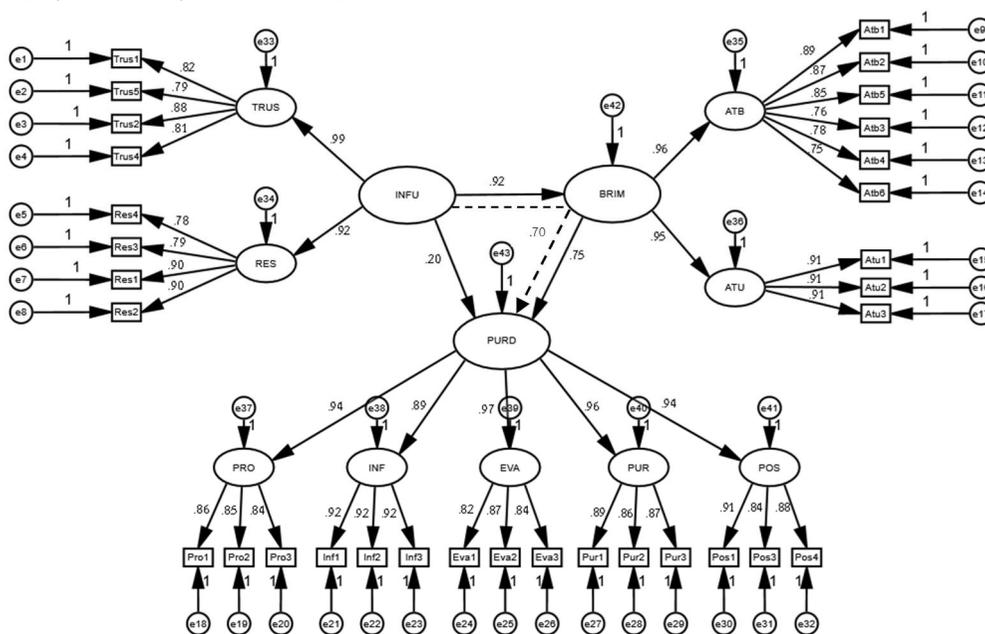


Figure 2 The Structural Equation Model Result

Source: The authors

5.1.4 Hypothesis Testing

From the structural equation model, the findings showed that all hypotheses were supported. Firstly, online influencers have a significant positive impact on purchasing decisions, the coefficient was 0.20, significant at 0.001. Therefore, H1 was supported. It is also found that online influencers had a critical impact on the brand image (0.92), significant at 0.001. Then, H2 was accepted. In addition, H3 was supported as brand image positively impacted purchasing decisions, significant at 0.001. Lastly, H4

was also confirmed as the brand image was a mediator between the relation of influencers and buying decisions, the indirect effect was .70, and the total effect was .89.

5.2 Discussion

The research confirmed that beauty influencers on social media have a positive influence on cosmetic purchasing decisions corresponding to previous findings in both Thai and international papers (Ritveeradej, 2019; Ananda & Wandebori, 2016; Putri & Trenggana, 2021; Takoolsom, 2019; Sa-ngardam et al., 2020). It indicated that beauty influencers play important role in buying decisions in the internet era. Putri and Trenggana (2021) claimed that social media influencers have a significant influence on purchase intention, with an effective value of 0.434. Ritveeradej (2019) found that micro-Influencers affected the decision to buy organic cosmetics online media of women in Bangkok. Similarly, Ananda and Wandebori (2016) found that reliability, expertise, and attractiveness of influencers were projected into consumer attitudes to determine the impact on purchase intent. The research of Takoolsom (2019) found that overall cosmetic purchase intent was positively correlated with perceptions of the composition of well-known individuals who endorse cosmetics. The image aspect being the similarity was the highest important followed by the trust aspect, expertise and respect, and acceptance. Additionally, Sa-ngardam et al. (2020) found that similarity, trust, and expertise affect the perception of the cosmetic brand value, however, beauty influencers on social media had less impact on cosmetic buying decisions. Differently, Hermanda et al. (2019) found that social media influencers did not have a significant influence on purchase intention. Additionally, Nurhandayani et al. (2019) also found there was no influence between social media and consumers' purchase intention.

