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WHEN FUEL PRICES RISE, BEHAVIOR REWRITES:

What Social Listening Reveals About Thai Consumers



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RIISING FUEL PRICES ARE NOT JUST INCREASING COSTS. THEY ARE RESHAPING HOW CONSUMERS THINK, DECIDE, AND LIVE

Fuel price increases are often discussed as an economic burden. However, when viewed through the lens of social listening, the impact goes far beyond higher expenses. What we are witnessing is a gradual but meaningful shift in consumer behavior, one that is redefining how people make everyday decisions.

From mobility to spending and lifestyle choices, Thai consumers are moving away from convenience-driven habits toward a more intentional, calculated way of living. This transformation reflects not just financial pressure but a deeper need to regain control in an increasingly uncertain cost environment.

Wisesight Research analyzed social media conversations around **rising fuel prices**, identifying 204,707 mentions and over 210 million engagements between March 1 and April 19, 2026. **The intensity of this discourse is on par with the public response to the major earthquake in Myanmar that affected Thailand in March 2025.**



This is not merely a spike in conversation but a signal of shifting consumer behavior. As rising costs reshape everyday decisions, this study examines how consumers are adapting and what it means for brands seeking to stay relevant and retain their customers in a rapidly changing landscape.

FROM DRIVING TO PLANNING: WHEN EVERY TRIP BECOMES A DECISION

One of the clearest signals emerging from social conversations is that consumers are not necessarily reducing mobility but fundamentally changing how they approach it.

Travel is no longer an automatic behavior. Instead, it has become something that requires planning and justification. Consumers are consolidating errands into fewer trips, avoiding traffic-heavy routes, and reconsidering hybrid or remote work arrangements to manage fuel costs more effectively.

This shift is strongly reflected in social data. Mentions of “fuel saving,” “refueling,” and “expensive fuel” have surged by over 2.5x, while engagement with content offering commuting tips and fuel-saving strategies has grown by 4.5x.

Real conversations reveal how deeply this mindset has taken hold:



“Spreading out expenses in different ways helps. Sharing routes with colleagues going to the same workplace naturally reduces costs.”



“I reviewed my household expenses and ranked them by proportion. Fuel, transportation, and vehicle maintenance turned out to be major costs. Now, whenever I go out, I plan my routes and errands carefully; basically, if I drive out, I make sure it’s worth it.”



“This is something we used to do, buying a day pass, and once we no longer needed it, we would wait and pass it on to someone else for free so they could save money instead of letting it go to waste.”

THIS REFLECTS A SHIFT FROM MOBILITY AS A HABIT TO MOBILITY AS A CONSCIOUS DECISION.

FROM SPENDING TO CALCULATING: REDEFINING WHAT “VALUE” MEANS

The ripple effects of rising fuel prices extend into the overall cost of living, prompting consumers to reassess how they spend money across categories.

Purchasing decisions are no longer based solely on product price. Instead, consumers are factoring in additional costs such as transportation, delivery fees, and long-term value. This has led to more deliberate behaviors, including increased price comparisons, a stronger focus on promotions, and a tendency to consolidate purchases to reduce frequency-related costs.

Mentions related to “high prices,” “cost of living,” “cost,” and “value for money” have increased more than fivefold, reflecting a growing consumer focus on financial pressure and spending efficiency.

This shift is clearly illustrated through real consumer conversations:

“People are worried about price increases. Even if you stock up, you’ll eventually have to pay more anyway. But saving even one tank’s worth still feels worth it. (I don’t stock up on fuel, but I stock up on cat food because I’m worried about rising delivery costs. Buying online is cheaper than in-store, but if shipping fees go up, it becomes a problem, so I stock up instead.)”

“With fuel prices this high, when I take my grandmother to the hospital, I make sure to buy food and daily necessities at the same time so the trip is worth the fuel.”

“I’ve started using things more carefully, finishing products before buying new ones, shopping during promotions, and comparing prices before making decisions. I’ve also reduced impulse purchases and now only buy what I truly need. For me, saving money doesn’t mean deprivation. It means spending mindfully, choosing what’s worth it, and cutting out what’s unnecessary so I can still live happily, even when everything is getting more expensive.”

In parallel, value-driven content, particularly on TikTok, has seen a significant rise in engagement, with share rates increasing by up to 4.5 times. This indicates that consumers are not only more price-conscious but also actively seeking and sharing content that helps them make smarter financial decisions.



