



Online Beauty Culture and the Monetization Practices of Thai Social Media Influencers on TikTok

Received: 22 January 2024

Revised: 8 May 2024

Accepted: 9 May 2024

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This paper examines the monetization strategies and the hybridization of beauty trends among the prominent Thai beauty influencers. Through an analysis of influencers' profiles, content, and interviews, the paper utilizes the daily walkthrough method to examine how the emerging online beauty culture takes place through the video streaming platform, TikTok, in Thailand. Our inquiry focuses on understanding influencers' strategies for generating beauty-related content on TikTok, revealing that influencers strategically craft their online personas and categorize various types of video content into curated collections. These practices reflect a trend towards enhanced "shoppability," facilitating the commodification of self through the display of online imagery and videos. In addition, the findings reveal that influencers play a significant role in celebrating diversity by showcasing a variety of beauty trends that speak to cultural discourses surrounding feminine beauty in contemporary Thai society. Our findings highlight the evolving landscape of beauty influencer culture on TikTok in Thailand, where influencers not only monetize their online presence but also advocate for positive social change and drive community building on social media platform.

Research Article

Abstract

Keywords

beauty influencers;
TikTok;
social media

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Received: 22 January 2024

Revised: 8 May 2024

Accepted: 9 May 2024

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บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจกลยุทธ์การทำกำไรและการผสมผสานเทรนด์ความงามในหมู่บิวตี้อินฟลูเอนเซอร์ที่มีชื่อเสียงในประเทศไทย โดยใช้การวิเคราะห์โปรไฟล์ เนื้อหา และสัมภาษณ์ ใช้การวิเคราะห์ผ่าน Walkthrough Method เพื่อสำรวจวัฒนธรรมความงามออนไลน์ผ่านแพลตฟอร์มตึกต็อกที่เจริญขึ้นอย่างมากในประเทศไทยในปัจจุบัน ผลการศึกษาพบว่าอินฟลูเอนเซอร์ใช้กลยุทธ์สร้างตัวตนผ่านการจัดประเภทเนื้อหาวิดีโอต่างๆ ในหมวดหมู่ความงามที่สะท้อนแนวโน้มโดยเน้นไปที่ “การขายสินค้า” ผ่านการแสดงภาพและวิดีโอออนไลน์ นอกจากนี้ ผลการศึกษายังค้นพบว่าอินฟลูเอนเซอร์มีบทบาทสำคัญในการเผยแพร่ความหลากหลายโดยถ่ายทอดผ่านเนื้อหาความงามที่สอดคล้องกับวัฒนธรรม ความงามสตรีในสังคมไทยร่วมสมัย ผลการศึกษายังเน้นถึงภูมิทัศน์ที่เปลี่ยนแปลงไปของวงการบิวตี้อินฟลูเอนเซอร์บนตึกต็อกในประเทศไทยซึ่งแสดงให้เห็นว่าอินฟลูเอนเซอร์ไม่เพียงแต่ทำกำไรจากการสร้างเนื้อหาในแพลตฟอร์มออนไลน์ แต่ยังสนับสนุนการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางสังคมในเชิงบวกและขับเคลื่อนการเสริมสร้างชุมชนในสื่อโซเชียล

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1. Introduction

The short video app, TikTok, has become increasingly popular in Thailand in recent years. With functions that enable users to create short videos, edit, upload and share social media content, the app has quickly gained attention and established itself as one of the most used platforms worldwide. With the rapid development of social media, it was reported that Thailand is ranked the top for market penetration with over 49.3% of the overall users on TikTok (Lexicon Thai, 2023). The total number of users have risen to over 40.28 million active users throughout the country. Ostensibly, the platform offers various business features such as shop tab, product showcase, online forms of advertisements that further enhance the opportunities for users to directly purchase products online (TikTok, 2024). Recent research has revealed that TikTok's emerged as a prominent business tool, particularly for disseminating product awareness content through short-form videos and enhancing audience engagement across platforms (Bangkok Bank Innohub, 2022). In particular, the available features of TikTok facilitate the online form of businesses among content creators and influencers, enabling them to generate monetized media content that promote the self-branding techniques and strategies on the platform (Putri, Prasetya, Handayani, & Fitriani, 2023). In promoting online content, influencers can generate content in various ways such as creating lip-syncing and generating challenge videos, reviewing products, and adding a link that allows audiences to directly make a purchase online. Thus, shaping the overall content formats, storytelling ideas and online forms of engagement throughout the Thai influencer industry.

In this vein, the rise of TikTok among influencers has led to the intertwining of beauty trends with entrepreneurial practices among beauty influencers in Thailand. This involves collaborations with brands to promote beauty and cosmetic products, the circulation of beautified media images, and the promotion of before-and-after practices through short promotional videos. This involves the practices of how influencers perform various uses of techniques such as curating highly constructed social media images that generate a sense of inspiring narratives of "having it all" on social media" (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p. 1). In this context, Duffy and Hund (2015) stated that the prevailing narratives regarding the impact of online platforms is often associated with women's economic empowerment which often stem from assumptions surrounding the benefits of highly personalized and flexible employment opportunities. These modes of entrepreneurial practices demonstrate an increasing interests in the promotional materials of discourses of labour where the capabilities of platforms such as TikTok are employed by emerging new media people and influencers. The constructions of these practices poses the questions for understanding how online beauty personas are constructed on social media. In particular, research indicates that the most engaging beauty content on TikTok includes product reviews, product showcases, and before-and-after demonstrations (Shoo, 2024). Additionally, statistics reveal that popular content categories in Thailand encompass lifestyle, talent/performance, entertainment, beauty/fashion, and education (Virayasiri, 2020).

