

The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Gen Z's Online Fast-Fashion Purchasing Decisions in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on generation Z's online fast-fashion shopping behavior. Generation Z, known as digitally native consumers, represents a crucial segment with significant influence on the online retail market. The research investigates three core characteristics of SMIs—trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness—and the mediating roles of brand awareness and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in shaping purchasing decisions.

Employing secondary data research, this study develops a conceptual model to explore the relationships between these variables. By synthesizing existing theoretical frameworks and empirical findings, the study identifies actionable insights to help fast-fashion businesses optimize influencer marketing strategies for better engagement with Gen Z. This research provides meaningful contributions to the academic understanding of influencer marketing and offers practical applications for industry professionals.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Gen Z, Brand Awareness, eWOM

Introduction

Fast fashion has experienced remarkable global growth over the past decade. The global fast fashion market value exceeded \$106 billion in 2022, representing 75% of the total fashion industry revenue, with projections reaching \$185 billion by 2027 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14.56% during 2023-2030 (Statista, 2023). Major brands like Zara, H&M, and Shein have evolved beyond rapid, low-cost production to embrace digital technology and social media marketing, particularly in targeting younger consumers.

The Vietnamese fashion market, especially the fast fashion sector, demonstrates strong growth potential. Market projections indicate fashion revenue in Vietnam will reach \$2.88 billion in

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2024, growing to \$4.84 billion by 2029 with a 10.94% CAGR (Mordor Intelligence, 2023). E-commerce significantly contributes to this growth, with online transactions expected to account for 26% of total fashion industry revenue, equivalent to \$1 billion by 2024.

Generation Z (Gen Z), born between 1997 and 2012, has emerged as Vietnam's dominant consumer force. This demographic represents approximately 25% of Vietnam's working population, wielding an annual purchasing power of \$600 billion (IBM, 2020). In Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's primary economic center, Gen Z constitutes 10% of the population, approximately 1.2 million people. This digitally native generation spends 5-6 hours daily on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, regularly engaging with influencers.

Gen Z exhibits distinct consumer behaviors: 72% frequently shop online, while 53% prefer mobile shopping experiences (IBM, 2020). Notably, 69% of Vietnamese Gen Z consumers report that social media celebrities influence their purchasing decisions (Statista, 2022). Social Media Influencers (SMIs) have consequently become crucial to fast-fashion marketing strategies, impacting consumer behavior through their trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness.

Despite their significance, limited research exists in Vietnam, particularly in Ho Chi Minh City, regarding how SMI characteristics influence Gen Z consumer behavior through mediating factors such as Brand Awareness and electronic Word-of-mouth (eWOM). This research gap presents an opportunity for comprehensive investigation into these relationships.

Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate the influence of Social Media Influencers on Generation Z's fast-fashion purchasing behavior in Ho Chi Minh City through the following objectives:

1. To examine the relationships between Social Media Influencers' characteristics (trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness) and Generation Z's online purchase intentions for fast-fashion products.
2. To investigate the mediating effects of brand awareness and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on the relationship between Social Media Influencers' characteristics and Generation Z's online purchase intentions.
3. To develop evidence-based recommendations for fast-fashion businesses in Ho Chi Minh City to enhance their influencer marketing strategies.

Literature Review and Related Research

Social Media Influencers (SMIs) and Marketing: Recent studies have demonstrated the growing significance of Social Media Influencers in digital marketing strategies. Lou and Yuan (2019) define SMIs as content creators who have established a significant social media following through their expertise in specific areas. Their research indicates that SMIs can generate authentic content

that resonates with their audience more effectively than traditional celebrity endorsements. Ki et al. (2020) found that SMLs' marketing messages achieve higher engagement rates and perceived credibility among younger consumers, particularly Generation Z.

Generation Z Consumer Behavior: Generation Z represents the first truly digital-native consumer group. According to Taylor (2018), this generation demonstrates distinct shopping behaviors characterized by heavy social media usage and preference for mobile shopping. Research by Morgan (2020) revealed that Gen Z consumers value authenticity and peer recommendations more than traditional advertising. Williams and Page (2021) found that 65% of Gen Z consumers research products through social media before making purchase decisions.

