

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON GEN Z MALE CONSUMERS' CHOICE OF NATURAL SKINCARE PRODUCT IN BANGKOK

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to expand current understanding of the opinions of male Generation Z consumers regarding natural skincare products. For this purpose, a series of in-depth interviews was conducted within a means-end chain analytical framework during July and August 2022, with 15 interviewees being involved in the interviews. Following an Attribute-Consequence-Value sequence, 24 basic product attributes, 20 consequences, and 2 value beliefs were revealed and visualized in a Hierarchical Value Map. The findings suggest that retailers should focus on different formula, price, and packaging, that focus on male customers supporting their customers to achieve self-esteem and create a skincare routine.

Keywords: Male Consumer, Natural Skincare, Generation Z, Means-end Chain Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, consumers have tended to avoid products containing synthetic ingredients or chemicals due to a heightened awareness of health, appearance, and environmental concerns (Hartmann & Klaschka, 2017; Kim & Chung, 2011). This has resulted in an ever-growing demand for organic or natural products. To better understand consumer demand for organic products, natural skin care products were selected as the research focus. The global market size for natural skin care products reached USD 6.7 billion in 2021, while the industry is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.6% from

2022 to 2030 due to a growing concern of the negative effects of chemicals on the skin (Grandwiewresearch.com). In this milieu, Thailand is no exception.

In Thailand, skincare is a must due to weather and pollution. Thailand is steadily strengthening its position as a main market of skincare products in the Southeast Asian region, with the market size for skincare products at \$2.57 billion in 2021, and an expected increase of more than 3% annually from 2021 to 2026 (GlobalData, 2022a). In general, hypermarkets and supermarkets are the main channels from which consumers purchase skincare products followed by health & beauty stores (GlobalData, 2022b). The quantity of raw materials, qualified

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workers, and high standards all contribute to the sector's growth. Also, at present, consumers are becoming more conscious of their health and self-image (Hanspal & Devasagayam, 2017) which has led to greater expansion. As a result, organic and natural beauty and care products are in high demand in Thailand. Moreover, it is possible for the synthetic chemicals we put on our skin to enter the bloodstream and accumulate in our bodies (Wright, 2019; Hwang et al. 2020). In this context, using organic and natural products becomes an effective way to maintain a chemical-free skin care routine; we should use organic and natural products. By doing so, consumers will likely enjoy the following many benefits of using natural skincare products. First, natural skincare products do not contain synthetic chemicals such as sodium laurel sulfate, mineral oil, laurite sulfate, or the potentially toxic residues from pesticides that might cause problems like irritation if used repeatedly (Twonilesc.com). In addition, natural skincare products are made of naturally grown ingredients, free from harmful pesticides and fertilizers, they do not pollute the soil, water, and air. However, Thailand is famous for its skincare and cosmetic industry as most of the ingredients used are completely natural; these products are acquired all over the world (Ma, 2021). It is common in Thailand to find a variety of both local and foreign brands with a variety of natural skincare products.

More interestingly, this study attempts to target Generation Z consumers as they are the driving force for the success of future marketing (Priporas et al. 2017; Morgan, 2016; Wood, 2013)

The first generation of people born in the twenty-first century is known as Gen Z. Practitioners and academics use different terminologies to describe this new consumer segment in the literature. Gen Z is the more common name for this cohort; other names include iGeneration, iGen, iMillennials, Post-millennials, Centennials, and Pivotal (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014; Twenge, 2017; Fromm & Read, 2018; Llopis-Amorós et al.,

2019; Ameen & Anand, 2020; Cotet et al., 2020). Although many writers disagree on the generation's borders, Gen Z is most often defined as people born between 1996 and 2010 (Fromm & Read, 2018; McCrindle, 2018; Parry & Battista, 2019; Pew Research, 2019; Dorsey & Villa, 2020). This market segment possesses a high level of education, and Gen Z is always linked to a large amount of data (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014; Chaney et al., 2017). Gen Z is innovative, autonomous, resourceful, and ambitious. They have a natural ability to negotiate and a drive for entrepreneurship (Twenge, 2017; Seemiller & Grace, 2018; Frunzaru & Cismaru, 2018; Weise, 2019).

