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Marketing Factors Brand Heritage and the Commercial Potential of Savon de Marseille Soap in Thailand

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Abstract

This study aimed to (1) assess the commercial potential of Savon de Marseille soap in Thailand, (2) examine consumer awareness, perceived value, trust, and perceived business success, and (3) test the structural relationships linking marketing factors, consumer responses, and commercial potential. A quantitative survey was administered to 400 Thai consumers aged 20 years or older who had purchased or considered purchasing premium soap or skincare products in Bangkok, surrounding provinces, and major economic cities. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and structural equation modeling. Commercial potential was moderate ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.69$), whereas perceived business success was moderate-to-low ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.83$). Heritage image and brand credibility received the highest marketing-factor rating ($CM = 3.58$, $SD = 0.66$) and exerted the strongest positive effects on awareness ($\beta = .64$) and perceived value ($\beta = .59$). Price negatively affected awareness ($\beta = -.18$) and perceived value ($\beta = -.41$). The full model fitted the empirical data well ($\chi^2 = 236.48$, $df = 192$, $\chi^2/df = 1.23$, $RMSEA = .032$, $CFI = .98$, $TLI = .97$), and business success positively influenced commercial potential ($\beta = .71$; $R^2 = .50$). The findings show that heritage can build value and trust, but converting favorable attitudes into loyalty and willingness to pay a premium remains the central market gap. Managers

should therefore combine verifiable authenticity cues with accessible-premium pricing and trial experiences.

Keywords: brand heritage, perceived value, consumer trust, commercial potential, Savon de Marseille

Introduction

Thailand's cleansing and skincare market increasingly rewards products associated with natural ingredients, safety, environmental responsibility, and distinctive brand stories. Savon de Marseille is relevant to this shift because its market meaning is built not only on cleansing performance but also on a long production tradition associated with Marseille, vegetable oils, simple formulations, and origin-based authenticity. These attributes allow the product to compete as a heritage offering rather than as an undifferentiated bar soap.

Yet heritage alone does not establish commercial viability in a new market. Consumers must first recognize the product, understand why its origin and formulation matter, judge the benefits as commensurate with the price, and develop sufficient trust to purchase, repurchase, and accept a premium. In Thailand, the term Savon de Marseille may also be used loosely as a stylistic or marketing cue. This creates uncertainty about authenticity and makes communication, value justification, and brand credibility especially important.

Previous studies explain price-quality-value trade-offs (Zeithaml, 1988), corporate heritage (Urde et al., 2007), heritage authenticity (Rindell & Santos, 2021), relationship trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), and masstige positioning (Paul, 2015). However, these streams are rarely integrated to explain how marketing inputs move through awareness, value, and trust to consumer-based business outcomes and perceived commercial potential for a heritage soap in an emerging premium market. The present study addresses this gap by testing a sequential framework in the Thai context.

Objectives

1. To assess the commercial potential of Savon de Marseille soap in Thailand.
2. To examine consumer awareness, perceived value, trust, marketing-factor evaluations, and perceived business success.
3. To test the structural relationships linking marketing factors, consumer responses, business success, and commercial potential.

Review Hypothesis

1. Brand heritage, authenticity, and awareness

Brand heritage refers to the use of an organization's history, longevity, values, symbols, and track record as strategic resources (Urde et al., 2007). For a product whose distinctiveness rests on origin and traditional production, heritage cues can reduce ambiguity and create continuity. Authenticity strengthens this mechanism when consumers perceive the brand's claims as credible and consistent rather than decorative (Rindell & Santos, 2021). In an unfamiliar market, heritage communication should therefore increase awareness and provide a frame through which consumers interpret product claims.

2. Product quality, price, and perceived value

Perceived value is a consumer's overall assessment of utility based on what is received and what is given (Zeithaml, 1988). Ingredient quality, safety, performance, and packaging increase perceived benefits, whereas monetary and nonmonetary sacrifices reduce net value. A premium price can signal quality, but it can also depress value when consumers lack knowledge or cannot verify authenticity. For heritage products, the managerial challenge is therefore not simply to charge more, but to make the quality and origin that justify the premium observable.