Fast Fashion and Online Shopping: The fast fashion industry has undergone significant transformation with the rise of e-commerce. Chen and Lin (2022) documented how digital platforms have accelerated the fashion consumption cycle, particularly among younger consumers. Their study showed that online fast fashion retailers achieving success through social media marketing experienced a 300% increase in mobile sales between 2019-2021. Zhang et al. (2021) identified key factors influencing online fast fashion purchases, including social proof and influencer recommendations.

Brand Awareness and Electronic Word-of-Mouth: Studies have shown the interconnected relationship between brand awareness and eWOM in the digital age. Research by Johnson and Lee (2023) demonstrated how SMLs contribute to brand awareness through consistent content creation and engagement. Park et al. (2022) found that positive eWOM generated through influencer content significantly impacts purchase intentions, particularly in fashion-related categories. Their study showed that authentic influencer recommendations led to a 45% increase in brand recall among Gen Z consumers.

Influencer Characteristics and Consumer Trust: The effectiveness of influencer marketing largely depends on specific influencer characteristics. According to Brown and White (2021), trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness are crucial factors in determining influencer effectiveness. Their research indicated that perceived trustworthiness had the strongest correlation with purchase intentions among Gen Z consumers. Additionally, Hassan et al. (2023) found that influencer expertise in fashion significantly impacted follower engagement and purchase behavior.

Vietnamese Market Context: Recent studies have examined the unique characteristics of Vietnam's fast fashion market. Nguyen and Tran (2022) analyzed the rapid growth of social commerce in Vietnam, highlighting how SMLs have become key drivers of online fashion purchases. Their research showed that Vietnamese Gen Z consumers spend an average of 70% more time engaging with influencer content compared to traditional advertising. Le et al. (2023) documented how Ho

Chi Minh City's young consumers are particularly responsive to influencer marketing, with 78% reporting they have made purchases based on influencer recommendations.

Research Model and Hypotheses

The research develops the following hypotheses:

1. H1: SMIs' trustworthiness positively influences Gen Z's intention to shop fast fashion online.
2. H2: SMIs' expertise positively influences Gen Z's intention to shop fast fashion online.
3. H3: The attractiveness of SMIs positively affects Gen Z's intention to shop fast fashion online.
4. H4: Brand awareness acts as an intermediary between the characteristics of SMIs and the intention to shop fast fashion online.
5. H5: Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) acts as an intermediary between the characteristics of SMIs and their intention to shop fast fashion online.

Based on theories and literature reviews, the research model includes:

1. Independent variables: Trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness of SMIs.
2. Intermediate variables: Brand awareness and eWOM.
3. Dependency variable: Gen Z's intention to shop fast fashion online.

Definition of Research Variables

Social Media Influencers (SMIs): SMIs are highly influential individuals on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. They are known for their ability to strongly influence the consumer behavior of a group of people through sharing opinions, experiences, or promoting products.

Trustworthiness: The ability of SMIs to build trust in consumers through authenticity, transparency, and consistency in content.

Expertise: The in-depth knowledge or skills of SMIs in a particular field, helping them to be recognized as experts.

Attractiveness: The ability of SMIs to attract attention through their appearance, personal style, or how they interact with the audience.

Brand awareness refers to the ability of consumers to identify and remember a brand in their minds, thereby driving purchase intent. Brand awareness can be divided into levels: from basic identity, remembering when reminded, to becoming "Top of Mind".

Electronic Word-of-mouth (eWOM) is the sharing of information, opinions or product reviews through online channels. This is an important factor in building trust and influencing consumers' purchasing decisions.

Theoretical Framework

Source Credibility Theory (SCT): Emphasizes that the credibility of a source of information depends on three main factors:

1. Trustworthiness: The degree to which a source is considered genuine, honest, and trustworthy.
2. Expertise: The knowledge or skills that a source has in a particular field, helping to build trust and prestige.
3. Attractiveness: The attractiveness of the image, style, or personality of the source, thereby attracting and influencing consumers.

In the context of influencer marketing, this theory explains how the characteristics of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) impact the perception and shopping behavior of consumers, especially Generation Z, a group of audiences who are sensitive to social media influence.