**CONSUMERS ARE NOT NECESSARILY
SPENDING LESS.
THEY ARE REDEFINING WHAT QUALIFIES AS
“WORTH SPENDING ON.”**



THE TRADE-OFF ERA: BALANCING CONVENIENCE AND COST

What makes this behavioral shift particularly compelling is the diversity of consumer responses. Conversations do not point to a single dominant choice. Instead, they reflect a range of decisions shaped by individual constraints and personal priorities, offering a clear foundation for consumer segmentation.

At the same time, interest in electric vehicles (EVs) and fuel-efficient alternatives is on the rise, even though immediate adoption remains limited. Conversations and engagement around EVs and hybrid vehicles have increased by 26%, indicating growing curiosity and consideration.

However, these discussions are not driven by a simple “EV is the future” narrative. Consumers are weighing multiple factors before making decisions:

“If you only have one car, I’d recommend a hybrid. It still saves fuel, and you don’t have to worry about after-sales issues like with some Chinese EV brands. EVs are more suitable as a second car or for heavy users; that’s when the fuel savings really offset the cost.”

“I can afford fuel. My time is more important. EVs are for people who want to save money.”

“Yesterday I saw a post about people queuing for 5 hours to charge at a station. That’s why I chose a PHEV. I don’t want to wait. Charging takes at least an hour. With a PHEV, I can just refuel. But if someone is willing to trade time for savings, then an EV can be a worthwhile option.”

Beyond mobility choices, consumers are also adjusting their lifestyles in different ways. Some are reducing travel and relying more on delivery services:

“City people can just stay home and order delivery for all three meals. Fuel is too expensive.”

“This Songkran, I plan to stay home. I don’t want to go out into crowded places. Fuel is expensive, it’s crowded, and there’s PM2.5. I’d rather celebrate at home.”

At the same time, others are moving in the opposite direction, cutting back on delivery due to rising fees and returning to home cooking. Mentions related to “expensive delivery” or “not worth it” have increased fourfold, reflecting growing sensitivity to hidden costs.

“Staying home saves on fuel, but food costs can still add up.”

“During Songkran, with fuel prices and living costs rising, eating out with family can get expensive. Cooking at home can help reduce overall expenses.”

CONSUMERS ARE NO LONGER SEEKING THE BEST OPTION, BUT THE ONE THAT FITS THEIR LIVES BEST IN THE MOMENT. THIS MARKS A SHIFT TOWARD MORE ADAPTIVE, CONTEXT-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING.



WHEN SOCIAL IS NO LONGER JUST FOR EXPRESSION, BUT A SURVIVAL TOOL FOR CONSUMERS

Another critical shift revealed through the analysis of social conversations and content is the evolving role of social media itself.

Consumers are no longer using social platforms merely to express opinions or emotions. Instead, they are actively leveraging them as practical tools for problem-solving, whether it is seeking fuel- or energy-saving techniques, comparing product performance, or looking for real user reviews. Social media has become an integral part of the decision-making process.

This shift is further reflected in content trends. Short-form videos on TikTok related to “fuel saving,” “energy saving,” and “value-for-money purchases” have increased by 98%, indicating growing demand for actionable, practical content.

At the same time, there is a noticeable rise in question-driven and solution-oriented conversations, such as:

“Does anyone have real tips for saving fuel?”

“What’s the best time to refuel? ⚡ Let’s break it down — does temperature really affect fuel volume? 🌡️ 🌬️”

THIS SHIFT POSITIONS SOCIAL MEDIA AS A “DECISION INFRASTRUCTURE” WHERE CONSUMERS GATHER, VALIDATE, AND ACT ON INFORMATION BEFORE MAKING CHOICES.