Gen Z has a significant impact on how much money families spend on food, electronics, clothes, holidays, and vehicles (Sharma & Sonwaney, 2015; Setiawan et al., 2018; Dorsey & Villa, 2020; Yang et al., 2020). The generation's oldest members have already completed their undergraduate degrees and are beginning their jobs (Vasudeva & Barea, 2017; Seemiller & Grace, 2018; Parry & Battista, 2019).

According to Vallone et al. (2016), brands must link their message with Gen Z's contemporary lifestyle objectives and interests in order to effectively engage this cohort and foster brand affinity. More important than trendy looks and the quest for originality is brand congruence with the cohort's basic values (Topic & Mitchell, 2019). To achieve brand alignment with Gen Z's basic values, which is essential to establishing long-term partnerships, research into the factors that influence brand affinity among this generation is essential. By carefully incorporating the brand message into their life, developing a rich brand story and encouraging Gen Z to collaboratively narrate the brand story, may assist in discovering an affinity for the company's values (Vallone et al., 2016; Weise, 2019; Dorsey & Villa, 2020).

This research attempts to answer the research question: what factors motivate male Gen Z consumers to choose natural skin care products? For this purpose, in-depth

interviews were conducted based on a means-end chain model, which is a technique for revealing the reasons why consumers choose certain products (Olson & Reynolds, 2001)

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) attempts to explain how attitudes and actions relate to one another in human activity (Fishbein, 1967). Based on people's current attitudes and behavioral intentions, it is mostly used to forecast how they will behave. The results that an individual anticipates to occur from engaging in a certain conduct drive their decision to do so. The idea was created in 1980 by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen and was based on earlier work in social psychology, persuasion models, and attitude theories. According to Fishbein's beliefs, attitudes and behaviors are related. The main goal of the TRA is to understand a person's voluntary conduct by looking at the primary motivating factors behind their behavior, indicating that a person's intention to perform a behavior is the primary driving force of his or her actual behavior (Carmack & Lewis-Moss, 2009; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen, 1985). The key elements of intention are attitude and subjective norms. Attitude refers to a person's favorableness or unfavorableness towards a thing, an object, an action, or a person, while subjective norms indicate the importance of members of reference groups who might influence an individual's intention to carry out an action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Additionally, whether or not the person will actually participate in the behavior depends on the normative component. The theory holds that the intention to engage in the behavioral action comes before the actual behavior (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017). The assumption that engaging in the activity will produce a certain consequence gives rise to this intention, which is referred to as behavioral intention. (Ajzen, 1985). The theory emphasizes behavioral intentions as it claims that these

intentions "are affected by attitudes to behaviors and subjective norms" (Park Hee, 2000). Stronger intentions likely result in greater effort to carry out the action (Conner & Norman, 2022). Further, Ajzen developed the theory of planned behavior (TPB) in order to advance the conceptualization and validation of the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen, 2002). The concept of the TPB was to include perceived behavior, which refers to "people's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior" (Lin et al. 2021, p. 4; Ajzen, 1991). Together with attitudes and subjective norms, the TPB has been used to predict human behavior based on the hypothesis that human beings are "rational and make systematic use of the information available to them" (Carmack & Lewis-Moss, 2009, p. 659; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

2.2. Means-End Chain Analysis

Means-end chain analysis is a collection of methods for asking specific customers why they chose a certain product and analyzing their replies in terms of results that may be generalized (Olson & Reynolds, 2001). This theory has been applied to reveal how product attributes are associated with consequences generated from functional and psychological aspects, thereby satisfying consumers' individual personal values (Kaciak & Cullen, 2006; see Gutman, 1982, 1984; Howard, 1977; Olson & Thomas, 1983; Young & Barbara, 1975). As a cognitive construct, the findings of the MEC theory can be analyzed through an attribute-consequence-value (ACV) sequential procedure (Al-Abdullatif & Aladsani, 2021; see also Gengler et al., 1999; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). The result of the MEC theory is "a hierarchical value map (HVM) that systematically categorizes individuals' perceptions of a product or service" based on analyzing the associations between attributes, consequences, and the value perceived by an individual consumer (Al-Abdullatif & Aladsani, 2021, p. 3; Gutman, 1982; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). Within the scope of ACV, product attributes (A) that are vital to consumers in making a