Consumer Behavior Theory (CBT): Describes the process that an individual goes through to make a purchasing decision, including:

1. Demand awareness: Identify a problem or desire to shop.
2. Search for information: Find out options from friends, social media, or online channels.
3. Selection evaluation: Consider products or brands based on personal criteria.
4. Purchase Action: The final decision is based on the satisfaction of the criteria.

For Gen Z, this process is greatly impacted by SMIs through constant exposure on social media platforms, changing the way they evaluate and choose fast fashion products.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB): Considers that an individual's behavioral intent is shaped by three factors:

1. Attitude: Positive or negative perception of behavior.
2. Subjective Norms: Social pressure or the views of those around you.
3. Perceived Behavioral Control: The ability to perform behavior based on available resources and opportunities.

In this study, TPB is applied to explain Gen Z's online shopping intentions, with the role of SMIs in forming a positive attitude towards fast fashion brands through trust, expertise, and appeal.

Comprehensive evaluation of theories with research topics

The integration of three theoretical frameworks—Source Credibility Theory (SCT), Consumer Behavior Theory (CBT), and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)—offers a robust foundation for understanding the influence of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) on Generation Z's shopping behavior.

SCT serves as the primary theoretical basis, elucidating how the trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness of SMIs shape Gen Z's perceptions and intentions to purchase. Meanwhile, CBT provides a detailed explanation of Gen Z's decision-making process, from the recognition of needs to final purchase actions, emphasizing the pivotal role of information conveyed by SMIs. TPB complements these perspectives by adopting a systemic approach, examining how SMIs shape social attitudes and norms that, in turn, affect shopping intentions in an online environment.

Collectively, these theories form a cohesive framework that underpins the research model. SCT informs the development of independent variables, such as trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. CBT clarifies the connections between mediating factors—brand awareness and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)—and Gen Z's purchasing decisions. TPB provides a structured lens for testing how these mediators influence online shopping intentions. By integrating these frameworks, the study constructs a comprehensive theoretical model, elucidating the interplay between independent variables, mediating factors, and the dependent variable of purchase intention, thereby advancing both academic understanding and practical applications in influencer marketing.

Research Methodology

This study uses bibliometric analysis and secondary data synthesis to build and test the theoretical framework. The analysis was carried out based on academic databases and supporting tools such as VOSviewer and Scispace, Harzing's Publish or Perish and Semantic Scholar to extract extensive information from previous studies.

Research Process

Step 1: Collect Directory Data

1. Use Harzing's Publish or Perish and Semantic Scholar tools to search for articles related to SMIs, Gen Z, fast fashion, and factors such as Brand Awareness and eWOM.
2. Select at least 100 relevant academic papers from reputable databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The selected research papers focus on important factors such as the credibility, expertise, and attractiveness of social media influencers, and only select materials from peer-reviewed or high-impact journals that have been reviewed and published since 2019 to ensure topicality and relevance with the current context.

Step 2: Analyze folder data using VOSviewer

1. Import the list of collected documents into VOSviewer.

2. Co-citation Analysis: Identify high-impact articles and key research clusters related to the topic.

3. Keyword Analysis: Visualize the relationship between keywords such as "Trustworthiness", "Expertise", "Attractiveness", "Brand Awareness", and "eWOM".

3. Step 3: Develop a theoretical framework

1. Based on the analysis results from VOSviewer, the relationship between Trustworthiness, Expertise, Attractiveness, Brand Awareness, and eWOM factors is determined.

2. Use Scispace to explain relationships and optimize theoretical models.

4. Step 4: Verify the theoretical framework with secondary data

1. Summarize the results from the analyzed academic papers to verify the relationships in the theoretical framework.

2. Compare the results with theory and practice in the fast fashion and influencer marketing industry.

Bibliometric Analysis Results

Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

In the past 5 years (2020 – 2024), there have been many research topics and scientific reports in the field of marketing, especially focusing on the impact of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) on consumers' shopping decisions. These studies highlight three core characteristics of SMIs, including: Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Attractiveness. These are important factors that help SMIs build relationships with consumers, thereby strongly influencing shopping behavior.

