

Strategic Management of Digital Customer Signals and Brand Image for Social-Commerce Cosmetics: Evidence from Bangkok Consumers

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Abstract

In social commerce, cosmetics firms compete less for physical shelf space and more for attention, credibility, and speed of market learning. This study examines the direct and indirect effects of Digital Customer Signals (DCS) on online purchase intention for cosmetics, with brand image as a mediator. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey of Bangkok consumers ($n = 400$) and regression-based mediation analysis, the study tests whether DCS predicts brand image and online purchase intention. The final model shows that DCS significantly predicts brand image ($\beta = 0.551$, $p < 0.001$), while both DCS ($\beta = 0.223$, $p < 0.001$) and brand image ($\beta = 0.537$, $p < 0.001$) significantly predict purchase intention; the indirect effect through brand image is 0.296 and the total effect is 0.519, indicating partial mediation. The findings suggest that cosmetics managers should govern peer-generated reviews, ratings, and user-generated content as a strategic signal environment through measurement discipline, authenticity controls, and timely response routines in order to stabilize brand image and convert attention into intention.

Keywords: social commerce, cosmetics, digital customer signals, brand image, online purchase intention, mediation, Bangkok

1. Introduction

Social commerce has transformed the cosmetics industry by relocating discovery, evaluation, and conversion into platform environments that combine content, community, and checkout. Consumers increasingly judge cosmetics through peer reviews, influencer showcases, livestream demonstrations, and

platform cues rather than relying only on firm-controlled communication, a pattern widely observed in electronic word-of-mouth (eWO) and social-commerce research (Albayrak & Ceylan, 2021; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Qiu & Zhang, 2024; Verma et al., 2023). Although the literature commonly frames such peer communication as eWOM, a managerial perspective requires a broader concept. This study, therefore, uses Digital Customer Signals (DCS) to refer to visible, enduring, and measurable customer-generated traces such as ratings, narrative reviews, comments, recommendations, and user-generated demonstrations. Unlike a narrow interpersonal-persuasion view, DCS can be monitored, governed, and translated into managerial learning.

Cosmetics provide a suitable context because they are experience-based products associated with perceived risk relating to fit, authenticity, and safety. In Bangkok, consumers frequently interact with both local and cross-border cosmetics through social platforms and marketplace ecosystems, making the city a relevant setting for examining how signal-based decision-making shapes brand image and online purchase intention. Prior work on social-commerce trust, Thai cosmetics consumption, and beauty-platform behavior likewise shows that authenticity concerns, product fit, and platform-enabled demonstrations are central in this category (Cam Thuy, 2025; Rizomyliotis et al., 2024; Senali et al., 2024; Taghipour & Loh, 2017).

This study contributes in three ways. First, it reframes peer communication as a managerial signal environment rather than only an interpersonal influence mechanism. Second, it empirically tests a mediated model in which brand image channels part of the effect of DCS on online purchase intention. Third, it offers practical guidance for cosmetics firms regarding review governance, credibility design, and analytics routines in social-commerce markets.

Accordingly, the objectives are to examine the effect of DCS on brand image, to assess the direct effects of DCS and brand image on online purchase intention, and to test the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between DCS and online purchase intention among Bangkok consumers.