3. Perceived value, trust, and business outcomes

Trust develops when consumers regard a brand as reliable, honest, and capable of delivering its promised benefits. The commitment-trust perspective positions trust as a foundation for enduring market relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). For premium skincare, value judgments about quality, safety, and authenticity should precede trust, which in turn supports purchase intention, repurchase, loyalty, and willingness to pay. These behavioral outcomes form the consumer-side basis of business success and, ultimately, perceptions of market growth and investment potential.

4. Conceptual framework

The proposed sequence is: marketing factors (product quality, price, place, promotion, and heritage image/brand credibility) shape awareness and perceived value; perceived value builds trust; awareness, perceived value, and trust support business success; and business success enhances commercial potential. The framework also allows price to operate negatively when sacrifice exceeds perceived benefits.

Research Methodology

1. Research design and participants

A cross-sectional quantitative design was used. The target population comprised Thai consumers aged 20 years or older who had purchased or considered purchasing premium soap or skincare products and could make their own purchase decisions. The final sample consisted of 400 respondents drawn from Bangkok, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Samut Prakan, Chiang Mai, Chonburi, Phuket, and Khon Kaen. Quotas were allocated proportionally to the reported population sizes of the study areas. Respondents were screened for eligibility before completing either an online or field questionnaire. Because a complete sampling frame for premium-soap consumers was unavailable, the achieved sample should be interpreted as a screened quota sample rather than a strictly probability-based national sample.

2. Instrument

The questionnaire used five-point Likert-type responses (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). It measured product quality (PQ), price (PR), place/distribution (PL), promotion (PM), heritage image and brand credibility (HI), awareness (AW), perceived value (PV), trust (TR), business success (BS), and commercial potential (CP). Business success covered purchase intention, repurchase intention, brand loyalty, and willingness to pay a price premium. Commercial potential covered demand, growth opportunity, competitive advantage, expansion feasibility, and return on investment. Three experts assessed content validity using the index of item-objective congruence, with .50 as the acceptance criterion. A pilot test with 30 respondents used Cronbach's alpha, with .70 as the minimum criterion. The source report did not provide construct-level IOC, alpha, composite reliability, or average variance extracted values; these values should be inserted from the original statistical output before journal submission.

3. Data analysis

Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations described the sample and core variables. Pearson correlations examined bivariate relationships. Structural equation modeling tested the measurement and structural models. Model fit was evaluated using $\chi^2/df \leq 3.00$, RMSEA $\leq .08$, and incremental fit indices of at least .90. Standardized path coefficients and coefficients of determination (R^2) were used to interpret structural relationships.

Results

1. Respondent characteristics

Table 1. Respondent profile (n = 400)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	138	34.50
	Female	262	65.50

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Age	20–30 years	148	37.00
	31–40 years	156	39.00
	41 years and above	96	24.00
Education	Below bachelor's	82	20.50
	Bachelor's	238	59.50
	Above bachelor's	80	20.00
Occupation	Private employee	176	44.00
	Government/state enterprise	72	18.00
	Business owner	84	21.00
	Other	68	17.00
Monthly income	Below THB 20,000	110	27.50
	THB 20,001–40,000	172	43.00
	Above THB 40,000	118	29.50

The sample was predominantly female (65.50%), aged 31–40 years (39.00%), educated at bachelor's level (59.50%), employed in the private sector (44.00%), and earning THB 20,001–40,000 per month (43.00%).

2. Levels of the study constructs

Table 2. Descriptive results for the principal constructs

Construct	M	SD	Interpretation
Commercial potential	3.35	0.69	Moderate
Awareness	3.32	0.76	Moderate

Construct	M	SD	Interpretation
Perceived value	3.41	0.72	High
Trust	3.38	0.74	Moderate
Product quality	3.52	0.68	High
Price	3.28	0.77	Moderate
Place/distribution	3.22	0.79	Moderate
Promotion	3.35	0.73	Moderate
Heritage image/credibility	3.58	0.66	High
Business success	2.82	0.83	Moderate

Note. Interpretation follows the stated scale: 3.41–4.20 = high; 2.61–3.40 = moderate.

Heritage image and credibility received the highest marketing-factor score, followed by product quality. Distribution had the lowest marketing-factor score. Within consumer responses, perceived value was higher than trust and awareness. Business success was materially weaker than these attitudinal measures. Its components showed a clear decline from purchase intention ($M = 3.12$) and repurchase intention ($M = 2.95$) to brand loyalty ($M = 2.68$) and price-premium acceptance ($M = 2.52$), indicating an attitude-behavior conversion gap.