The finding revealed that beauty influencers on social media had a direct influence on brand image. This is consistent with research by Hermanda et al. (2019), it has been shown that there is a significant positive correlation between social media influencers and brand image. Furthermore, Dreifaldt, and Drennan (2019) found that online influencers had a strong influence on consumer purchasing intention, including perception or brand image. Nurhandayani et al. (2019) found that social media influencers and their brand image had a significant level. This is because a brand image is formed only when there are intermediaries such as social media influencers who build direct relationships with consumers and promote brand loyalty.

The brand image of cosmetics had a positive influence on cosmetic purchasing decisions. Consistently, Hiranprateep (2016) found that brand image and attitude influenced the purchase intention of cosmetics, and the composition of attitude found that attributes and benefits correlated with the intention to buy cosmetics. Siriwong et al. (2017) found that attributes, benefits, and values affect cosmetics buying decisions. Significantly. Thaihan et al. (2019) found that the overall brand image-level was high. If considered on a case-by-case basis, it was found that it was at a high level in all aspects, including attributes, culture, benefits, personality, values, country of origin, and users respectively.

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Beauty influencers on social media have a positive influence on purchasing decisions, mediated by brand image. Surprisingly, the social media beauty influencer had an indirect impact higher than a direct impact on decision making. It can be interpreted that beauty influencers can be a good tool to build brand image rather than using it for stimulating the decision-making of consumers. Similarly, brand image was a mediator in tea product buying decisions. However, there was less intention from previous papers focusing on mediating the brand image between influencers and purchasing decisions. Hermanda et al. (2019) found that social media influencers had no significant influence on purchasing decisions but had a significant positive influence on brand image. However, it found that tea products' brand image was a significant mediate the influence of positive word-of-mouth on purchase intention (Prabandari et al., 2018).

6. Conclusion

Both influencers and images positively influence making the decision to buy cosmetics. However, it can be concluded that influencers are suitable to create brand images rather than stimulating a decision to buy.

7. Suggestions

7.1 Suggestions from Research

From the finding, it is recommended that marketers and business operators should make use of influencers to build a brand image, which in turn influences customers to make a purchasing decision. Other marketing strategies such as discounts, giftsets, coupons, testimonials, free trials, etc. should be simultaneously applied with cosmetic influencers to effectively induce the purchase decision since the finding revealed that the influencers had an indirect effect, rather than a direct effect on the purchase decision. In the case of building brand image, the study suggested that cosmetic marketers should emphasize product attributes especially quality and cost-effectiveness, while innovation and product development may concern themselves with allergic reactions and irritations from using the products. Furthermore, attitude toward online influencers is very crucial for building brand image, the characteristics of influencers should be a reflection of targeted customers. Additionally, marketers should scrutinize the expertise and depth of product knowledge when selecting influencers.

7.2 Suggestions for Further Research

It is a study to investigate the decision-making of online customers focusing on cosmetics via influencers and brand image. However, there are many factors intervening in the decisions, therefore, other factors such as demographics, marketing mixes, competitors, etc. should be concerned. Additionally, the limitation of this study is respondents' profiles who were aged 21-30 years, single,

with education being in bachelor's degree, and income <10,000 baht per month. Other focused generations should be studied. Qualitative research is recommended to find out depth detail about decision-making influenced by influencers.

7.3 Policy Recommendations

7.3.1 Business operators and marketers should focus on building a brand image that aligns with the qualities of high-quality cosmetic products offered at reasonable prices. Additionally, selecting beauty influencers who are well-suited to the products and genuinely use them is essential for enhancing brand credibility and fostering a positive brand image.

7.3.2 Online beauty influencers should prioritize presenting products that are engaging and up-to-date. They must also maintain honesty with consumers to build trust and strengthen relationships between consumers and the brand.

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