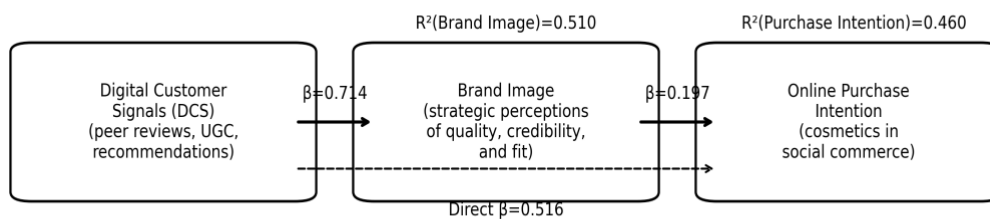


Figure 1. Conceptual model (Digital Customer Signals -> Brand Image -> Online Purchase Intention) with standardized paths.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model and clarifies the logic used to test the proposed relationships among DCS, Brand Image, and Online Purchase Intention. The model shows that DCS operates through two routes. The first route is indirect: stronger signals from reviews, ratings, comments, and user-generated content improve Brand Image, which then raises Online Purchase Intention. The second route is direct: consumers may respond to visible peer signals even before they fully translate those signals into broader brand meaning. This dual-path structure is important because it reflects how social-commerce decision-making often combines rapid heuristic processing with cumulative brand evaluation. The model also indicates meaningful explanatory power for both dependent constructs. Thus, Figure 1 functions not only as a schematic overview but also as a strategic map of how firms can convert platform-based customer feedback into stronger perception and higher purchase readiness in Bangkok's cosmetics market.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Digital customer signals as a management tool

Meta-analytic research shows that online peer communication significantly influences intention to buy, but the strength of that effect depends on product type, platform conditions, and information quality. From a strategic-management perspective, the important issue is not only that peer communication matters, but that it forms a quantifiable signal environment that firms can monitor and shape (Albayrak & Ceylan, 2021; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Qiu & Zhang, 2024; Verma et al., 2023).

DCS is managerially relevant because signals are cumulative, searchable, and comparable across time. Platforms aggregate dispersed opinions into ratings, comments, and visible engagement cues, enabling both consumers and firms to interpret evolving market sentiment. Research based on the elaboration likelihood model also indicates that message informativeness, source cues, and popularity signals influence online persuasion, implying that firms can improve the credibility and usefulness of DCS through disclosure, verification, and content design (Moradi & Zihagh, 2022).

DCS may also serve as market intelligence. Review themes and comment patterns can reveal unmet needs, product problems, and emerging preferences more quickly than slower survey cycles. At the same time, signal environments can be noisy or manipulated, especially when affiliate incentives or undisclosed sponsorships reduce authenticity. Therefore, DCS should be treated as a strategic asset that requires governance, measurement, and response routines. Evidence from beauty-industry influencer and affiliate contexts similarly suggests that disclosure quality and authenticity controls remain important antecedents of consumer response (Sesar et al., 2022).

2.2 Brand image as a strategic perception resource

Brand image refers to the set of consumer perceptions associated with a brand, including perceived quality, credibility, uniqueness, and symbolic meaning. In social commerce, brand image is not built solely through official brand communication; it is co-constructed through the interaction between firm activity, user-generated content, and platform context.

Prior studies indicate that customer-generated content can strengthen brand image when it provides consistent and credible product-use evidence. In cosmetics, where consumers value demonstrations and personal fit, user-generated content can make brand claims more believable. Research on online reviews and social media marketing further suggests that digital interaction can reinforce brand associations, brand equity, and purchase intention when communication is credible and coherent (Alzate et al., 2022; An & Ngo, 2025; Zeqiri et al., 2024).

2.3 Online purchase intention in cosmetics social commerce

Purchase intention represents a consumer's stated likelihood of buying a product and is widely used as a behavioral outcome in digital-commerce research. In social commerce, decision cycles are compressed by shoppable posts, in-app checkout, and livestream offers, but low friction does not eliminate uncertainty. Consumers still depend heavily on cues of credibility, trust, and perceived quality.

Recent evidence shows that seller trust, product trust, price fairness, and authentic interaction all shape purchase intention in social-commerce settings. In the beauty segment, short-video marketing and livestream selling can strengthen buying intention because they compress search time while increasing perceived authenticity and social proof (Cam Thuy, 2025; Rizomyliotis et al., 2024; Senali et al., 2024).

2.4 Hypothesis development

Based on the reviewed literature, this study proposes that DCS should improve brand image because credible peer signals reduce uncertainty and strengthen social confirmation. Brand image should, in turn, increase purchase intention because it provides a consolidated perception of quality and trustworthiness. DCS is also expected to have a direct influence on purchase intention because consumers may use peer signals as decision shortcuts even before a stable brand evaluation is fully formed.