buying decision must be highlighted, while consequences (C) aim to reveal consumers' feelings and feedback after using a particular product, from functional and psychological aspects. Finally, an individual consumer's perception of value will be concluded based on the findings of A and C. In this context, HVM is developed to show the linkages (Lin, 2002).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the A-C-V sequence, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data, in which 15 interviewees were involved in interviews conducted via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. A saturation technique was used, meaning that the interviews would be stopped at the point when the interviewer is no longer receiving new information to address the research questions of concern (Guest et al, 2020; see also Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Guest et al, 2006; Given, 2016; Birks & Mills, 2015; Olshansky, 2015). The respondents in the study were Gen Z males aged 18-25 years who had no experience of natural skin care products, and who lived in Samut Prakan, Thailand. A snowball sampling technique was utilized in collecting the data, through which potential respondents were recruited via referrals.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents the main findings related to product attributes, consequences, and value. The findings are reported as follows:

Q1. Have you ever used natural skincare products?

This question was a screening question, allowing the potential interviewees to be filtered, with only those who had no prior experience of using natural skincare products being accepted. Consequently, the result states that all 15 male interviewees answered "No".

Q2. Under what circumstances would you use natural skincare products?

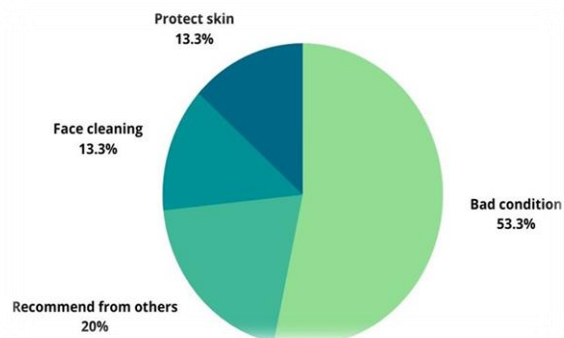


Figure 1: Under what circumstances would you use natural skincare products?

This question attempts to analyze which conditions lead men to intentionally use natural skin care products. 53.33% of the respondents reported that they would use skin care products after they had experienced a problem with their facial skin, followed by 20% stating a recommendation from others, and the remainder stated wanting to clean their face or to protect their facial skin, each accounting for 13.33%. This question revealed that an important factor motivating male customers to purchase natural skin care products is encountering facial skin problems.

Q3. What are the top three things you care about before buying natural skin care products?

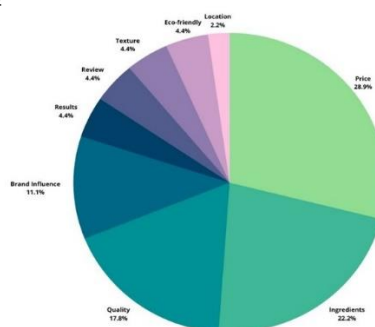


Figure 2: 3 things that male consumers are concerned with the most before buying natural skincare products.

This question aims to reveal the three most important factors interviewees care about when purchasing natural skincare products. Most of the respondents said that they considered the most important factor to

be the price of the natural skincare products, accounting for 28.89% of the sample. At the same time, 22.22% of the respondents answered the ingredients of the natural skincare products, 17.78% of the respondents expressed that the quality of the natural skincare products would be among their top three most important factors, while 11.11% of the respondents expressed brand influence. The remaining factors, namely product effectiveness, reviews, texture, and eco-friendliness, each accounted for 4.44%, followed by location with 2.22%.

To sum up, the price, ingredients, and quality, of natural skin care products were identified as the top three influencing factors for male consumers to purchase natural skincare products.

Q4. Why do you think (answer from question 3) are important?