[pc1] Thailand, thus, plays a significant role in the beauty and cosmetics market within Southeast Asia,

boasting a market value of \$5.3 billion and securing a top-three position in the region (German Thai Chamber of Commerce, 2023). With the rapid expansion of TikTok in Thailand, the objective of this article is to analyze the performance of Thai beauty influencers and how they construct their online personas. It aims to provide insights into how influencers utilize TikTok to enhance opportunities and promote the commodification and monetization of beauty practices in the Thai digital economy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Rise of Thai Beauty Influencers

The influencers industry in Thailand originated with the emergence of Internet idols among young Thai women, who gained recognition through Internet forums and discussion boards in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018). Platforms contributing to the rise of online beauty culture included sites like Pantip.com, Dek-D.com, Bloggang.com, and Jeban.com (Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018). In this vein, Hund and McGuigan (2019, p. 2) state that “new marketing and analytics companies appeared, offering a variety of services to identify and monetize these new social ‘influencers’” that have enabled them to generate and monetize their content online. They have discussed how previously recognized bloggers have been provided the opportunity to rise to fame during the ‘Web 2.0’ eras (Hund & McGuigan, 2019, p. 2). This may include the utilization of various online platforms to establish beauty related content, the promotional materials of reels and short videos that are connected with various social media platforms. Thus, offering several opportunities for internet famous people to maintain a significant status on social media.

In terms of the monetization practices, recent study revealed that there has been an upward trend of influencer marketing since 2020 where the growth has risen up by 30% , costing over 2 billion for the influencer marketing campaign in the country (Supakan, Loetsakulcharoen, & Thanlap, 2021). The rise in prominence of social media practices is expecting strong economic growth throughout 2024-2025 where businesses are focusing on the trends of “shoppertainment” which integrates entertainment and educational elements that is projected to reach up to \$12.4 billion by 2025 across social media (Bangkok Post, 2023). Furthermore, the beauty market in Thailand is experiencing rapid expansion with an increasing focus on beauty related content creation. According to statista, revenue in Thailand’s cosmetics segment, especially within beauty trends, is anticipated to grow steadily from 2024-2028, resulting to an additional \$184.4 million throughout the country (Statista, 2024). The proliferation of social media practices, particularly in the realms of lifestyle and beauty-related content, underscores the significant influence of beauty trends within the Thai beauty industry. Research indicates a preference among Thai consumers for anti-aging and skincare products, with a strong emphasis on natural practices. As Lim (2023) put it “Thailand’s beauty

culture is deeply rooted in its rich traditions and a profound appreciation for holistic wellness as well as aesthetics". The promotional materials associated with beauty practices, thus, contribute to shaping cultural trends. These trends signify the fusion of "the incorporation of branded content into youth digital culture, where interactive opportunities for self-expression become increasingly intertwined with consumer culture" (Jorge, Marôpo, & Nunes, 2018, p. 76). Given the importance, the paper seeks to fill the gap by exploring the noteworthy representation of beauty trends and the significance development of Thai online beauty industry. The primary focus is on understanding the idealization of beauty practices specifically within the context of brand engagement on platform such as TikTok in Thailand.

2.2 The Cultural Impact of Thai Beauty Standard

In understanding the influence of Thai beauty culture, Van (2000, p. 129) stated that:

Appearance matters. Beautiful appearances matter even more. In Thailand, beauty can override family connections, money or class, as well as other ascribed and achieved attributes of women, and to lesser degree, men (Van, 2000, p. 129).

This statement reveals the contrasting gender relations that place emphasis on the conditions of achieving beauty ideals (Van, 2000). Not only does physical appearance allow women to gain confidence in themselves, but it is also concerned with the conditions of attaining higher status throughout modern Thai society. It suggests how the concept of beauty determines social acceptance which is an important factor for economic opportunity among both men and women in Thailand (Van, 2000). In this instance, Puathanawat (2022, p. 41) define the idealization of beauty as "the attainment of highly constructed media images that homogenize the cultural representation of Thai beauty ideals. These ideals reinforce the global standard of Westernized and Northeast Asian styles of beauty, emphasizing the curative displays of light and tanned skin, a high nose bridge, and a V-shaped face". In this context, the promotional content of enhanced media images encompasses various aspects, including the notion of possessing a "slim and slender figure; youthful appearance; white, clear, and radiant skin; large, firm and shapely bust and odorless hidden spot" (Phakdeephassook, 2009, p.71). Within this framework, Abidin and Limkangvanmongkol (2018) argue that "cultural norms often determine cultural intelligibility for conventional beauty and femininity: in Thai culture, beautiful women are expected to have white, clear, and radiant skin" (Phakdeephassook, 2009, p. 63, as cited in Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018, p. 103). Concurrently, the incorporation of representations reflecting Caucasian beauty styles is increasingly evident in Thai media formats, showcasing a cultural phenomenon that encourages the cultivation of a tan skin tone (Puathanawat, 2022).

In understanding the emergence of Thai beauty culture, the promotional materials of beautified media images are closely interconnected with cultural trends that both reinforce and define aesthetic standards and career opportunities among Thai women (Puathanawat, 2022). In this vein, the analysis will fill the gap in understanding the influence of influencers on beauty trends, examining the extent to which

the promotional values of Thai beauty ideals play out and how the values of beauty shape the socio-cultural dynamics of the Thai online beauty communities.

2.3 Understanding the Use of TikTok Among Influencers

Scholars have provided insights into understanding the emergence of TikTok and the distinct characteristics that differentiate the functionality of the platform features (Kaye, Chen, & Zeng, 2020). In their research, Kaye et al., (2020) examine the differences and similarities between TikTok and Douyin in which they provide insights into understanding the features of the platforms and the impact on social media economies. Their findings discuss the infrastructures of the platforms that inform our understandings of the users' practices. Through a detailed analysis of both platforms, Kaye et al., (2020) introduce the term "parallel platformisation" that highlights the process through which both platforms operate, where users strive for online visibility with the potential to benefit from virtual currency exchange (Kaye et al., 2020, p. 20).

Similarly, Zulli & Zulli (2020, p. 11) explore the interactive utilization of Internet memes, and the influence of this on shaping online users' behavior. They posit that users' engagements with TikTok are intricately connected to the "imitation" and "replication" features inherent in the platform. This highlights how users emulate the sounds provided within the app to communicate and broadcast themselves to the public. These practices draw attention to engaging and sharing content that mirrors the evolving trends in comprehending relational interactivities on social media (Zulli & Zulli, 2020).

In understanding the shifts in the platform infrastructure, Zhang (2020) asserts that "TikTok attains its power on commercial monetization, content distribution, and acquisition of data sources through its infrastructural ambition of building a "video encyclopedia" that can be saleable" (Zhang, 2020, p. 1). Her study underscores the significant role of video streaming platforms and their impacts on cultural and social practices in China, combining integration with e-commerce. Meanwhile, Kennedy's (2020) article explores the utilization of TikTok, characterizing women's engagement as "a celebration of girlhood." She examines the use of digital media space, particularly in private settings like bedrooms, where girls and young women showcase themselves with the goal of expanding their media visibility (Kennedy, 2020).

