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Research on the Impact of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM), User-Generated Content and Subjective Norm on the Intention to Purchase Vegan Cosmetics of Gen Z Women Through Social Media Platforms in Vietnam

[1] **Tran Pham Huyen Trang**
[1] Vietnam-Korea University of Information and Communication Technology, Vietnam
[1] The University of Danang, Danang, Vietnam

Corresponding Author: **Tran Pham Huyen Trang**

Abstract

The Vietnamese market is experiencing intense competition, especially in the context of technological development and companies looking for ways to reach Gen Z consumers. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have become places where consumers learn about products, read reviews, and interact with brands. Gen Z frequently uses these platforms to explore new products and review opinions from the community. The purpose of this research is to clarify the relationship between factors such as eWom, subjective norms, and user-generated content with the purchase intention of Gen Z females towards vegan cosmetics, thereby providing appropriate marketing strategies for the Vietnamese market.

Data was collected through an online survey targeting three main groups: working individuals, students, and high schoolers. A total of 415 valid observations were used to test the relationships through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The research results show that all hypotheses are accepted and statistically significant, contributing to proving and expanding previous hypotheses and aligning with the current situation. The study suggests several practical solutions to help businesses increase the online purchase intention of vegan cosmetics for female Gen Z consumers through popular social media platforms in Vietnam.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of the Internet has driven the explosion of digital marketing services. The way people search for information online is also undergoing significant changes. The Internet provides global connectivity, allowing billions of users to access and communicate within an immense space of information. People can easily share their thoughts, feelings and personal experiences with the community. Therefore, Online shopping is becoming increasingly popular among many consumer generations in the digital transformation era, especially Generation Z.

Generation Z, also known as Gen Z, is gradually becoming a key and influential consumer group, attracting attention from businesses selling through social media and e-commerce platforms. Gen Z's online shopping habits have almost completely reshaped the market, as they are Vietnamese market consumers who carefully consider and evaluate important factors before deciding to purchase any product.

In today's digital age, the rapid growth of technology has made it easier for consumers to access product information through social media platforms. This method, commonly referred to as electronic word of mouth (Ewom), plays a significant role in shaping purchasing decisions. Online reviews and recommendations contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of consumer choices. Several studies highlight that eWom is a key driver in promoting Vegan Cosmetics purchasing intentions (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020; Rahim *et al*., 2016). Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWom) has emerged as a powerful tool for marketing and brand promotion in the online space (Hussain *et al*., 2018). The wide range of devices and digital platforms

available today enables both businesses and consumers to create, share, and evaluate various forms of content to meet personal objectives. These include sharing information, assessing products, voicing dissatisfaction with subpar offerings, providing business solutions, and warning other consumers about specific products or services (Shankar *et al*., 2022).

Another crucial factor identified in recent international research on Vegan Cosmetics purchasing intentions is trust. When consumers feel that a product meets their environmental expectations, they are more likely to make a purchase (Chen & Chang, 2012).

In addition, eWom, User-Generated Content plays a key role in trust. Businesses need to focus on creating positive experiences, thereby enhancing the ability to convert potential customers into actual buyers and build long-term relationships with them.

The research aims to determine the impact of eWom, User-Generated Content, Subjective norm, trust and on the purchase intention of Gen Z women consumers in choosing vegan Cosmetics in Vietnam through social media platforms.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development
2.1 Vegan Cosmetics
Modern consumers are increasingly choosing vegan cosmetics because of its safety, tenderness, and environmental friendliness. Vegan cosmetics provide substantial health and environmental advantages because they are made completely of plant-based materials and do not include animal experimentation during production.

Vegan cosmetics are merchandise that are 100% free of animal-derived ingredients, consisting of honey, beeswax, carmine and gelatin. They are additionally now not examined on animals.

Vegan cosmetics are made with plant-based components that are herbal and mild on the skin. They are frequently prosperous in moisture, which helps to hydrate dry pores and skin and minimize oil manufacturing for oily skin. Vegan cosmetics are additionally appropriate for touchy pores and skin and are much less possibly to irritate traditional cosmetics.

2.2 Electronic word-of-mouth on Social media platforms
Social Media, also known as social networking platforms, is an interactive technology that allows users to create, share, and exchange information with the community on the Internet. Currently, popular Social Media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and others.