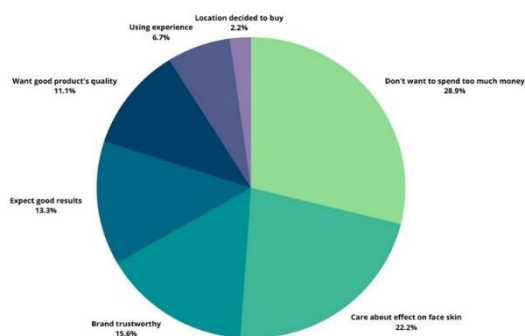


Figure 3: Why do you think (answer from question 3) are important?

This question was asked to reveal the reasons why male customers thought that the identified influential factors were important concerns when purchasing natural skincare products. 28.89% of interviewees answered that they didn't want to spend too much, followed by caring about the effect on their facial skin at 22.22%, brand trustworthiness at 15.56%, expecting good results at 13.33%, wanting good product quality at 11.11%, the experience of using the product 6.67%, and the location where it was decided to buy the product at 2.22%.

To sum up, most male consumers believed that price is the most influential factor. This may be because the price of

natural skincare products is relatively more expensive, so greater consideration is given to price when purchasing. The respondents preferred the cost-effectiveness of natural skincare products. In addition, they would pay attention to the ingredients contained in natural skin care products because they care about the effect of the ingredients on the facial skin and expect good results after using the products. In addition, trust in brand credibility is also important as it allows them to feel they can trust in the good quality of products from a brand with a good reputation.

Q5. Which product features are most valuable to you?

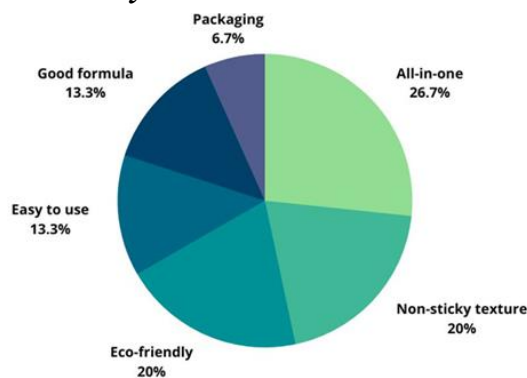


Figure 4: Valuable product features

This question attempts to analyze the most valuable product attributes that can increase male customers' interest in purchasing natural skin care products. As shown in figure 4, 26.67% of the respondents wanted an all-in-one function in a natural skin care product, followed by non-sticky texture and environmentally friendly status, each accounting for 20% of the respondents. In addition, easy-to-use and well-formulated products were also features of interest to the consumers, each accounting for 13.33%. The last interesting product feature for male consumers was packaging, which accounted for 6.67%.

Through this question, non-sticky, eco-friendly and all-in-one were the most valuable product features for the respondents, each of which can go a long way to increasing consumer interest in purchasing natural skincare products.

Q6. From which channel do you want to get information about natural skincare products?

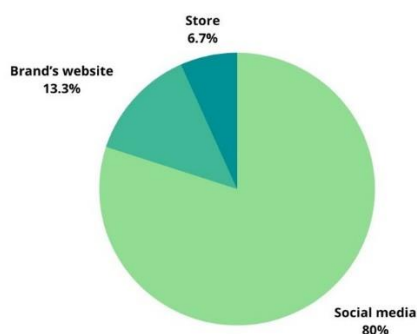


Figure 5: Preferred channel to get information about natural skincare products.

The answers from this question provide insight into the channel that male customers use to receive information regarding skincare products, allowing companies to be able to directly promote and provide specific messages to male audiences. 73.33% of interviewees used social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Tiktok, and Blogs, as the most preferred channels to get information. Meanwhile, other channels that male customers wanted to receive information from regarding the products were the brand's website and store, which accounted for 13.33% and 6.67% respectively.

Q7. Where do you prefer to buy natural skincare products?