In this vein, Kennedy (2020, p. 1071) notes that "in digital spaces like TikTok, such risk of humiliation and degradation – whether in relation to the expression of sexual desire or in terms of one's self-representation – is very much embedded within the architecture and ethos of the platform". Her article also sheds light on the construction of femininity, reflecting cultural trends and social values, where "the most-followed TikTok star is a slim, white, normatively attractive teenage girl" (Kennedy, 2020, p. 1073). This points to underlying conditions where the curated displays of girls and women on TikTok have sparked criticism regarding social issues that demand immediate attention in the online digital economy (Kennedy, 2020).

In terms of understanding users' practices, Verma (2021) explores how TikTok's emergence has empowered regular social media users to achieve fame and showcase their talents, regardless of their popularity status on other social media platforms. The performances of these practices revolves around the lip-syncing and the creation of entertaining and engaging short video content (Verma, 2021). These practices are noteworthy as they unveil how TikTok navigates cultural trends, offering users the opportunity to gain recognition and present their images, influencing the emergence of popularity status on social media (Verma, 2021).

In particular, the promotional materials of generating online videos are often associated with the curation of influencers' posts, characterized by lip-syncing and the increasing trend of curating Internet memes (Kaye et al., 2020; Zulli & Zulli, 2020). These meme constructions are widely "replica[ted]" and "imita[ted]" (Zulli & Zulli, 2020, p. 2) among users and social media influencers, featured through the algorithm-based format highlighted on the For You page as users enter the app. The growing prominence of these trends highlights the evolving practices that mirror the "technological affordances" (Cunningham & Craig, 2017, p. 72) of the platform features.

In addition to the abovementioned features, the platform provides a range of business features, including a shop tab, product showcase, and online advertising options, thereby expanding opportunities for users to make direct online purchases (TikTok, 2024). These features support the development of online businesses for content creators and influencers, allowing them to create monetized media content that promotes self-branding techniques and strategies on the platform (Putri et al., 2023).

2.4 The Entrepreneurial Trends of Online Labour Conditions

Scholars have characterized the entrepreneurial trends of social media activities as "the cultural quality of cool, creativity, autonomy, self-investment, compulsory networking, portfolio evaluations, international competition and foreshortened careers" (Neff, Wissinger, & Zukin, 2005, p. 207). This emphasizes the creative expansion of social media engagement among users online. Through the generation of online content, individuals can create the opportunities to "reinvent themselves, change lives and influence others and society" (Yu, Xu, & Sun, 2022, p. 254). However, Yu et al. (2022) point out that an increasing number of unemployed individuals are seeking self-employment opportunities as digital entrepreneurs on social media. This highlights the precarious nature of labour conditions that necessitate specific skills in maintaining fame and a significant status online.

In their research, Elias, Gill, & Scharff (2017) offers valuable insights into understanding the labour conditions of generating beauty trends, which they describe as "mark[ing] out a new intellectual terrain in beauty studies" (Elias et al., 2017 p. 5). The enactments of beauty practices encompass various performances, such as sharing images of makeup tutorials, conducting product reviews, and engaging with followers. These actions mirror the ongoing negotiations of beauty norms, carefully curated and enacted

in the Thai social media sphere. Meanwhile, Lazar (2017, p. 51) also asserts that women are likely to engage in and invest effort in aesthetic labour on their bodies as a component of embodying “heterosexual femininity” (Lazar, 2017, p. 51). This entails a considerable amount of time and effort for women to enhance their self-representation.

In examining the labour conditions within the influencer industry, Brydges & Sjöholm (2019, p. 122) further expand the concept by introducing “aesthetic labor 2.0.” This perspective situates influencers within intricate, elusive, and frequently precarious social structures, where they possess the ability to negotiate demands not only from a single employer but from various actors and networks (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019, p. 122). The concept of aesthetic labour in this context reflects the fast-growing trends of online form of labour that require the promotional materials of generating branded content that promote products and services. Thus, contributing to building engagement and credibility within the online digital economy.

In extending our understanding on the labour conditions, Abidin (2016, p. 90) proposes that the engagements in social media activities contribute to the concept of “visibility labor.” This type of labour can be understood as “the work enacted to flexibly demonstrate gradients of conspicuousness in digital or physical spaces depending on intention or circumstance for favorable ends”. Relatedly, she also offers valuable insights into how social media influencers adapt to the evolving trends of TikTok, emphasizing the growing significance of the “attention economy” in garnering fame and visibility on social media platforms (Abidin, 2021, p. 77). She examines the importance of labour practices involved in crafting their online personas, which become widely visible in the online sphere. In Thailand and elsewhere, creating online video content significantly amplifies viewership and engagement, particularly with the proliferation of advertorial paid works. These forms of online labour play a crucial role in establishing economic opportunities and monetization practices, providing unique perspectives into understanding the cultural trends and marketing strategies within the platform (Abidin, 2021). As a result, the paper will unpack how generating online video content further enhance the business of beauty and how these different forms of labour shape the idealization of beauty practices, which has gained increasing prominence on sites such as TikTok.

3. Methodology

As TikTok gains increasing recognition as one of the most widely used platforms during the pandemic (Kennedy, 2020), it has also experienced a surge in diverse users, with influencers being active participants (Abidin, 2021). In this context, Abidin (2021) contextualizes the concept of Internet celebrities on TikTok, examining the extent to which users adapt to align with the evolving trends, enabling them to present various styles of personas due to changing media environments. To understanding the platform's study and the significant development of social media platform in the digital economy, this article was

conducted qualitatively using the walkthrough method in order to examine the practices and performances of Thai beauty influencers and how they construct their online personas that shape the commodification and monetization practices online (Light, Burgess, & Duguay, 2018). This method allows for a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon, capturing the nuances of influencer behavior and content creation within the digital landscape. The choice of qualitative analysis aligns with the research objectives, which aim to understand the monetization practices and idealization of beauty ideals prevalent among Thai beauty influencers on TikTok. In particular, Light et al., (2018, p. 882) emphasized on the importance of online observation, involving “step-by-step observation and documentation of an app’ screen”, enabling social media users to conduct an online observation of the overall functionality of the app that enhance our understanding of an online digital economy. Given the importance of online social media practices, our aim is to examine the distinct performances of the prominent Thai beauty influencers in order to examine the monetization practices and the idealization of beauty ideals that have become increasingly commodified and monetized. The research questions driving this study are:

RQ1: What are the key strategies the Thai beauty influencers employed to monetize social media content on TikTok?