Social media platforms are considered highly effective for eWom (Kim *et al*., 2014; Erkan and Evans, 2016). Through social media, individuals can share their opinions via comments, images, videos, or simply by clicking "like" on certain information. Moreover, by sharing posts, social media allows eWom to reach a wide audience (Chu and Kim, 2011). With these features and convenience, an increasing number of people are turning to social media to gather information and seek advice about products and services (Barreda *et al*., 2015). In this study, electronic word of mouth (eWom) is examined from an informational perspective and can occur in various ways. Users may intentionally share information about the brands or products/services they are experiencing or researching, but they may also unintentionally provide references for others

by expressing their preferences, such as becoming followers, members, or interacting with brand-related posts through liking, commenting, or posting content relevant to the brand without any commercial advertising intention. Most importantly, marketers can also engage with users by sending information through their official accounts on social media platforms (Alboqami *et al*., 2015).

2.3 User-Generated Content (UGC)
User-Generated Content (UGC) refers to any content created and shared by users on a particular online platform or website (Khan *et al*., 2021). UGC, such as user reviews, is generated by the general public based on their personal experiences, rather than by professionals who are compensated for producing such material (Rodgers & Wang, 2011). UGC plays a crucial role in shaping and influencing purchase intentions, as it provides consumers with a deeper understanding of a product or service (Yang & Adomavicius, 2019). In a study conducted by Norsita and Lestari (2020) on YouTube beauty product review videos, they found a strong correlation between UGC and purchasing intentions. The research indicated that the more engaging and attractive the content is, the more likely viewers are to watch it and use it to fulfill their informational needs. This conclusion is consistent with other recent studies that have highlighted the significant impact of UGC on purchase intention (Muda & Hamzah, 2021; Panopoulos *et al*., 2022; Costa & Abd Aziz, 2021; Zhu & Zhang, 2022).

2.4 Subjective norm
This suggests that social anxiety can influence individuals by social pressure in three distinct ways. A subjective norm can be assessed based on others' normative expectations and an individual's motivation to meet those expectations. When considering normative beliefs, it should be understood as a key factor in shaping subjective norms. The next stage involves considering the perspectives, opinions, and expectations of specific groups within the community.

Subjective norm is a social influence. Subjective norm is defined as "the person's perception that most people who are important to him or her think he/she should or should not perform the behavior in question". Also, subjective norm is a component included in the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behavior showing that subjective norm can influence one's behavior by impacting on one's behavioral intentions.

2.5 Trust
Trust has been a frequently discussed concept in academic literature, with the most common definition provided by Moorman *et al*. (1992), who described it as a willingness to rely on a business partner. Barney and Hansen (1994) defined trust as mutual confidence that neither party would exploit the other's vulnerabilities. According to Jarvenpaa, Noam, and Vitale (2000), trust is a relationship influenced by uncertainty, sensitivity, and commitment. Additionally, trust can be seen as an individual's belief in others, which is shaped by their integrity, generosity, and competence (McKnight *et al*., 2002; Lin, 2011). Pavlou and Fygenson (2006) further defined trust as the buyer's confidence that the seller will act in a generous, professional, and ethical manner. More recently, Oh *et al*. (2012) described trust as an expectation formed by individuals or groups, leading to a

tendency to believe in and value their trusted trading partners. Online trust is built through positive feedback on websites (Jarvenpaa *et al*., 2000). It plays a critical role in shaping customers' attitudes and purchase intentions (Gefen and Straub, 2003; Gefen and Community, 2003; Wang and Emurian, 2005; Hassanein and Head, 2007; Lin, 2011; Limbu *et al*., 2012).

2.6 Purchasing intention
Purchasing intention is described by Spears and Singh (2004) as "an individual's deliberate plan to make an effort to buy a brand." The process of making a purchase decision is intricate, and purchase intention plays a crucial role in the evaluation of alternatives during this process (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). Online purchase intention is an extension of general purchase intention (Close and Kukar-Kinney, 2010). Dodds *et al*. (1991) suggest that purchasing intention refers to the likelihood or willingness of customers to make a purchase. According to Meskaran *et al*. (2013), purchasing intention arises when customers are prepared to make an online purchase. Similarly, Ariffin *et al*. (2018) define online purchasing intention as the consumer's desire to buy products and services through the internet.

2.7 The association of electronic word of mouth, User-generated content, experience with trust and Vegan Cosmetics purchase intention through Social media platforms
The association of electronic word of mouth on Trust
Abubakar and Ilkan (2016) [2] discovered that eWom had a significant effect on trust. This finding aligns with other research indicating that eWom positively and significantly influences trust (Matute *et al*., 2016; See-To & Ho, 2014). Based on these findings, this study presents the following hypothesis:

H1: eWom on social media platforms positively affects Trust.