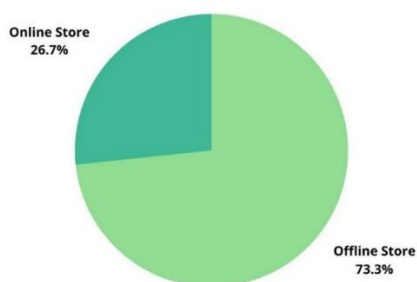


Figure 6: Preferred place to buy natural skincare products.

This question analyzes the preferred locations for male customers to purchase natural skin care products. Most of the respondents answered offline stores,

including department stores, supermarkets and beauty stores, accounting for 73.33%. The remainder specified online stores, including the brand's official website, Shopee, or Lazada, accounting for 26.67%.

Through this question, it can be seen that most male consumers believe that offline is the preferred channel for purchasing natural skin care products, rather than online stores, as they focus on seeing the real thing to guide them in understanding related issues before purchasing. At the same time, they can also make preliminary comparisons of existing products.

Q8. What results do you expect after using natural skin care products?

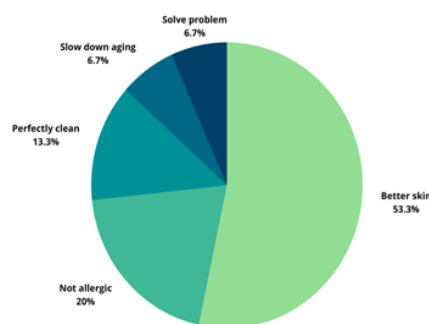


Figure 7: Expected results after using natural skincare products.

The answers reflected the expected results that male respondents wanted after using natural skin care products. Most respondents (53.33%) expected better skin after using natural skin care products. 20% believed that natural skin care products do not cause allergic skin reactions. In addition, 13.33% of male respondents wanted to have completely clean, natural skin care products that could keep their skin healthy. Finally, slowing aging and solving existing problems were also mentioned, each accounting for 6.67% of respondents. From this, it can be concluded that having better skin, non-allergenic formulation, perfect cleanliness, anti-aging, and an ability to solve facial skin problems were the most expected results from using the natural skin care products among the interviewees.

Q9. In your opinion, what is the main reason why most men are reluctant to use skin care products?

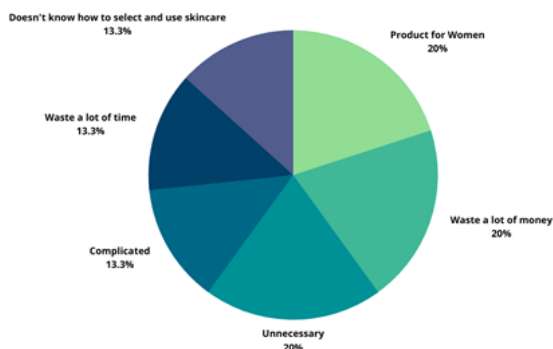


Figure 8: Main reasons not to use natural skincare products.

This question attempts to analyze the reasons why men are reluctant to use skin care products. Most of the respondents stated that natural skin care products are women's products, and that it is not necessary to spend a lot of money on natural skin care products, each accounting for 20%. At the same time, 13.33% of the male respondents said that they are complicated and they might end up wasting time while not knowing how to choose and use skin care products.

To sum up, most male consumers still believe that the use of skin care products is a women's patent, and the use of skin care products by men will weaken their masculinity, so they are reluctant to use skin care products as one of their daily activities.

Q 10. What do you think if natural skincare products mention "for men skin" on packaging?

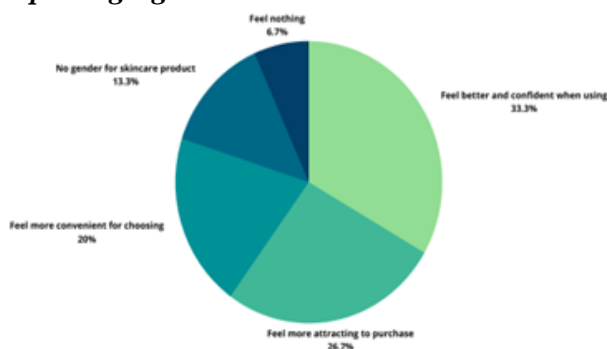


Figure 9: What do you think if natural skincare products mention "for men skin" on packaging?