RQ2: How do the dominant discourses of feminine beauty manifest within the context of TikTok? How are these constructed and adopted within the platform’s culture?

During the selection process, we thoroughly explored the practices of prominent Thai beauty influencers recognized for their creation of beauty-related content on TikTok and various social media platforms between January 2021 to April 2021 and from November 2023 to February 2024. These influencers were carefully chosen based on their substantial popularity across platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, with a specific criterion of having followers ranging from 70k-1M followers on each platform. In particular, study pointed out that those influencers who have accumulated follower ranging from 50k and above tend to be more approachable and able to give stronger reach which facilitate online engagement than lower-tier influencers (Supakan et al., 2021). In addition, we specifically selected influencers with followers counts ranging from 70k to 1M, commonly referred to as Mega or Macro influencers. This selection criteria was based on their recognized extensive reach and substantial online presence (Abidin, 2018). In this instance, we conducted searches using keywords such as “Thai beauty influencers”, “Thai beauty bloggers” “Review Beaut” on social media search engines. We then searched through the list of influencers recognized for their beauty-related content. Our selection criteria included consistency in creating beauty content, the establishment of a distinct persona on social media, and the promotion of media materials to generate sponsored content online. As a result, we chose three prominent influencers such as @Nisamaneenut (1.7M followers), @Architasirii (707.8k followers), and @Vvalentines (72.1k followers), each known for presenting a distinct beauty persona that resonates with current social media trends on TikTok.

Throughout the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2018), we systematically viewed beauty related content among the three beauty influencers, focusing on the relevant trends, collections of their content, promotional materials of social media images and videos and so on. The analysis involved an examination of influencers' practices and the constructions of their online videos in order to identify significant content indicative of monetization practices. In addition, we explored affiliate links, product content and promotions as well as the narratives of storytelling approach to identifying patterns, trends on influencers' profiles. A total of 10 significant pieces were then selected for analysis, capturing the current beauty trends and the monetization opportunities on TikTok.

4. Process of Selecting Interview Materials

To recruit participants for interviews, the data primarily stemmed from personal interviews conducted during the author's fieldwork for her PhD candidacy. Initially, we contacted influencers to conduct semi-structured interviews regarding their use and engagement on TikTok. We specifically targeted three distinct influencers recognized for creating various beauty-related content across social media platforms. We categorized them into two groups: (1) those who emerged before the advent of social media and gained recognition through the Thai Internet discussion boards, and (2) those who rose to fame in recent years through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, known for generating monetized content.

In selecting interview participants, we followed a process similar to selecting TikTok visual materials for analysis. Using search engines and keywords such as "Thai beauty influencers" "Beauty trends," "Influencers", we narrowed down the scope to identify specific participants. The criteria for selecting interviewees included: a) being Thai citizens creating beauty-related content in Thailand, b) having a minimum of 10,000 followers on TikTok, and c) engaging in commercial collaborations with brands (as indicated by hashtags and tagging information). Subsequently, we selected five significant influencers and contacted them via direct message as through their social media profiles to inquire about interviews. Ultimately, three participants agreed to be interviewed, all are renowned for generating beauty-related content and highly prominent in the Thai influencer industry. In consideration of participant confidentiality, some individuals requested that their information remain undisclosed. Consequently, pseudonyms will be employed, and certain images from TikTok videos will be intentionally blurred.

The details of each influencer interviewed during the data collection process are presented as follows:

1. Prae (17.4k followers on TikTok, pseudonym) Prae has a background in modeling where she garners significant attention from her followers on both mainstream and social media platforms. Prae is renowned for her diverse content encompassing fashion, beauty, travel, and lifestyle, showcasing a wide array of looks. Her TikTok persona stands out for its cultural fusion, blending Korean and Western beauty styles. Prae maintains consistent activity on TikTok, providing insights into the Thai online beauty industry.

2. Ann (300k followers on TikTok, pseudonym) Ann is a rising Thai beauty influencer who emerged on the social media scene in recent years. A young university graduate, she shares her journey of creating beauty-related content on platforms like YouTube. Ann gained recognition by establishing her own beauty business, specializing in selling lipstick and cushion products on TikTok and other prominent social media platforms.

3. Onn (50k followers on TikTok, pseudonym and has requested that her details to be confidential)

The interview transcripts obtained from the selected influencers underwent thematic analysis to uncover insights into their experiences, perspectives, and practices regarding social media engagement and monetization strategies on TikTok. The interviews were transcribed and coded to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the research questions. Themes included the influencers' constructions in creating beauty-related content, their strategies for engaging with followers, the depictions of online persona with brand collaborations, and their perceptions of beauty ideals and discourses on TikTok.

In particular, the analysis utilizes two key components: visual material examination and interview transcripts. These components are utilized to explore distinct aspects outlined in the following sections.

The first section focuses on aesthetic labour, examining the construction of beauty practices and strategies employed by Thai beauty influencers to promote idealized Thai beauty standards. These standards are transformed into commodified and monetized content on TikTok, with a focus on the techniques utilized by influencers in generating monetized beauty work.

The next section delves into the dominant discourses of feminine beauty and their adoption to promote the platform's culture. This involves the curation and promotion of beauty trends that reflect global standards, as observed in Thai society. The analysis examines influencers' roles in shaping these discourses and their influence in promoting various types of beauty ideals.

Throughout the analysis, examples predominantly comprise media materials such as screenshots from videos, @mentions, incorporation of hashtags, and excerpts from interviews with influencers. These materials provide insight into influencers' experiences in promoting content related to cosmetics and beauty products on TikTok in Thailand.