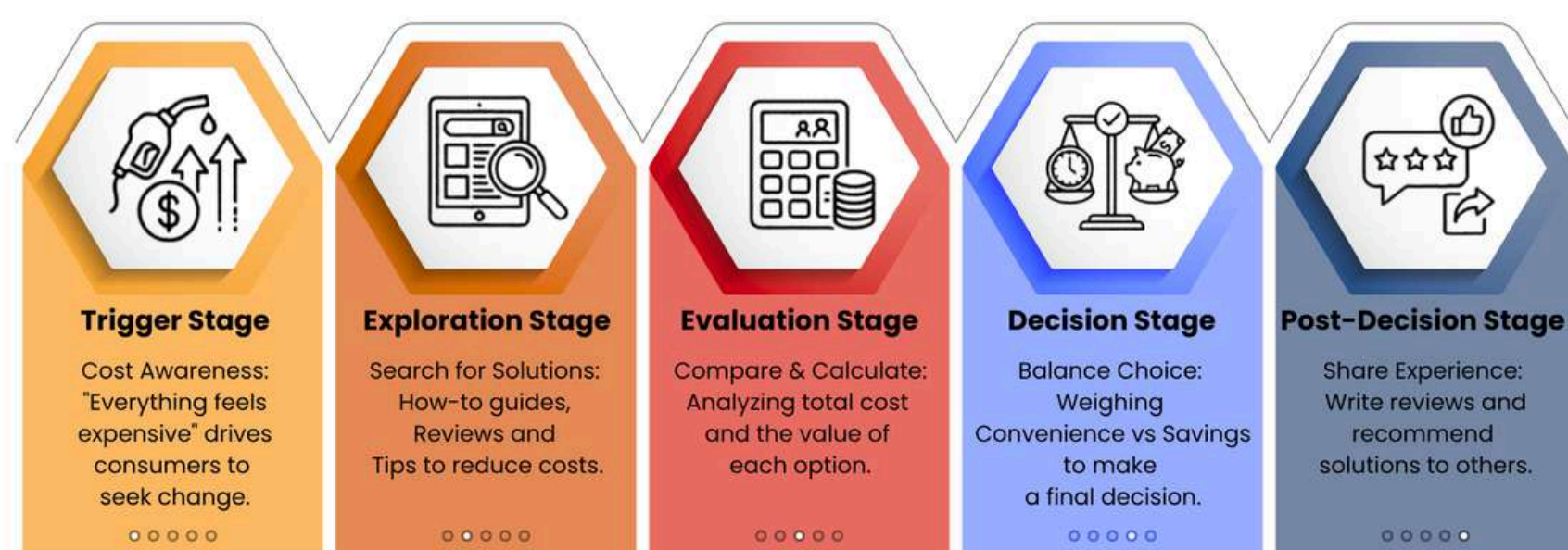
CONSUMER DECISION JOURNEY IN THE ERA OF RISING FUEL PRICES

Under these conditions, the traditional linear decision-making funnel no longer applies. Instead, consumer journeys have evolved into a more dynamic and iterative process shaped by cost awareness and value optimization.

The journey often begins with a trigger, where rising costs create a sense of discomfort or loss of control. This leads to an exploration phase in which consumers actively seek solutions, advice, and alternatives on social platforms. As they gather information, they move into evaluation, carefully comparing options and calculating total costs across multiple dimensions.

The decision itself is rarely about choosing the optimal option in absolute terms. Rather, it is about selecting the most balanced solution based on current needs and constraints. Finally, after the decision is made, consumers frequently return to social platforms to share their experiences, contributing to a continuous feedback loop that influences others.

CONSUMER DECISION JOURNEY IN HIGH FUEL PRICE ERA



THIS CIRCULAR JOURNEY HIGHLIGHTS A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT IN THAT DECISION-MAKING IS NO LONGER ISOLATED. IT IS SOCIALLY INFORMED, CONTINUOUSLY EVOLVING, AND DEEPLY INFLUENCED BY REAL-WORLD CONSTRAINTS.

FROM INSIGHT TO IMPACT: WHAT BRANDS SHOULD DO

These behavioral changes signal a critical shift in how brands need to position themselves. Consumers are not simply looking for products. They are looking for solutions that help them navigate a more complex and costly environment.



To remain relevant, **brands must move beyond feature-based communication and instead demonstrate how they fit into consumers' lives under current conditions.** This means helping consumers make better decisions, not just offering more options.

Value perception becomes a key differentiator. It is no longer about being the cheapest but about making consumers feel that their choice is justified and sustainable in the long run. Strategies such as bundling, cost-per-use communication, and highlighting long-term savings become increasingly important.

Equally, **content must evolve from being purely engaging to being genuinely useful.** Practical guidance, comparison tools, behind-the-scenes insights, and authentic user experiences are more likely to resonate because they reduce decision-making friction.

Finally, **brands must pay attention to what consumers do, not just what they say.** Metrics such as saves, shares, and search behavior often reveal deeper intent than visible engagement alone.

THE REAL SHIFT IS NOT COST, BUT CONTROL

In a world where the cost of living continues to rise, consumers are not simply trying to spend less. They are trying to regain a sense of control over their lives.

This is the underlying force behind the behavioral shifts we observe, a move from passive consumption to active, intentional decision-making.

Brands that understand this shift will not only remain relevant but will become trusted partners in consumers' daily lives. In contrast, those that fail to adapt risk becoming disconnected from the realities that shape modern consumer behavior.

Ultimately, social listening is no longer just a tool for tracking sentiment. It is a lens through which we can understand how people are adapting and where the future of consumer behavior is heading.