This question attempts to analyze the impacts of for "men's skin" being mentioned on the packaging of the natural skin care products. 33.33% of respondents believed that they would feel better and more confident when using these products. They also felt that the purchase was more attractive, and the choice was more convenient, accounting for 26.67% and 20% of the male respondents respectively. In addition, 13.33% of respondents believed that natural skin care products should be equally usable by both men and women, while 6.67% stated that they would feel nothing in response to the statement.

Through this question, it can be seen that mentioning "male skin" on the packaging is important, as it suggests that this can encourage male consumers to make a decision to purchase and use natural skin care products.

Q11. Would you buy natural skincare if brands advertised more on men?

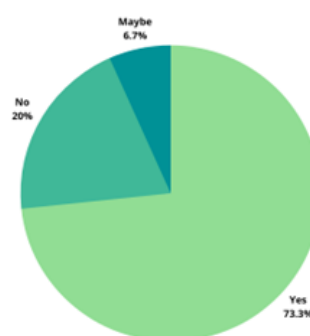


Figure 10: Would you buy natural skincare if brands advertised more on men?

This question analyzes the impact of branding emphasizing the impact of male advertising on male consumers' decisions to purchase natural skin care products. 73.33% of male respondents said that they would buy more natural skin care products if brands did more advertising with men. On the other hand, 20% of male respondents said they would not buy more natural skincare products if brands were advertising more with men. The remaining 6.67% of male respondents said that if the brand was more heavily promoted in male ads, and they might be likely to buy

more natural skin care products. Based on the feedback from the male respondents who answered "yes", it can be seen that male consumers tend to prefer targeted advertising. Male consumers tend to buy more natural skin care products if brands advertise male-specific products, such as natural skin care products for men.

Q12. What do you think if you need to pay more for natural skincare products?



Figure 11: What do you think if you need to pay more for natural skincare products?

This question attempts to analyze the feelings of male respondents when required to pay more for natural skin care products. Most male respondents (46.67%) did not want to spend more on natural skin care products. 40% said that if natural skin care products were effective and of good quality, there would be no problem. Finally, switching to other skin care products and depending on the personal financial situation each received the same percentage of 6.67%. Therefore, it can be concluded that the premium price may be a factor preventing male consumers from purchasing natural skin care products.

Q13. Will you be more interested in natural skincare products if the products are recommended by people around you?

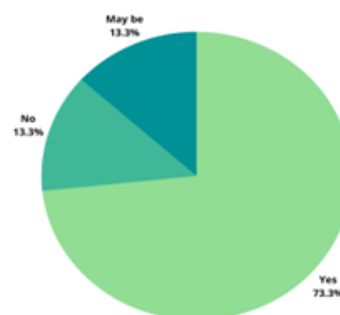


Figure 12: Will you be more interested in natural skincare products if the products are recommended by people around you?

73.33% of male respondents would be more interested in natural skin care products when recommended by people around them. On the other hand, 13.33% of male respondents would not be more interested in natural skin care products. This finding reveals the importance of social and peer influences.

Q14. Are you interested in using natural skincare in the future?

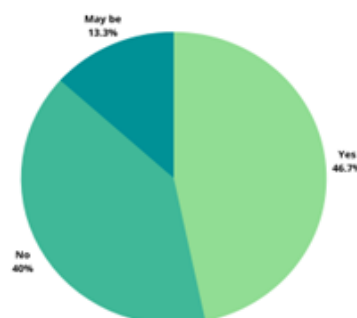


Figure 13: Are you interested in using natural skincare in the future?

This question revealed the intentions of the respondents to use natural skin care products. 46.67% said they would use natural skin care products in the future. Meanwhile, 40% said that they would not use natural skin care products in the future. The remaining 13% of the respondents said they were likely to use natural skin care products in the future.

It can be concluded that the vast majority of male consumers will tend to use natural skin care products in the future.