5. Analysis

5.1 The Monetization Strategies and Practices of Thai Beauty Influencers

Following our investigation into RQ1, we proceeded to analyze influencers' profiles in order to examine their video content, focusing particularly on the diverse range of beauty personas depicted and the methods employed to promote prevailing social trends. This examination shed light on the growing influence of aesthetic labour in shaping monetization practices aimed at promoting Thai beauty ideals. Our initial inquiry centered on understanding influencers' strategies for generating beauty-related content on TikTok. The analysis revealed that the three selected influencers had amassed substantial followings, ranging from 70k to 1.7M, with each strategically crafting their online persona beyond conventional promotional materials observed on other social media platforms. Notably, influencers on TikTok exhibited a tendency to categorize various types of video content into curated collections, prominently featured on their profiles.

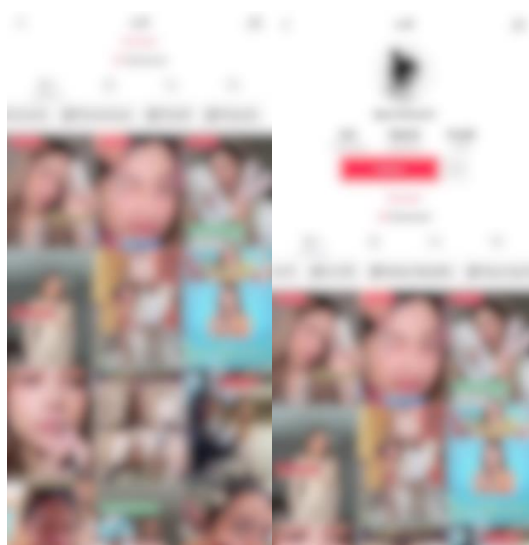


Figure 1. @Architasirii, screen grabbed by author, December 2023

For example, influencer @Architasirii categorized her content into sections such as “Vlog, showcasing interesting things,” “Travel Abroad,” “Review Beauty,” and “Food Review” etc. Similarly, @Vvalentines engaged in similar practices, organizing content into collections such as “Fragrance,” “Hair,” “Blush,” “Tutorials,” and “Outfits of the day.” The deliberate construction of their online personas reflects the growing trend towards enhanced “shoppability,” wherein the curated “presentation and commodification of self” are facilitated through the display of online imagery and videos, eliciting emotive and affective responses among both influencers and their followers across the platform (Hund & McGuigan, 2019, p. 4). Here, aesthetic labour is performed through the embodiment of “heterosexual femininity” (Lazar, 2017, p. 5)

where influencers possess the ability to negotiate demands in the fast-growing trends of online beauty work. Moreover, our analysis revealed that influencers strategically constructed their online beauty content based on the curation of latest trends, showcasing a variety of beauty styles and looks.

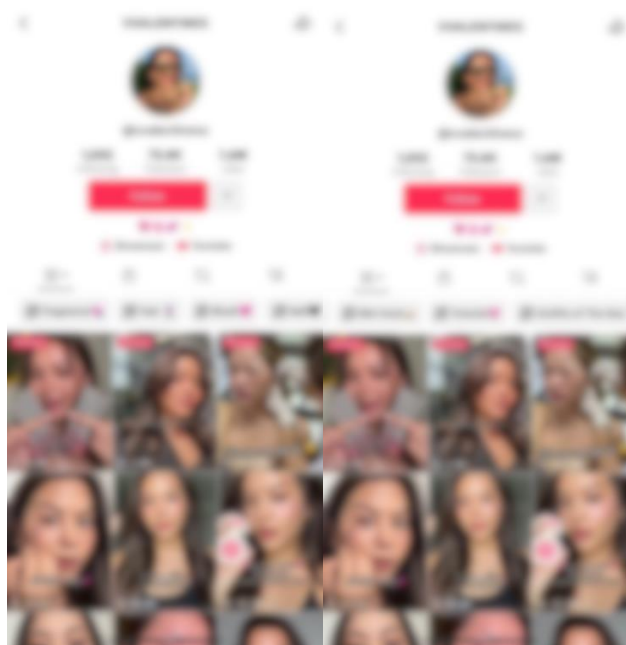


Figure 2. @Vvalentines, screen grabbed by author, December 2023

For example, images in figure 3 highlight the promotion of beauty trends through the curated display of video content. Here, influencer @Architasirii demonstrates the use of various shades of blushes in her promotional videos. Throughout their practices, Thai beauty influencers consistently applied hashtags such as #รีวิวกิตตี้ #ครีมบลัช #อาชิตา #ARCHITA #Perfectcheek @archita.cosmetics to their online content, reflecting the promotional materials of beauty and cosmetic products that negotiate the entrepreneurial trends in establishing online businesses. By utilizing hashtags, audio features, and narrative memes provided as part of TikTok's features, these influencers positioned themselves at the forefront of trends in curating various styles of beauty personas, where "imitation" and "replication" of social media practices intricately draw attention and facilitate audience engagement online (Zulli & Zulli, 2020).