H1: Digital Customer Signals positively influence brand image for cosmetics products in social commerce.

H2: Brand image positively influences online purchase intention for cosmetics products in social commerce.

H3: Digital Customer Signals positively influence online purchase intention for cosmetics products in social commerce.

H4: Brand image mediates the relationship between Digital Customer Signals and online purchase intention.

3. Methodology

This study used a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationships among Digital Customer Signals, brand image, and online purchase intention in the cosmetics social-commerce context of Bangkok, Thailand.

3.1 Sampling and data collection

A non-probability purposive sampling approach was used because the study required respondents with relevant social-commerce cosmetics experience. Data were collected through an online questionnaire.

Inclusion criteria required respondents to be at least 18 years old, to live in Bangkok or regularly purchase in Bangkok's cosmetics market, to have prior exposure to social-commerce cosmetics content, and to have made at least one prior online cosmetics purchase. After screening and data cleaning, 400 valid responses were retained for analysis.

3.2 Instrument development and measurement

The questionnaire measured three multi-item constructs using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree): Digital Customer Signals (DCS), Brand Image (BI), and Online Purchase Intention (PI). DCS items captured reliance on peer reviews, ratings, comments, recommendation cues, and user-generated content. Brand image items captured perceived quality, credibility, and favorable brand associations. Purchase-intention items captured willingness and likelihood to purchase cosmetics online.

To strengthen measurement rigor, item wording was aligned with prior eWOM and social-commerce studies and then adapted to the DCS framing. Reliability and convergent validity were reviewed through internal-consistency and loading-based checks, while procedural remedies such as anonymity assurance and clear instructions were used to reduce common-method bias.

3.3 Data analysis strategy

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, item-level and construct-level descriptive statistics were examined. Second, correlations and standardized path estimates were used to test the direct relationships among the constructs. Third, mediation analysis was applied to decompose the total effect of DCS on purchase intention into direct and indirect effects through brand image.

4. Results

4.1 Measurement and descriptive results

Table 1 reports item-level descriptive statistics, while Table 2 summarizes construct-level means and standard deviations. Overall, respondents reported relatively high levels of brand image and purchase intention, with moderately high reliance on digital customer signals. These patterns suggest an active, high-engagement cosmetics market in which peer-generated information plays a meaningful role in evaluation and readiness to buy.

Table 1. Item-level descriptive statistics.

Item	Mean	SD	Min	Max
DCS1	4.199	0.768	1.000	5.000
DCS2	3.660	0.796	1.000	5.000
DCS3	2.848	1.244	1.000	5.000
Brand image1	4.013	0.815	1.000	5.000
Brand image2	4.179	0.766	1.000	5.000

Table 1 presents item-level descriptive statistics for the observed indicators used to measure DCS, Brand Image, and Online Purchase Intention. The pattern of means suggests that respondents generally expressed favorable evaluations across the instrument, especially on items related to trust in peer information and willingness to purchase cosmetics through social-commerce channels. Variation at the item level also matters because it helps identify which statements generated stronger consensus and which ones captured more diverse consumer experiences. The spread shown by the standard deviations indicates that most responses clustered within a moderate range rather than showing extreme dispersion, which supports the stability of the measurement items. At a managerial level, Table 1 demonstrates that the scale captured meaningful differences in how Bangkok consumers read reviews, interpret user-generated content, and connect those signals to brand impressions and buying intention. This makes the table valuable for validating the empirical foundation of the later path and mediation analyses.

Table 1. Item-level descriptive statistics (Continued).

Item	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Purchasing 1	4.197	0.782	1.000	5.000
Purchasing 2	4.101	0.815	1.000	5.000

Table 1 (Continued) completes the item-level profile by presenting the remaining indicators, particularly those associated with purchase intention. These rows are important because they show that intention-related items also recorded comparatively high average scores, indicating that respondents were not merely passive observers of online cosmetics content but consumers with concrete purchase readiness. The continuation confirms that the instrument maintains consistency across constructs: each item remains within a plausible statistical range, and none appears highly erratic or inconsistent with the overall distribution. From an interpretation standpoint, Table 1 (Continued) strengthens confidence that the later structural results are built on stable observed measures rather than on isolated high-performing indicators.