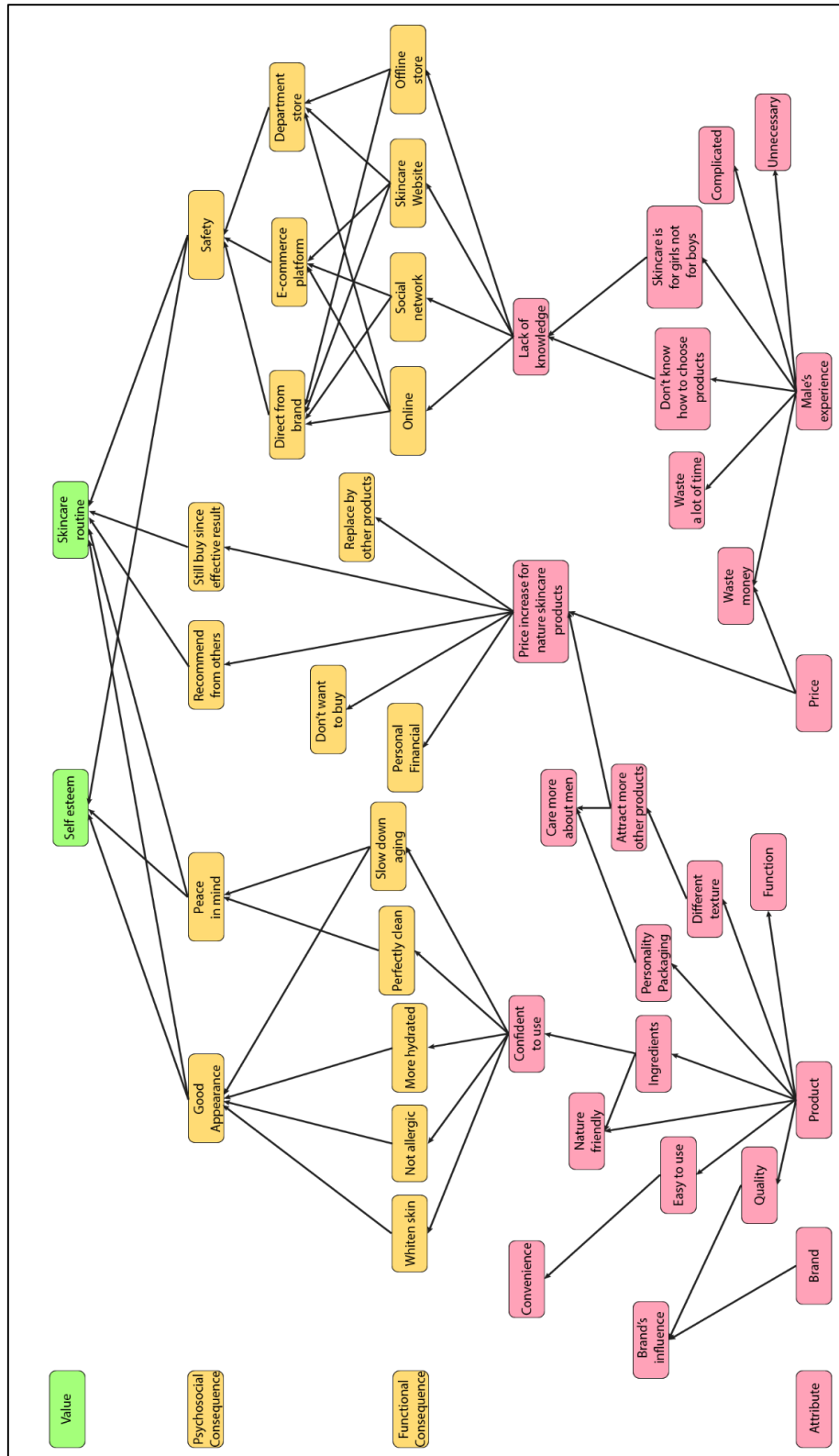


Figure 14: Attribute-Consequence-Value chart

As shown in Figure 14, 24 basic product attributes, 20 consequences, and 2 value beliefs were mentioned in the HVM. At an individual-value level, two value beliefs were concluded namely “self-esteem” and

“skincare routine”. This ACV chart briefly illustrates the links between the attributes, consequences, and individual value beliefs, when investigating male consumers’ purchase intentions for natural skincare products.