3. Correlations

Table 3. Correlations among the study variables

Var.	PQ	PR	PL	PM	HI	AW	PV	TR	BS	CP
PQ	1.00									
PR	-.42	1.00								
PL	.48	.36	1.00							
PM	.52	.28	.44	1.00						

Var.	PQ	PR	PL	PM	HI	AW	PV	TR	BS	CP
HI	.61	-.31	.40	.55	1.00					
AW	.58	-.25	.42	.62	.64	1.00				
PV	.66	-.52	.45	.58	.69	.72	1.00			
TR	.60	-.48	.43	.56	.71	.68	.74	1.00		
BS	.38	-.55	.30	.36	.49	.52	.58	.56	1.00	
CP	.22*	-.62	.18*	.24*	.35	.38	.42	.40	.46	1.00

Note. * $p < .05$; all unmarked non-diagonal coefficients were reported as significant at $p < .01$ in the source report. PQ = product quality; PR = price; PL = place; PM = promotion; HI = heritage image; AW = awareness; PV = perceived value; TR = trust; BS = business success; CP = commercial potential.

Heritage image was strongly associated with perceived value ($r = .69$) and trust ($r = .71$), while perceived value and trust were strongly related ($r = .74$). Price correlated negatively with business success ($r = -.55$) and commercial potential ($r = -.62$). Business success correlated positively with commercial potential ($r = .46$). These patterns support the central role of heritage and value while identifying price as the principal barrier.

4. Structural equation model

Table 4. Fit indices for the full structural model

Index	Criterion	Observed	Decision
χ^2	—	236.48	—
df	—	192	—
χ^2/df	≤ 3.00	1.23	Acceptable
RMSEA	$\leq .08$	.032	Excellent
GFI	$\geq .90$	.97	Acceptable
AGFI	$\geq .90$	.95	Acceptable
CFI	$\geq .90$	.98	Excellent
TLI	$\geq .90$	.97	Excellent

Index	Criterion	Observed	Decision
NFI	$\geq .90$	.96	Acceptable

Note. Full-model $\chi^2 p = .01428$ as reported in the source document.

The full structural model showed good fit. Marketing factors explained 46% of awareness. Heritage image had the strongest positive effect on awareness ($\beta = .64$), followed by promotion ($\beta = .46$), product quality ($\beta = .28$), and place ($\beta = .22$); price had a negative effect ($\beta = -.18$). Marketing factors explained 68% of perceived value, with positive effects from heritage image ($\beta = .59$), product quality ($\beta = .48$), promotion ($\beta = .38$), and place ($\beta = .27$), and a negative effect from price ($\beta = -.41$). Awareness positively affected perceived value ($\beta = .63$). Perceived value then positively affected trust ($\beta = .67$; $R^2 = .61$). Awareness, perceived value, and trust jointly explained 62% of business success. Business success positively affected commercial potential ($\beta = .71$), for which the model explained 50% of variance.

Table 5. Key standardized effects reported in the structural model

Structural relationship	β	R ² of outcome	Interpretation
Heritage image → Awareness	.64	.46	Strongest awareness driver
Promotion → Awareness	.46		Positive
Product quality → Awareness	.28		Positive
Place → Awareness	.22		Positive
Price → Awareness	-.18		Negative
Heritage image → Perceived value	.59	.68	Strongest direct value driver
Product quality → Perceived value	.48		Positive
Promotion → Perceived value	.38		Positive
Place → Perceived value	.27		Positive
Price → Perceived value	-.41		Negative
Awareness → Perceived value	.63	.68	Positive

Structural relationship	β	R ² of outcome	Interpretation
Perceived value → Trust	.67	.61	Positive
Business success → Commercial potential	.71	.50	Positive

Note. The source report did not include standard errors, critical ratios, exact p values, or confidence intervals for individual paths. These should be added from the original SEM output before submission.