It also suggests that purchase intention in this context is shaped by a blend of information quality, signal visibility, and broader consumer confidence in the brand. Thus, the continuation is analytically necessary because it shows the full item set supporting the construct-level and structural findings reported later in the article.

Table 2. Construct-level descriptive statistics.

Construct	Mean	SD	Min	Max
DCS	3.569	0.665	1.000	5.000
Brand Image	4.096	0.683	1.000	5.000
Purchase Intention	4.149	0.687	1.000	5.000

Table 2 summarizes the construct-level descriptive statistics and gives a clearer view of the overall tendencies in the sample. The results show that Brand Image and Purchase Intention achieved relatively high mean values, while DCS remained moderately high, indicating that respondents frequently relied on peer-generated online information when evaluating cosmetics products. This pattern is theoretically meaningful because it implies that the social-commerce environment in Bangkok is already mature enough for customer signals to function as a normal part of decision making rather than as a peripheral influence. The standard deviations remain controlled, which suggests that the sample was reasonably cohesive in its evaluations. In practical terms, Table 2 indicates that firms cannot separate brand management from signal management: consumers' perceptions of image and their willingness to buy are already embedded in a highly interactive digital information setting. Accordingly, the construct means provide an important descriptive bridge between measurement adequacy and the later causal path analysis.

4.2 Correlation, path analysis, and mediation

The findings support the view that peer-generated information should be understood as a strategic signal environment rather than only as interpersonal word-of-mouth. The strong link between DCS and brand image indicates that consumers construct brand meaning through visible signals such as reviews, comments, and demonstrations. This reinforces the managerial importance of authenticity, disclosure, and response discipline, in line with prior studies on review persuasion, influencer credibility, and review-derived brand meaning (Alzate et al., 2022; Moradi & Zihagh, 2022; Sesar et al., 2022).

The significant direct effect of DCS on purchase intention suggests that consumers also use social signals as fast decision heuristics in social-commerce environments. At the same time, the strong brand image-purchase intention relationship confirms that durable perceptions of credibility and quality still matter, especially in cosmetics, where risk and personal fit remain salient. This pattern is consistent with prior evidence from meta-analytic eWOM studies, trust-based social-commerce research, and beauty-

market investigations (Albayrak & Ceylan, 2021; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Senali et al., 2024; Taghipour & Loh, 2017).

The partial mediation pattern implies a dual-route mechanism: some consumers convert digital signals directly into intention, while others first process those signals into a broader brand evaluation. This interpretation is compatible with recent studies linking social media marketing, brand equity, and cosmetic purchase intention in emerging markets (An & Ngo, 2025; Zeqiri et al., 2024).

Table 3. Correlation matrix.

Variable	DCS	Brand Image	Purchase Intention
DCS	1.000	0.551	0.519
Brand Image	0.551	1.000	0.660
Purchase Intention	0.519	0.660	1.000

Table 3 reports the correlation matrix among the core constructs and provides the first direct statistical view of their interrelationships. The positive associations across all variables indicate that stronger DCS are linked with better Brand Image and higher Online Purchase Intention. The strongest correlation appears between DCS and Brand Image, suggesting that peer-generated reviews, comments, and usage demonstrations substantially shape consumer perceptions of quality, credibility, and fit. The correlation between Brand Image and Purchase Intention is also positive and meaningful, reinforcing the idea that a stronger brand perception supports downstream buying readiness. Importantly, the coefficients are substantial without suggesting complete redundancy among constructs, meaning that the variables are related but still conceptually distinct. This is important for later mediation testing because a mediator must be connected to both the predictor and the outcome while still representing its own explanatory mechanism. In short, Table 3 establishes the empirical groundwork for the structural paths tested in the following tables.

Table 4. Path analysis results.