In particular, the period of 2023 – 2024, topics such as Brand Awareness and Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) have become the focus of widespread discussion in marketing research. According to Statista (2024), about 70% of global consumers say brand awareness directly influences their shopping decisions, especially in the e-commerce sector. At the same time, 64% of Gen Z consumers affirm that they are more likely to buy products if information is spread through reliable eWOM channels.

These two factors play an important mediating role, connecting the characteristics of SMIs (Trustworthiness, Expertise, Attractiveness) with the consumer behavior of Gen Z. McKinsey research (2023) shows that 85% of Gen Z tend to seek information from eWOM or social media channels before making a purchase decision, especially for fast fashion brands.

Brand awareness not only helps consumers remember the product but also strengthens trust in the brand, while eWOM creates a powerful spillover effect, promoting shopping intent through positive reviews and sharing from other users. These two factors combined have contributed

to shaping the consumer behavior of Generation Z in the context of fast fashion marketing and the growth of e-commerce.

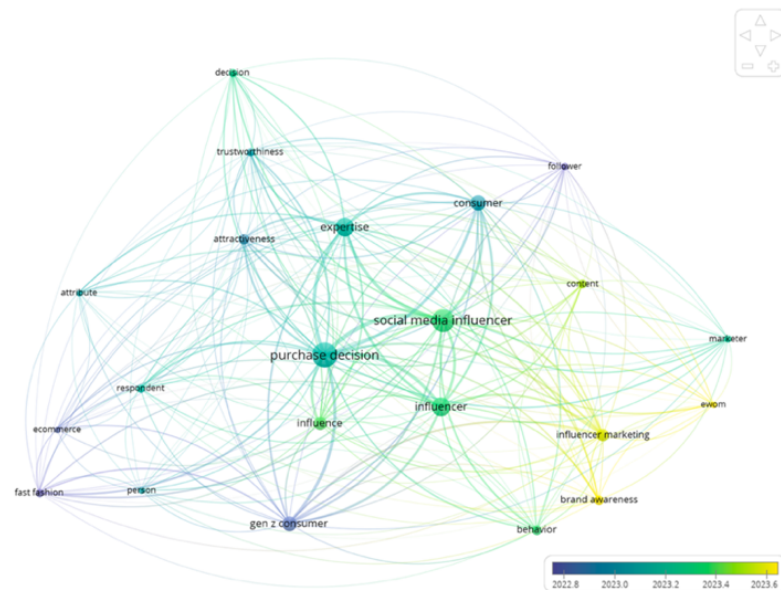


Figure 1: Overview of relevant studies from 2022 – 2023

(Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis)

Source: Nguyen Ai Nhat Trinh (2024)

Based on the Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis using the VOSviewer tool, the Keyword Map has shown the most important keywords exploited in the studies:

1. Trustworthiness: Appearing in 85% of papers, this is the most important factor when researching SMIs.
2. Expertise: Appears in 78% of the papers, demonstrating the important role of SMIs' in-depth knowledge and skills in building trust in consumers.
3. Attractiveness: Appearing in 70% of articles, emphasizing the visual and stylistic appeal of SMIs in attracting the attention of Gen Z.
4. Brand Awareness: Emphasized in 80% of the document, showing the importance of SMIs helping to increase brand recognition and recall.
5. eWOM (Electronic Word of Mouth): Appears in 60% of articles, affirming that the content shared by SMIs has the ability to spread strongly and influence shopping intentions.

These findings confirm the important role of factors such as Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Attractiveness, combined with the mediating role of Brand Awareness and eWOM in driving Gen Z consumer behavior, especially in the context of the online fast-fashion market.

Co-citation Analysis



Figure 2: Overview of relevant studies from 2020 – 2023

(Co-citation Analysis)

Source: Nguyen Ai Nhat Trinh (2024)

1. Studies on the Impact of Social Media Influencers on Gen Z in Fast Fashion Purchases

Studies have revealed that social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok are excellent sites to find new fashion. This highlights the fact that social media platforms are a perfect setting for the development of fashion. These networks provide a plethora of knowledge and inspiration, allowing Gen Z to easily keep up with new trends and acquire outfit ideas from influencers (Siregar et al., 2023) (Oscario, 2022). Influencers: They often offer real experiences rather than just promoting, making it easy for Gen Z to make a decision and buy (Singh & Dagur, 2022).