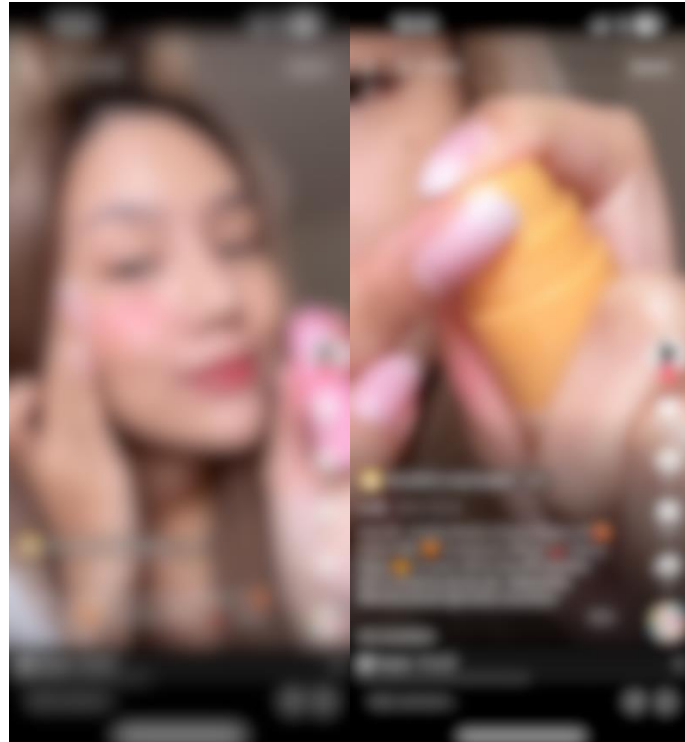


Figure 3. @Architasirii, screen grabbed by author, December 2023

Notably, participants in the study revealed that they often collaborate with beauty brands to promote various types of beauty products through sponsored content. For instance, Ann stated, “I tend to collaborate with brands by creating short videos, where I show specific beauty products or provide reviews during the launch of the beauty campaign” (Ann, translated from Thai). Similarly, Prae indicated, “most of the influencers receive compensation either by receiving newly launched products for free or sometimes they would get paid for it depending on their popularity and rate card” (Prae, translated from Thai). Additionally, it became apparent that prominent Thai beauty influencers incorporated affiliate links into their content, directing viewers to purchase beauty products from affiliated retailers on the platform. Interestingly, influencers such as @Architasirii and @Vvalentines both incorporated the link, which directs their followers and social media users to visit TikTok shop and product showcase, pointing to increased sales and enhanced monetization opportunities among influencers on social media. Through these practices, the images in figure 4 and figure 5 revealed the construction of their online content ranging from beauty and cosmetic products such as mascara, lipstick, skincare, etc., each categorized in the selection of creator’s choice, recommended, bestsellers, prices and so on. All of these practices indicate a shift in the platform’s infrastructure, enhancing “commercial monetization, content distribution, and acquisition of data sources through its infrastructural ambition of building a ‘video encyclopedia’ that can be saleable” (Zhang, 2020, p. 1).

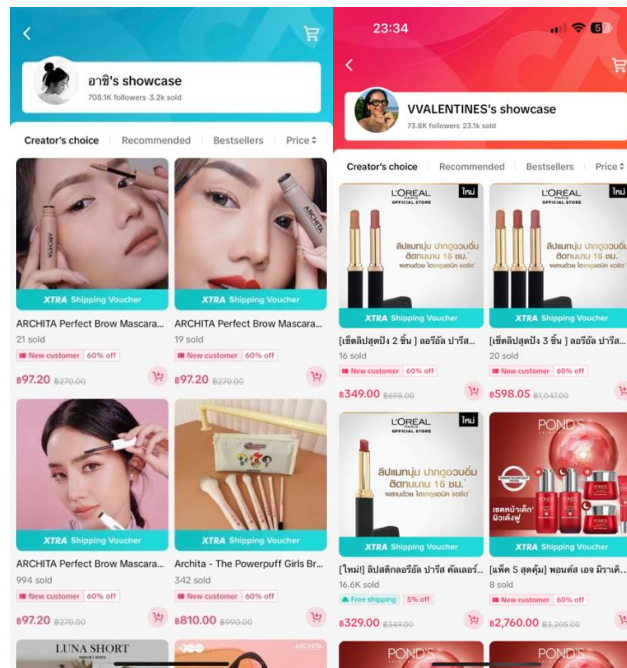


Figure 4. @Architasirii, screen grabbed by authors, January 2024

Figure 5. @Vvalentines, screen grabbed by author, January 2024

Furthermore, the narrative display of influencers' online personas often involves sharing lifestyles and personal experiences with beauty and cosmetic products. As depicted in Figure 6 influencer @Vvalentine is observed engaging in the review of beauty products, sharing personal lifestyle experiences, introducing product ingredients, and highlighting the products' benefits to the audiences online. In addition, an examination of her TikTok video collection revealed a consistent portrayal of an online persona, often incorporating terms such as "review", "swatch", "first time trying cosmetic products" which aligned with typical promotional content found in sponsored posts. Throughout her videos, she articulates narratives about her makeup choices aimed at enhancing her skin, encouraging her followers to consider making purchases. This engagement contributes to the cultivation of beauty-related content, exemplifying productive creativity and monetization practices within the Thai influencer industry.



Figure 6. @Vvalentines, screen grabbed by author, January 2024

Specifically, the curative display of such beauty practices contributes significantly to shaping discourses of beauty on the platform, demonstrating how influencers navigate their online presences in order to enhance credibility among their followers. With the corporation of affiliate links in the promotional material of influencers' online content, it enabled followers to make direct purchases that extended revenue streams for both influencers and brands. Here, the examples above demonstrate the growing significance of the "attention economy" among Thai beauty influencers in garnering fame and visibility across social media (Abidin, 2021, p. 77). Yu et al., (2022) highlighted the precarious nature of labour conditions requiring specific skill sets to maintain significant online status.

In this vein, participants noted the necessity of consistently projecting professionalism and authenticity across social media platforms. However, findings revealed that the platform logic of TikTok extends the opportunity to promote products to their followers, thereby enhancing brand visibility, driving more exposure, and promoting "the cultural qualities of coolness, creativity, autonomy, and self-investment, influencing others" throughout the Thai digital economy (Neff et al., 2005, p. 207).

5.2 The Hybridization of Beauty Trends

In terms of our investigation into RQ2, we continued to examine influencers' online content in shaping the beauty trends of how the dominant discourses of feminine beauty manifest within the context of TikTok. In this vein, we analyzed the shifting influences of beauty trends that shape the cultural and social discourses of feminine beauty, exhibited in the modern Thai society. Here, we examined the role of influencers' practices that negotiate the construction and dissemination of beauty content within TikTok's culture. In analyzing the practices of Thai beauty influencers on TikTok, it became evident that they play a significant role in celebrating diversity by showcasing a variety of beauty trends that speaks to the cultural and social discourses surrounding feminine beauty as manifested in contemporary Thai society. This demonstrates influencers' engagement that aligns with "a celebration of girlhood" (Kennedy, 2020, p. 1071) which gives young women the extended opportunity to further enhance their visibility and online career. Through the cultivation of generating online persona, the influencers' content reflects the negotiation of beauty ideals that point to the emerging trends in promoting Westernization and the Korean style of feminine beauty (Puathanawat, 2022). This negotiation expands our understanding of the dominant discourses of feminine beauty prevalent in Thai society, highlighting the cultural nuances and influences which shapes the contemporary beauty norms. For instance, the portrayal of Western-style beauty, as exemplified by influencer @Nisamaneenutt, reflects the adoption of Caucasian beauty standards, characterized by features such as darker eye shadow, face contouring, and nude lipstick.