Path	Standardized beta	t value	p value	R ² (dependent)
DCS -> Brand Image	0.551	13.914	0.000	0.303
DCS -> Purchase Intention (direct)	0.223	5.403	0.000	0.471
Brand Image -> Purchase Intention	0.537	12.997	0.000	0.471

Table 4 presents the standardized path coefficients and explains how strongly each hypothesized direct relationship contributes to the model. The path from DCS to Brand Image is strong and statistically significant, indicating that visible consumer feedback and peer endorsements materially shape how cosmetics brands are perceived in social commerce. The direct path from DCS to Purchase Intention is also significant, which means that some consumers react to signal-rich environments immediately, without relying exclusively on a fully formed brand-image evaluation. In addition, the path from Brand Image to Purchase Intention remains robust, confirming that favorable strategic perceptions continue to matter even in fast, content-driven digital settings. The R-squared values reported in Table 4 show that the model explains a meaningful share of variance in the dependent constructs, providing evidence that the proposed framework has practical explanatory power. Overall, Table 4 demonstrates that the study's structural model is not only statistically significant but also strategically relevant for understanding cosmetics purchasing behavior in Bangkok.

Table 5. Mediation effects.

Effect type	Standardized effect
Indirect (DCS -> Brand Image -> Purchase Intention)	0.296
Total (DCS -> Purchase Intention)	0.519

Table 5 focuses specifically on mediation and decomposes the relationship between DCS and Purchase Intention into indirect and total effects. The indirect effect through Brand Image is substantial, which indicates that a considerable portion of the influence of customer-generated signals works by improving consumers' strategic perceptions of the brand. This finding is important because it shows that signals do not operate merely as short-term prompts; they also contribute to deeper meaning formation that later supports buying intention. At the same time, the total effect remains larger than the indirect

component alone, implying that the mechanism is one of partial rather than full mediation. From a managerial perspective, Table 5 suggests that firms should not treat reviews, comments, or creator content only as conversion tools. They are also inputs into brand-building. In theoretical terms, the table confirms that Brand Image is a meaningful explanatory bridge linking the signal environment to consumer intention. Therefore, Table 5 gives the clearest statistical evidence for the study's mediation argument.

Table 6. Summary of hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis	Path	Standardized beta	t value	p value	Result
H1	DCS -> Brand Image	0.551	13.914	0.000	Supported
H2	DCS -> Purchase Intention (direct)	0.223	5.403	0.000	Supported
H3	Brand Image -> Purchase Intention	0.537	12.997	0.000	Supported

Table 6 consolidates the hypothesis-testing results and provides a concise decision summary for the proposed relationships. Each hypothesis receives empirical support, indicating that the theoretical model is internally coherent and well aligned with the observed data. H1 confirms that DCS significantly improve Brand Image, H2 shows that Brand Image significantly increases Purchase Intention, and H3 demonstrates that DCS also have a direct positive influence on Purchase Intention. H4 is supported through the mediation evidence, showing that Brand Image carries part of the effect of DCS toward purchase readiness. The value of Table 6 lies in its synthesis: rather than reading each coefficient separately, the reader can see immediately that the model holds together as an integrated explanation of social-commerce cosmetics behavior. This makes the table especially useful for linking the statistical findings to the broader discussion and for showing practitioners which relationships are most dependable when designing platform and branding strategies.