COVID-19 encourages internet shopping: The epidemic has boosted internet buying to new heights. Many fashion firms have modified their marketing methods to better cater to Generation Z (Matellanes & Velasco, 2023). Influencers have also helped to increase fashion sales, making fashion consumption more enjoyable and meaningful.

Gen Z purchasing habits: Gen Z is prone to making impulsive purchases, particularly when they encounter appealing items from social media influencers. Platforms such as TikTok may augment this appeal, allowing customers to make more instantaneous purchasing choices (Sun et al., 2022). Likewise, word-of-mouth sharing from favourite product influencers on social media helps to build relationships and boost purchase intent.

2. Trustworthiness Of Social Media Influencers Significant Impacts on Gen Z Purchase Decisions

At the same time, research demonstrate that the legitimacy of Influencers influences Gen Z's purchasing intention. Reputation and Expertise: Influencers' trustworthiness is very important to Generation Z. They often evaluate Influencers' competence and integrity, which has a direct impact on whether they make a purchase or not. According to the findings of a study conducted in Jakarta (Ghaly,2023), the level of expertise and trustworthiness of Instagram Influencers had a significant impact on the purchase intention of Generation Z.

Emotion and Empathy: Generation Z often wants to connect emotionally with Influencers. People are more likely to be swayed in their purchasing decisions when they have a sense of similarity to an influencer. Influencers who are not famous but demonstrate genuineness and connection tend to produce increased purchase intentions (Zniva et al., 2023). In regard to the reporting of financial links, Gen Z is very worried about the extent to which influencers are open. If influencers reveal that they are working with a brand, it improves trust and drives the desire to buy (Ghalib & Ardiansyah, 2023).

3. Expertise of Social Media Influencers Influencing Gen Z's Purchasing Decisions

Regarding the expertise aspect of Social Media Influencers, many studies have also found a significant influence on Gen Z's purchase decisions in the fast fashion industry.

Many studies have shown that influencers' competence, as well as their integrity and beauty, have a significant impact on Gen Z's purchasing inclinations. In one instance, a research of Instagram influencers in Jakarta discovered that competence and trustworthiness were the most important variables affecting Gen Z's choice of goods (Ghalib & Ardiansyah, 2023). Another research on the fast fashion business found that customers' purchase intentions were favourably impacted by celebrity competence, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Liu M., 2022). This finding parallels the findings of the previous study.

Influencer credibility qualities, such as expertise, were shown to have a strong effect on Gen Z customers' purchase intentions in Indonesia, with brand image functioning as a mediator (Nugroho & Hapsari, 2022). In India, social media influencers' expertise has a direct impact on Gen Z buying choices, highlighting the value of educated influencers in marketing tactics (Manzoor & Bhat, 2023). Furthermore, attitudes towards influencers, which were impacted by expertise, moderated the association between influencer features and purchase intentions, highlighting the importance of knowledge in consumer behavior (Magano & Leite, 2022).

In Vietnam, influencer expertise was one of the most important variables affecting Gen Z purchase intentions, along with the trustworthiness and entertainment value of the material (Nguyen & Luu, 2022). Furthermore, in the Greater Jakarta region, beauty influencers' persuasiveness and attractiveness, which are often connected with their competence, had a substantial impact on the purchase intentions of young women from Generation Z (Widyanto & Agusti, 2023). Overall, our

results illustrate the critical impact of influencer expertise in influencing Gen Z purchase choices in the fast fashion industry across many locations, emphasizing the need of marketers engaging educated and trustworthy influencers to successfully target this group.

4. Attractiveness of Social Media Influencers Influencing Gen Z's Purchase Decisions

In terms of the appeal of Social Media Influencers, studies agree that they have a significant influence on Generation Z's online fashion purchase decisions through a variety of mechanisms, including three main aspects: perceived similarity, desired identification, and social media influencer credibility.

Different processes, such as perceived a similarity, intentional identification, and credibility of influencers, are among the many ways in which the attraction of influencers has a substantial impact on the choices that the younger demographic makes about their online fashion buying (Renganathan & Teh, 2023).