Conclusion and Discussion

The study's principal contribution is the identification of a heritage-to-market mechanism. Heritage image was not merely the highest-rated attribute; it was also the strongest antecedent of awareness and perceived value. This supports the view that heritage can function as a strategic resource when it provides credible evidence of continuity, origin, and distinctive production (Urde et al., 2007). It also extends authenticity research by showing that heritage cues matter in a market geographically distant from the product's place of origin (Rindell & Santos, 2021). For Savon de Marseille, historical meaning appears to give consumers a vocabulary for interpreting product quality before extensive usage experience is formed.

A second contribution is the separation of evaluative strength from behavioral strength. Consumers rated heritage, product quality, value, and trust relatively favorably, yet business success—particularly loyalty and willingness to pay a premium—was lower. This pattern indicates that favorable attitudes should not be treated as evidence of commercial readiness. The strong path from perceived value to trust is consistent with the idea that consumers develop confidence when benefits appear credible and commensurate with sacrifice. Nevertheless, trust alone does not guarantee repeat purchase or premium acceptance. Availability, trial experience, competing alternatives, habit, and budget constraints may intervene between evaluation and behavior.

Third, price operated as a sacrifice rather than a prestige signal. Its negative relationships with perceived value, business success, and commercial potential support Zeithaml's (1988) trade-off model. In a market where awareness is still moderate, consumers may lack enough product knowledge to interpret a higher price as evidence of superior authenticity. This also explains why a masstige approach may be more suitable than an uncompromising luxury position: prestige cues can be retained, while

trial sizes, bundles, and transparent benefit communication reduce the perceived risk of initial purchase (Paul, 2015).

The final model suggests a sequential process: marketing inputs create awareness and value; value strengthens trust; and behavioral outcomes determine perceived commercial potential. The strong business-success-to-commercial-potential path indicates that investment attractiveness depends less on whether consumers find the story appealing and more on whether the story produces repeatable market behavior. The model therefore reframes brand heritage from a communication asset into a conditional commercial resource whose value is realized only when it is converted into purchase, repurchase, and loyalty.

Theoretical Contribution

This study integrates brand heritage, perceived value, trust, and commercial potential in one consumer-based model. It contributes a distinction between heritage's upstream role and commercial outcomes downstream. Heritage most directly supports awareness and value formation; its commercial effect is indirect and contingent on trust and behavioral conversion. The findings also show that price can counteract heritage value when consumers cannot verify the premium. Thus, heritage branding in an emerging market should be theorized as a value-justification process rather than as a uniformly positive country-of-origin cue.

Managerial Implications

Make authenticity verifiable. Use transparent information on origin, ingredients, production method, and certification rather than relying on decorative French imagery alone.

Translate heritage into consumer benefits. Connect the history to gentleness, ingredient simplicity, durability, or environmental value so that the story improves the perceived benefit-to-price ratio.

Adopt accessible-premium pricing. Trial bars, curated bundles, and entry packs can reduce initial risk without abandoning a premium position.

Close the attitude-behavior gap. Sampling, post-purchase education, replenishment reminders, and loyalty benefits should focus specifically on moving trial users toward repeat purchase.

Expand selective access. Online marketplaces and credible specialty retailers can improve convenience while maintaining authenticity signals and avoiding indiscriminate mass positioning.

Limitations and Future Research

The study is cross-sectional, so causal language should be interpreted as model-based association rather than temporal proof. Respondents were screened and geographically quota-allocated, but a complete probability sampling frame was unavailable; generalization to all Thai consumers is therefore limited. All outcomes were self-reported and business success was assessed from the consumer perspective rather than through observed sales, profit, or market share. The source report also did not include construct-level reliability and validity statistics or path-level uncertainty estimates. Before submission, the original analysis files should be used to report Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, AVE, discriminant validity, standard errors, values, and confidence intervals. Future research should use experimental price and authenticity manipulations, longitudinal repurchase data, and comparisons between authentic and heritage-inspired products.

Conclusion

Savon de Marseille soap has moderate commercial potential in Thailand, supported primarily by heritage image, brand credibility, and product quality. Heritage strengthens awareness and perceived value, and perceived value builds trust. However, the business remains at a trial-oriented stage because loyalty and acceptance of premium pricing lag behind favorable evaluations. Price is the model's principal negative force. Commercial success therefore depends on converting verifiable heritage into clear consumer benefits, lowering the risk of first purchase, and building mechanisms that encourage repurchase and loyalty. The study's central implication is straightforward:

heritage creates an opportunity, but only behavioral conversion creates commercial potential.

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