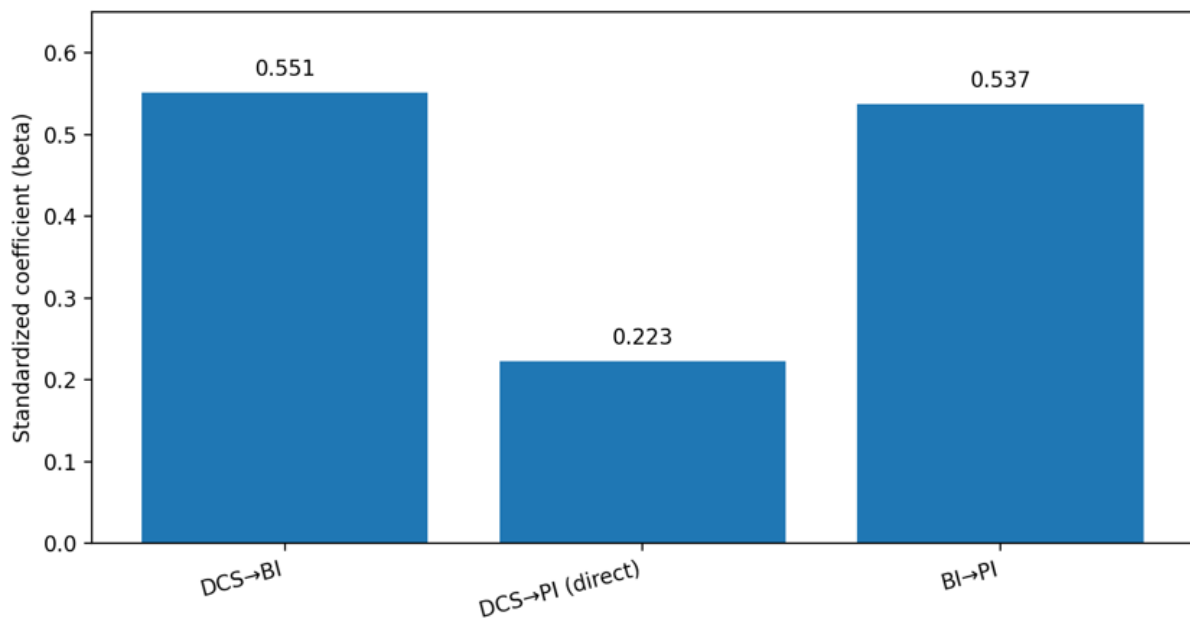


Figure 2. Standardized path coefficients.

Figure 2 visualizes the standardized path coefficients and translates the structural-model results into a form that is quickly interpretable. The tallest bars correspond to the paths from DCS to Brand Image and from Brand Image to Purchase Intention, showing that both relationships are not only statistically significant but also substantively important. The shorter bar for the direct path from DCS to Purchase Intention indicates that this route remains meaningful, yet its size is smaller than the pathway that first passes through Brand Image. This visual contrast helps the reader understand the logic of partial mediation more intuitively than coefficients alone. In strategic terms, Figure 2 suggests that customer-generated signals have their greatest impact when they strengthen consumers' brand perceptions, although a direct conversion effect also exists. Consequently, the figure reinforces the article's central argument that signal management and brand management should be integrated rather than treated as separate functions.