The association of User-Generated Content on Trust
User-generated content has been identified as a key driver of consumer trust (Brown, 2019). As mentioned earlier, consumers view UGC as a reliable source of information, given its authentic and peer-driven nature (Smith & Johnson, 2020). Positive online reviews and high ratings not only signal product quality but also contribute to building trust in the brand (Wang & Chen, 2019). On the other hand, negative reviews and low ratings can erode trust and deter potential customers (Tracy & Cai, 2018).

H2: The association of User-Generated Content on social media platforms positively affects Trust

The association of Subjective norm on purchase intention
Subjective norms refer to the belief that significant individuals or groups will approve and support a specific behavior. These norms are shaped by the perceived social pressure to act in a particular way and an individual's motivation to align with the views of others. Previous studies have generally shown that the influence of subjective norms on forming intentions is weaker than that of attitudes.

Additionally, research by Norris Krueger and colleagues (Krueger, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2000) found no correlation between subjective norms and the intention to start a business. As a result, they call for further investigation and refinement of the measures used. One possible explanation for the inconsistencies in the importance of subjective norms is that some of the information this variable captures is already reflected in the desirability of engaging in a specific behavior. A commonly noted weakness of the theory of planned behavior is the weak relationship between subjective norms and intentions. Icek Ajzen, the theory's author (1991), attributes this to the strong influence of personal factors, such as attitudes and perceived behavioral control, on intentions. Armitage and Conner (2001) critique the narrow conceptualization of subjective norms, which weakens the correlation between normative beliefs and intentions. In contrast, Rivis and Sheeran (2003) argue that the confirmed link between descriptive norms and intentions suggests the potential predictive power of this variable, highlighting the need for further research in this field.

H3: Subjective norm will have positive influence on Vegan Cosmetics purchase intention.

The effect of Trust on Vegan Cosmetics purchase intention
Trust plays a vital role in helping consumers navigate uncertainty and risk, encouraging them to engage in behaviors linked to trust, such as sharing information or making purchases. Harris and Goode (2010) suggest that consumer purchase intention is influenced by trust. Furthermore, studies by Grazioli and Jarvenpaa (2000) and Teng and Wang (2015) indicate that consumer trust has a positive impact on purchase intentions. Based on this, hypothesis H5 will be tested in this study to explore the relationship between trust and Vegan Cosmetics purchase intention.

H4: Trust has a positive effect on Vegan Cosmetics purchase intention

The effect of eWom through social media platforms Vegan Cosmetics purchase intention
The connection between eWom and purchase intention has been extensively explored in existing research. Numerous studies, such as those by Mirnawati & Rustam (2023), Ulan (2022), and Rusmayanti & Agustin (2020), have shown that eWom plays a crucial role in influencing purchase intention. These studies highlight the impact of eWom on consumer thought processes and behaviors when making purchasing decisions. Furthermore, earlier research has indicated that eWom, both directly and indirectly, significantly affects purchase intention (Al-Halbusi & Tehseen, 2018; Alhidari *et al*., 2015; Erkan & Evans, 2018). Taken together, these studies offer compelling evidence of a strong, positive relationship between eWom and purchase intention. Based on the discussion above, the following hypothesis is presented:

H5: Electronic word-of-mouth on Social media platforms has a positive effect Vegan Cosmetics purchase intention
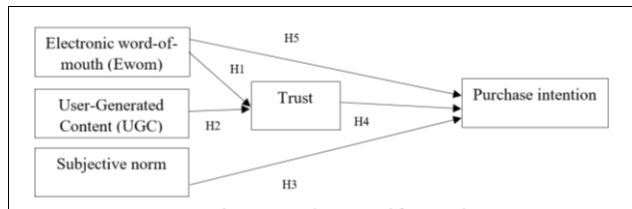
Fig.1: Proposed conceptual framework

3. Methodology

This research is a quantitative descriptive study, with the aim of getting an idea of the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWom), user-generated content and subjective norm on the intention to purchase vegan cosmetics of gen Z women through social media platforms in vietnam. For the quantitative approach, it is explained (Arikunto, 2010) that the approach uses quantitative because it uses numbers, starting from data collection, interpretation of the data and the appearance of the results.