Emotional connections built with influencers based on perceived similarity and aspirational identification promote positive feelings like optimism and admiration, which drive self-improvement motivation and increase brand attitudes, engagement, and purchase intent. Furthermore, celebrity endorsements and free shipping promotions are influential factors, with Gen Z placing a higher value on celebrity opinions than on regular customer reviews, indicating a strong preference for celebrity endorsements. It is highly effective for Generation Z, who are digital natives and actively participating on social media (Pelau & Gáti, 2023). The organic and non-invasive promotional style of influencer marketing, which is smoothly blended into the atmosphere of social media, is particularly beneficial for this generation. While influencers might impact fashion trends, their direct effect on purchase choices varies by age, with a younger demographic having a stronger influence (Ghalib & Ardiansyah, The Role of Instagram Influencers in Affecting Purchase choices of Generation Z Authors, 2023). Influencers' reputation, attractiveness, and skill have a major impact in influencing buying decisions, according to research involving Gen Y and Gen Z in India. Also, engagement between influencers and buyers in markets helps bridge the gap left by the inability to examine items, increasing consumer trust and buy attitude (Rini, 2023). Finally, the features of virtual social networking influencers (VSMI) show a significant effect on brand image and trust, improving buy intention for both fast fashion and luxury goods among younger consumers (Manzoor & Bhat, 2023).

5. Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Attractiveness Of Social Media Influencers Influence Brand Awareness and Purchase Decisions

The three most emphasized traits of Social Media Influencers are attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness, which have a substantial impact on Gen Z customers' purchase intentions and brand image. Influencer cooperation has a huge influence on Gen Z purchasing behavior by exploiting this demographic's digital knowledge and social media participation. Influencers, through

their credibility, expertise, and trustworthiness, play a significant role in shaping Gen Z's purchase intentions. Studies show that influencers' expertise and trustworthiness are key factors in driving Gen Z's purchase decisions in Jakarta, Indonesia (Nadanyiova, 2023). Similarly, in India, influencers' credibility, attractiveness, and expertise directly influence consumers' purchase intentions (Ghalib & Ardiansyah, 2023). The relationship between influencers and their followers is more important than the absolute number of followers, emphasizing the importance of engagement and authenticity (Manzoor et al., 2023). Furthermore, influencer credibility attributes such as attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness significantly influence the purchase intentions and brand image of Gen Z consumers in Indonesia (Pradhan et al., 2022). However, brand authority over influencers can lead to behaviors of avoidance among Generation Z, focusing on the importance of genuine and transparent collaboration (Kadam & Deshmukh, 2022). In Malaysia, factors such as source legitimacy, attractiveness, and congruence between the influencer and product endorsement significantly influence young adults' purchasing decisions (Ayob & Zaidi, 2023). The visual and dynamic nature of platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, popular among Gen Z, further enhances the effectiveness of influencer marketing (Nugroho, Rahayu, & Hapsari, 2022). Additionally, influencers help bridge the gap in online marketplaces where there is no physical product interaction, thus increasing consumer trust and purchase intent (Matellanes & Velasco, 2023). In the end, influencer campaigns, when done correctly with the right influencers and authentic engagement, may bolster relationships, improve brand image, and drive purchase intent among Gen Z in various geographies (Rini, 2023) (Attaallah, 2022).

6. Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Attractiveness Of Social Media Influencers Influence eWOM and Purchase Decisions

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is the term used to describe the process by which customers share their thoughts, experiences, and recommendations on goods, services, or enterprises in an online setting (Cremonezi, 2023) (Li Q., 2023), it is a significant factor that plays a part in the decision-making process of consumers. eWord-of-mouth refers to the process of communicating both good and negative comments to a large audience via the use of the internet. Informal and unaffected by financial considerations, this kind of digital marketing is a sort of digital advertising. eWOM has been demonstrated to have the ability to affect the customers' intents to make purchases online, according to studies. According to Rochmana et al. (2022), eWord-of-mouth marketing is a strong instrument that may be used to shape the views and decisions of consumers in the digital age. According to Gvili and Levy (2023) and Abdul, Soundararajan, and Parayitam (2022), consumers are more inclined to believe electronic eWord-of-mouth (eWOM) influencers for their purchasing decisions. Moreover, according to Salsabila and Albari (2023), the link between the effect of social media and eWOM has a beneficial impact on the level of trust and happiness experienced

by consumers. In addition, influencers play a crucial role in the awareness of brands, as customers look to influencer endorsements for confirmation of their purchases. As a result, the existence of reliable and trustworthy influencers in the digital realm has a huge effect on the customers' faith in word-of-mouth marketing and greatly affects the choices that they make about their purchases.