Mainly the respondents felt that using natural skin care products improved self-esteem and increased self-confidence. At the same time, they also have a need to use skin care products as part of their daily life. At the consequence level, twelve consequences influenced the value of "Skincare routine," ranging from "Good appearance" to "Peace of mind", "Recommendations from others", "Still buying due to effective results" and "Safety". This result suggests that male consumers require a skincare routine in many aspects. Second, self-esteem is linked with "Good appearance", "Peace of mind" and "Safety" consequences. Through these results, it can be seen that male customers want to develop skin care habits and build self-esteem through the use of natural skin care products. At the attribute level, starting from brand, product, price and experience, the main attributes were finally concluded, including "confident to use", "price" and "lack of knowledge"; these were most associated with the consequence level. In addition, the respondents also cared about ingredients, personalized packaging, and emphasized differentiation from women's skincare products.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Through the analysis of the interview information, the main factors influencing male consumers' purchasing and use of natural skin care products were identified. According to Rational Action Theory (TRA), the respondents exhibited diversity-seeking behavior, and their values reflected their own attitudes and psychological activities. This section will focus on natural skin care problems and any suggestions or solutions to address them.

5.1. Problems Of Natural Skincare Products

1) The majority of respondents generally agreed that using natural skin care products made them more confident and boosted their self-esteem. However, male consumers largely lacked the initiative to make a

purchase due to their lack of experience and brand knowledge.

2) Respondents demonstrated a need to use skin care products as part of their daily lives. However, their behavior will be limited by various factors, such as price, knowledge, traditional ideas and so on. They are heavily influenced by peer influence, meaning that they are likely to buy and use natural skin care products if someone around them recommends it to them. This finding echoes the influence of collectivism manifested in Thai society.

5.2. Solutions

According to the above problems, there are some recommendations for brands and stores in avoiding these problems.

1) Brands should increase awareness among male customers by using posts and advertisements for male-specific products. The image of the product should reflect the personality of men, so as to attract male customers.

2) The price of natural skin care products for male customers should be relatively reasonable. Male customers tend to consume more rationally, and they pay more attention to cost performance. Therefore, when promoting men's natural skin care products, customers should be truthfully informed about the effect of use, and the effect should not be exaggerated. In addition, brand merchants can also provide comparative information to let male consumers know that using natural skin care products is worth the money.

3) Brands must also study the shopping behavior of male consumers in order to launch male-targeted promotions that are likely to attract more male customers, both online and offline.

6. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings provide managers or businessmen with new information on natural skin care products targeting male users in the market, from which they can learn more about

male customers' perceptions of natural skin care products. The following recommendations are made:

1. Precise marketing and promotion, strengthening the concept of men's exclusive use. This can make more male consumers feel more comfortable in the buying process, thereby improving their shopping and usage experience.

2. In addition, companies should promote natural skin care products through male influencers. Currently, female influencers promote the most natural skin care products. Therefore, many men still believe that the use of skin care products is only for women, while the need for men to use skin care products has been marginalized. Therefore, if companies use male Internet celebrities for publicity, it may subtly change male consumers' inherent perception of skin care products, leading to more male customers buying and using natural skin care products.

3. In addition, brands must ensure the quality of natural skin care products, as male consumers tend to consume rationally, and most people think that high-quality products will bring the best results.

Finally, the market size of men's skin care products will undergo accelerated growth. With the development of social technology and the improvement of skincare awareness, more and more male consumers are aware of the importance of skincare. Therefore, skincare brands should focus on products that directly target male consumers, and natural skin care products for men should be refined to be professional and high-end. In addition, skincare brands can continue to innovate and motivate consumers by changing formats and even packaging, such as adjusting colors, font sizes, and specifying "men only".

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