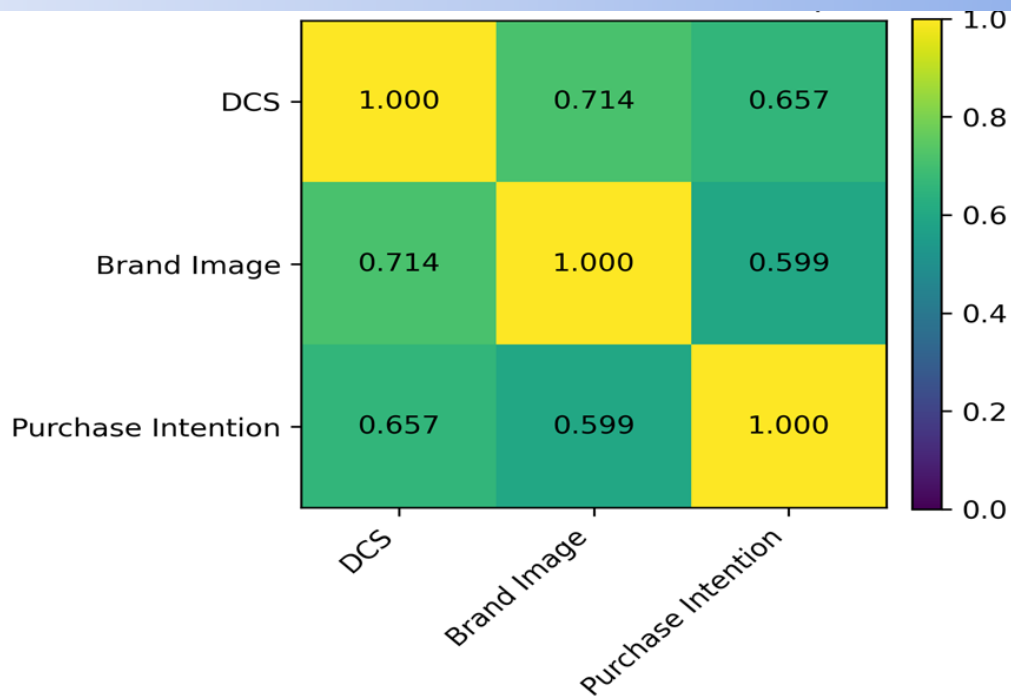


Figure 3. Correlation heatmap (construct-level).

Figure 3 displays the construct-level correlation heatmap and gives an immediate visual summary of how closely the major variables move together. The strongest shaded cell is the association between DCS and Brand Image, which indicates that signal-rich online environments strongly shape consumer judgments about quality, credibility, and product fit. The relationships between DCS and Purchase Intention and between Brand Image and Purchase Intention are also clearly positive, showing that information cues and strategic perceptions both matter for buying readiness. The heatmap is useful because it complements the numeric correlation matrix by allowing the reader to compare strengths of association at a glance. It also supports the later mediation analysis by visually demonstrating that the predictor, mediator, and outcome are all linked in the expected direction. Thus, Figure 3 strengthens the coherence of the empirical narrative and makes the relational structure of the model easier to understand.

5. Discussion

The findings support the view that peer-generated information should be understood as a strategic signal environment rather than only as interpersonal word-of-mouth. The strong link between DCS and brand image indicates that consumers construct brand meaning through visible signals such as reviews, comments, and demonstrations. This reinforces the managerial importance of authenticity, disclosure, and response discipline. The significant direct effect of DCS on purchase intention suggests that consumers also use social signals as fast decision heuristics in social-commerce environments. At the same time, the strong brand image - purchase intention relationship confirms that durable perceptions of credibility and quality still matter, especially in cosmetics, where risk and personal fit remain salient.

The partial mediation pattern implies a dual-route mechanism: some consumers convert digital signals directly into intention, while others first process those signals into a broader brand evaluation. This has strategic implications because cosmetics firms must simultaneously manage short-cycle conversion mechanisms and longer-cycle brand-building processes.

6. Managerial Implications

First, cosmetics firms should treat DCS as a measurable managerial asset. Reviews, ratings, comments, and creator demonstrations should be monitored systematically and classified into actionable themes such as product fit, authenticity, safety, service quality, and delivery experience.

Second, signal credibility must be actively governed. Verified-purchase mechanisms, clear disclosure for paid creators, balanced handling of critical reviews, and timely responses to complaints can protect brand image and reduce perceived manipulation.

Third, firms should align content design, pricing fairness, and service reliability. The evidence suggests that signal visibility can accelerate conversion, but only when it is supported by credible brand meaning and consistent seller conduct.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its cross-sectional design, which supports association and mediation testing but not strong causal inference. Future longitudinal research could examine how signal environments and brand image evolve over time. The study also relies on self-reported intention rather than observed behavior. Future work could combine survey data with clickstream or transaction data. Finally, the Bangkok setting is strategically relevant, but comparative research across markets would strengthen generalizability.

8. Conclusion

This study shows that peer-generated information in cosmetics social commerce functions as a strategic signal environment that influences both brand image and online purchase intention. By reframing eWOM as DCS, the manuscript highlights the managerial importance of measurement, credibility governance, and response routines. Evidence from Bangkok consumers demonstrates that DCS has both direct and indirect effects on purchase intention, with brand image serving as a partial mediator.

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