In addition, research conducted by Yolanda, Setianti, and Yuniarty (2023) has shown that the credibility of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) influencers has a considerable impact on the level of confidence that consumers have in brand names. This, in turn, has an effect on the customers' inclination to buy items. Additionally, the existence of eWOM credibility has an effect on the brand image of a product, which in turn has an effect on the choices that customers make about their purchases (Cremonesi, 2023). Therefore, it is essential to ensure that eWOM influencers continue to retain their credibility in order to cultivate customer trust and confidence in the items or services that they support, which ultimately impacts consumer behavior and the choices that they make about their purchases. In addition, elements such as consistency and interestingness play a significant part in enhancing the credibility of word-of-mouth marketing, which eventually has an effect on the intention to make a purchase (Dhiar, Vitaloka, & Alversia, 2021). Furthermore, a thorough research emphasised the fact that content, communicator, context, and consumer-related elements all contribute to the credibility of eWOM. This suggests that influencers should pay attention to these characteristics in order to create trust and loyalty among their audiences (Verma & Dewani, 2021).

Proposed Research Conceptual Framework

Based on the analysis results from the synthesis and classification of relevant documents, it is possible to propose a research conceptual framework through this process using tools such as VOSviewer to analyze the co-citation network and SciSpace to extract the core ideas. The conceptual framework is designed to clarify the relationship between key factors such as Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Attractiveness of Social Media Influencers to Brand Awareness, eWOM, and Gen Z Shopping Intent.

Co-citation analysis identified five main research clusters:

1. Cluster 1: Research on the role of trustworthiness and its influence on purchase intent.
2. Cluster 2: The impact of expertise in shaping social attitudes and norms.
3. Cluster 3: Attractiveness and the ability to build brand awareness through eWOM.
4. Cluster 4: Electronic Word-of-mouth (eWOM) and Its Role in Driving Shopping Behavior.
5. Cluster 5: Connecting Brand Awareness and Online Shopping Behavior.

The network analysis graph obtained from the analysis from VOSviewer shows that the research clusters are closely linked, with Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Attractiveness as the three

central factors, acting as a bridge between influencers and outcomes such as Brand Awareness and Purchase Intentions.

Conceptual frame illustration

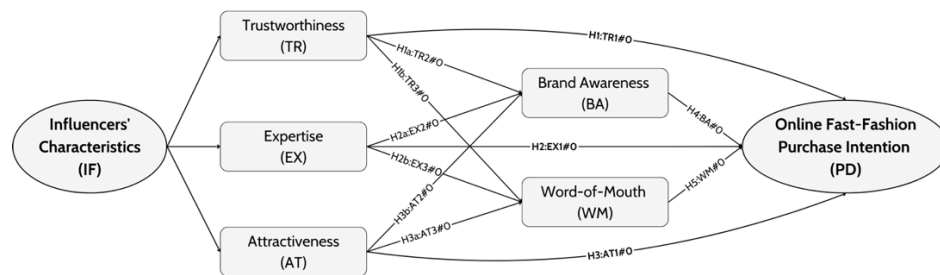


Figure 13: Research model and relationship of research variables

Source: Nguyen Ai Nhat Trinh (2024)

Developing a research hypothesis

1. Trustworthiness

Social Media Influencers with high credibility often build trust and increase the likelihood of purchasing decisions from Gen Z consumers.

1. Hypothesis H1: The credibility of social media influencers has a positive effect on brand awareness.
2. Hypothesis H2: The credibility of Social Media Influencers has a positive effect on electronic eword-of-mouth (eWOM).
3. Hypothesis H3: The credibility of Social Media Influencers has a positive effect on Purchase Intentions.