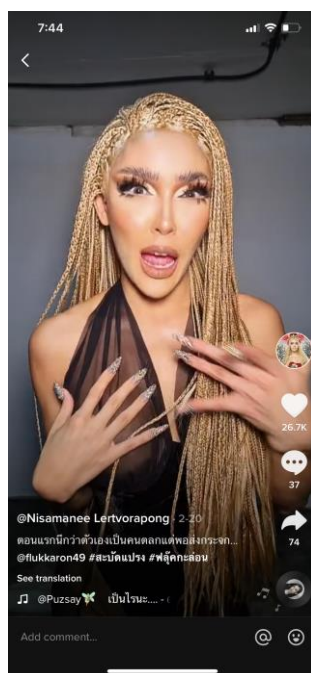


Figure 7. @Nisamaneenut, screen grabbed by author, August 2021

Participants mentioned that the Western style of beauty has gained prominence recently, around the past 5-6 years, with the main influence being Thai beauty pageants, where the curation of tan skin tone became prominent among women in Thailand. This trend signifies a growing prominence that shapes the ideals of beauty, which challenges the conventional beauty norms by offering an alternative standard of what beauty should be. In addition, this shift challenges the conventional perception of beauty as it introduces diverse arrays that reflect globalized ideals, broadening the perceived norms of beauty within Thai society. Conversely, participants highlighted the promotion of light skin associated with “Korean-like” features on the platform (Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018, p. 103). This point to the rising prominence of how “Thais are increasingly using body modification practices to look ‘white’ but not Caucasian.” (Kang, 2021, p. 273) which highlights the cultural phenomenon of Japanese/Korean type of skin tones (Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018, p. 103).

In identifying Korean styles of beauty, participants revealed that this concept is characterized by lighter makeup, high style, posture, and other distinctive features that signal the influence of Korean beauty standards. For instance, Ann stated that “korean beauty can be seen through hydrated and glowing skin, which can be achieved through the use of skincare routines that prioritize creams like moisturizing and hydrating products” (Ann, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, Onn added that “Korean style of beauty often highlights the natural features rather than heavy makeup, this can be seen through the use of BB creams, soft blushes with pinkish colour and natural-looking lip tints” (Onn, translated from Thai). Specifically, all participants highlighted that the Korean style of beauty is closely associated with the notions of “youthfulness and cuteness,” with the majority characterizing these traits as “natural,” “flawless,” “makeup, no- makeup,” and “glowing skin,” which distinguishes from the Western beauty style. Participants acknowledged that TikTok's features empower them to create diverse content and beauty trends. The dissemination of such beauty ideals not only influence individual preferences but also contribute to broader social trends in Thailand which shapes the attitudes towards beauty diversity and influencing consumer behavior. In addition, all participants emphasized that promoting both Northeast and Western beauty trends capitalizes on global popularity, which can enhance business opportunities, given a wide array of changing trends manifested on social media. These ideals signify the evolving preferences in Thai beauty culture which allows influencers to shape the significant value of beauty, crucial for maintaining popularity and status within the Thai influencer industry. The pursuit of international beauty standards, thus, emerges as a focal point in the idealization of beauty practices currently prevalent and disseminated through contemporary Thai media culture.

In understanding the emerging trend of “Korean-like” features, our study revealed a curated presentation of beauty, as evidenced by influencer @Architasirri's reinforcement of promotional content to shape social trends and negotiate the essence of Koreanness. This representation underscores the evolving preferences within Thai beauty culture and illustrates how influencers navigate cultural influences to shape beauty ideals on the platform.

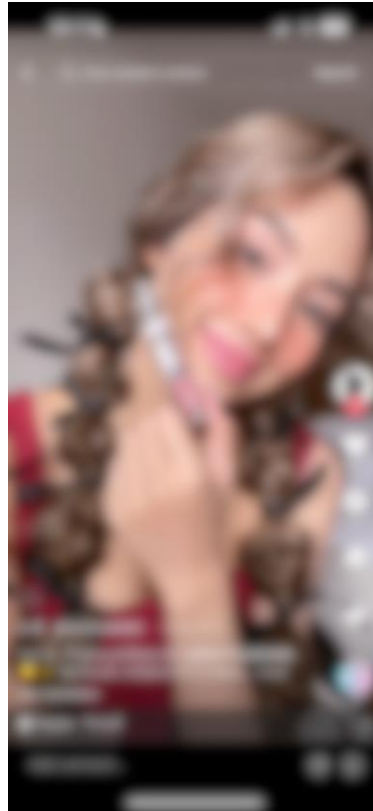


Figure 8. @Architasirii screen grabbed by author, December 2023

In this instance, @influencer @Architasirii is seen wearing pink lipstick, indicating involvement in product reviews. Her caption reads “รีวิวลิปเบสเฉีฟของน้อง@Bestkamsing.” In this vein, labour is enacted and shaped through the deliberate display of promoting idealized image, contributing to the depiction of Korean beauty ideals. Specifically, the promotion of trends emphasizing cuteness and natural makeup, is seamlessly incorporated throughout her TikTok posts. This representation signifies the evolving preferences in Thai beauty culture and demonstrates how influencers navigate cultural influences to shape beauty ideals on the platform. Furthermore, through strategic content curation and the utilization of hashtags and available TikTok features-including audio memes, natural personal narratives, filters that incorporated lifestyle content-influencers like @Vvalentines and @Architasirii attract diverse audiences which not only fosters positive attitudes towards beauty diversity but also encourages engagement with a wide array of beauty trends.

In extending our understanding on the construction of beauty personas within the platform's culture, participants were also observed not only engaging with mainstream beauty ideals but also promoting diverse representations of beauty that extend beyond conventional norms. For instance, influencer @Nisamaneenutt was seen actively promoting alternative beauty ideals that negotiate a natural style of beauty, which enhances the notion of gender diversity and inclusivity within modern Thai society. In one instance, she posted a video tutorial providing guidance on selecting appropriate cushion makeup that matches with one's skin tone.