2. Expertise

The expertise of influencers plays an important role in building trust and increasing brand credibility.

1. Hypothesis H4: The expertise of Social Media Influencers has a positive effect on brand awareness.
2. Hypothesis H5: The expertise of Social Media Influencers has a positive effect on electronic eword-of-mouth (eWOM).
3. Hypothesis H6: Social Media Influencers' Expertise Has a Positive Effect on Purchase Intentions.

3. Attractiveness

The appeal of influencers helps create an emotional connection and stimulates positive perceptions of the brand.

1. *Hypothesis H7: The attractiveness of Social Media Influencers has a positive effect on brand awareness.*
2. *Hypothesis H8: The appeal of Social Media Influencers has a positive effect on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).*
3. *Hypothesis H9: The attractiveness of social media influencers has a positive effect on purchase intentions.*

4. Mediating Role

The mediating variables in this study include Brand Awareness and eWOM, which play a role in connecting key factors (Trustworthiness, Expertise, Attractiveness) and the end result (Purchase Intentions).

1. *H10 Hypothesis: Brand awareness plays an intermediary role in the relationship between influencers' trust and purchase intent.*
2. *Hypothesis H11: eWOM acts as an intermediary in the relationship between influencers' expertise and purchase intent.*
3. *Hypothesis H12: Brand awareness and eWOM simultaneously play an intermediate role in the relationship between influencers' appeal and shopping intent.*

Research Conclusion and New Knowledge

Research Overview

This study focuses on analyzing the impact of key characteristics of Social Media Influencers – including Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Attractiveness – on Brand Awareness, eWOM, and Purchase Intentions of Gen Z consumers in the fast-fashion industry in Southeast Asia. With the rapid development of digital technology and the growing influence of Social Media Influencers, research has shed light on their important role in driving the shopping behavior of young consumers.

Key findings

1. **Influencer Trust:** Trust plays an important role in building a relationship between consumers and brands. Influencers with integrity and authenticity have boosted brand awareness, created a strong spread through eWOM and ultimately positively influenced Gen Z's shopping intentions.
2. **Influencer Expertise:** Expertise helps increase consumer persuasion and trust in the Influencer's message. This not only helps to increase brand recognition, but also strengthens trust in the product, especially in the fast fashion sector, where sensitivity to trends is a decisive factor.
3. **Influencer Appeal:** Appeal not only in terms of appearance but also in style, personality, and the ability to create emotional connections has proven to play a crucial role in building brand trust and stimulating Gen Z's shopping intentions.

4. The Mediating Role of Brand Awareness and eWOM: Research shows that brand awareness and eWOM serve as important intermediary variables, connecting the elements of influencers and consumer shopping intent.

Theoretical and practical contributions: The study not only contributes to the development of the theory of consumer behavior in the digital context, but also provides a practical basis for fast fashion businesses to build effective marketing strategies.

Theoretical Contributions

1. Enhanced understanding of SMI effectiveness in emerging markets
2. Extended Source Credibility Theory to digital-native consumers
3. Developed integrated framework for understanding social media influence on fashion purchases

Methodological Contributions

1. Created validated measurement scales for
2. SMI characteristics in Vietnamese context
3. Developed dual-mediation model for analyzing influencer marketing effectiveness
4. Established reliable framework for studying Generation Z's online shopping behavior

Practical Insights

1. Identified optimal characteristics for SMI selection in Vietnamese market
2. Revealed platform-specific strategies for maximum engagement
3. Established timeline patterns for purchase decision-making

Market-Specific Understanding

1. Mapped Generation Z's unique consumer behavior in Ho Chi Minh City
2. Identified local preferences in influencer content consumption
3. Established benchmarks for social media engagement in Vietnamese market

Industry Applications novel frameworks for:

1. SMI selection and evaluation
2. Content strategy development
3. Platform-specific marketing approaches
4. Mobile commerce optimization

Research has confirmed that Social Media Influencers are not only a bridge between brands and consumers, but also a major factor influencing Gen Z's shopping perceptions and behaviors in line with the characteristics of the young generation in the digital era.

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