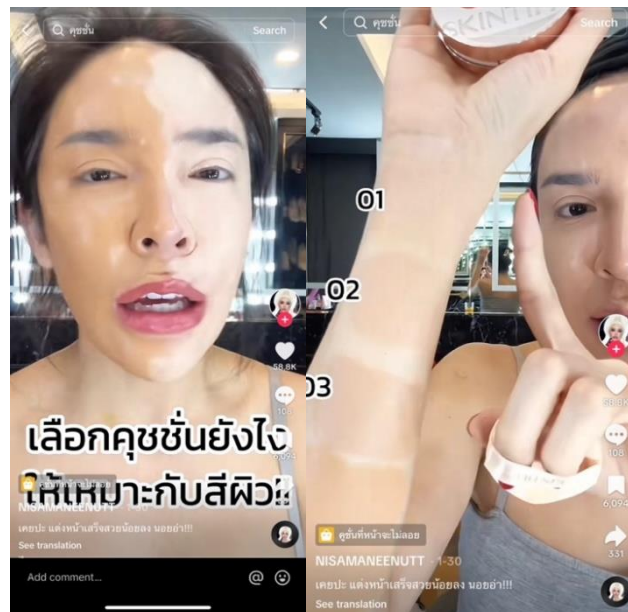


Figure 9. @Nisamaneenutt screen grabbed by author, January 2024

During the video, @Nisamaneenutt was seen to be applying different shades of cushion on her body, demonstrating the importance of selecting the right makeup suitable for each type of skin tone. Throughout the narrative, @Nisamaneenutt consistently emphasized the significance of making the appropriate choice, highlighting ingredients and product suitability across various shades and colors to enhance individuals' appearances. Furthermore, another example showcased her promoting Vaseline lotion in a TikTok video, emphasizing its launch which tailored specifically for Thai non-cisgender women.

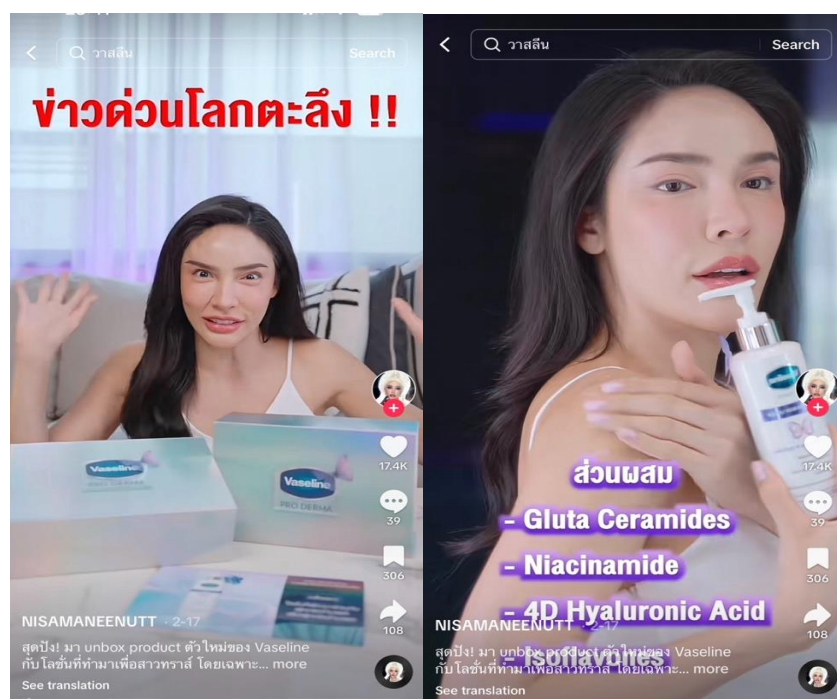


Figure 10. @Nisamaneenutt screen grabbed by author, February 2024

This emphasis on her content illuminates an aspect of promoting gender diversity and inclusivity, which can be seen as empowering individuals to openly and authentically express their gender identity. Throughout the video, the focus remained on promoting the product exclusively among non-cisgender women, in which she highlighted that she was the first non-cisgender woman in the country to be given the opportunity to try the product. She then provided detailed attention given to ingredients and discussed on how the product enhances skin, furthering the narrative of hormonal enhancement among non-cisgender women. Through a humorous and open style of beauty persona, it became evident that such example illustrates the important role in fostering a sense of empowerment among both influencers and audience members, encouraging Thai individuals to embrace their identity and celebrate diversity. The combination of @Nisamaneenutt's online posts illustrates a shift from merely promoting conventional beauty norms, where Thai beauty influencers are now employing TikTok as a platform to initiate positive conversations and challenge harmful stereotypes that may have constrained gender expressions among audiences within the Thai social media sphere. In particular, it illustrates how the role of Thai beauty has evolved from merely promoting monetized beauty products to further enhancing community building and support, advocating for positive change within modern Thai society.

6. Conclusion

This article explores the burgeoning online beauty culture on the video streaming platform TikTok in Thailand. It argues that TikTok offers beauty influencers an alternative platform for online labour, capable of being commodified and monetized. The paper posits that the manifestation of productive creativities among influencers is on the rise, contributing to the emergence of diverse femininities within the Thai online beauty industry. In this instance, our investigation into the monetization strategies of Thai beauty influencers revealed a strategic approach towards crafting online personas and curating engaging content. Influencers strategically categorized their video content, utilized hashtags, collection of online images and incorporated affiliate links to enhance brand visibility and monetization opportunities. By collaborating with beauty brands and promoting various beauty products, influencers not only generated revenue but also shaped prevailing beauty ideals within Thai society. The deliberate construction of online beauty personas facilitated enhanced engagement and credibility among followers, ultimately contributing to the commercial success of both influencers and brands.

In addition, our examination of the hybridization of beauty trends highlighted influencers' role in celebrating diversity and challenging conventional beauty norms. Influencers showcased a variety of beauty styles, including Western-style and Korean-style beauty ideals, reflecting cultural influences within contemporary Thai society. This diversification of beauty representations not only influenced individual preferences but also contributed to broader social trends which shapes the attitudes towards beauty

diversity and influencing consumer behavior. Moreover, influencers actively promoted gender diversity and inclusivity, empowering individuals to express their gender identity openly and authentically.

In conclusion, our analysis underscores the evolving landscape of beauty influencer culture on TikTok in Thailand, where influencers not only monetize their online presence but also advocate for positive social change and community building. By strategically navigating TikTok's features and embracing diverse beauty ideals, influencers play a pivotal role in shaping beauty discourse and fostering a more inclusive and empowered society within the Thai digital economy. As TikTok continues to grow in popularity, the influence of Thai beauty influencers is expected to further evolve, driving innovation and reshaping societal norms in the realm of beauty and beyond.

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