The research team used two data sources: primary data and secondary data. Secondary data is collected mainly from sources such as Google scholar, and previous domestic and foreign studies. Primary data was collected using an online survey to measure the eWom, User-Generated Content, Subjective norm, Trust and Purchase intention of the participants. The questionnaire form of the study consists of four parts. The scales were prepared in five-point Likert type as "1 = strongly disagree" and "7 = strongly agree".

The questionnaire was open to the access of the participants between 01.05.2024 - 30.06.2024 and 415 participants filled the questionnaire during this period. The research data and hypotheses were tested using SPSS 20.0 and AMOS 24.0.

4. Results

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Reliability is measured using Cronbach's Alpha, and the scale is considered reliable when the coefficient is 0.6 or higher (Ha & Bui, 2019). The analysis results show that the Cronbach's Alpha values for the constructs range from 0.90 to 0.96. Therefore, the scales for the variables demonstrate good reliability.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis Results

Constructs	Encode	AVE	CA	R²
Electronic word-of-mouth (eWom)	EW	0.76	0.90	
User-Generated Content (UGC)	UG	0.72	0.95	
Subjective norm	SN	0.78	0.92	
Trust	TR	0.85	0.93	0.65
Purchase intention	PI	0.88	0.91	0.72

4.2 Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

The results of Exploratory factor analysis considering four observed variables, showed a total variance explained of 64.194%. The research model demonstrated a KMO index of 0.821 and Bartlett's Test with Chi-Square = 376.155; df = 3 and Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05, indicating a strong correlation among the variables.

4.3 Confirmatory factor analysis

The results of the analysis through the Modification Indices (MI), show that: The research model has a P value of 0.000, Chi-square value = 271.846, Chi-square/df = 1.599, which is less than 2. RMSEA = 0.045, less than 0.08; TLI = 0.973, CFI = 0.970, both greater than 0.9 and the GFI index =

0.914, greater than 0.9. Thus, the indices indicate that the constructed model is suitable for the research data and the research concepts introduced are convergent, the CR coefficient is greater than 0.7 and AVE is greater than 0.5, satisfying the conditions for CFA analysis.

4.4 Structural Equation Modelling

The results shows the SEM analysis results regarding the adequacy of the research data show values of Chi-square = 324.057, df = 196, P = 0.000, GFI = 0.902, TLI = 0.917, CFI = 0.925, RMSEA = 0.027. The proposed model is considered to meet the required criteria. It can be asserted that the research model is reliable.
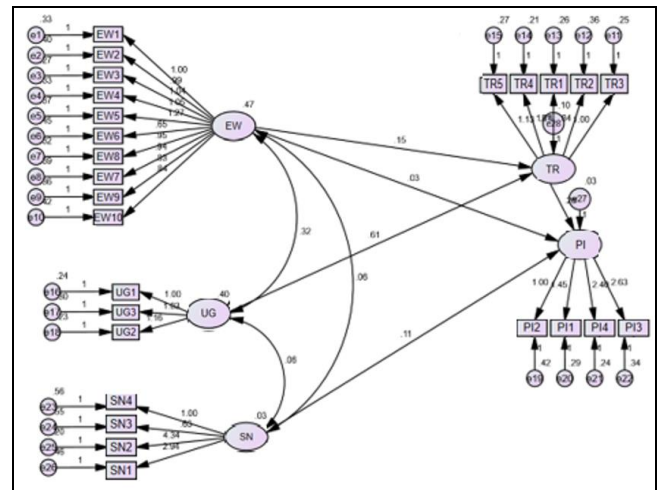

Fig 2: Structural model results

Hypotheses tests using SEM model

Table 2: Evaluation of structural model results

Hypothesized relationship				Standardized Coefficient β	S.E	C.R.	P	Conclusion
H5	PI	<---	EW	0.03	.068	2.05	.040	Supported
H4	PI	<---	TR	0.26	.077	3.04	.020	Supported
H3	PI	<---	SN	0.11	.047	4.02	.039	Supported
H1	TR	<---	EW	0.15	.067	2.95	.001	Supported
H2	TR	<---	UG	0.61	.101	2.65	.031	Supported

5. Conclusion and Implications

Within the scope of the study, as a result of the regression analysis conducted to examine the relationships between variables, it was concluded that the ewom, User-Generated Content, Subjective norm, Trust has positive and significant effects on the purchase intention. So it can be stated that our study, which is found positive and significant relationships among these variables, is in accordance with other studies in the literature. Furthermore, it is evident that the acceptance of Trust is influenced by the positively oriented relevance of eWom and User-Generated Content. These findings substantiate the hypothesis that Gen Z women are more likely to embrace online review information when it is pertinent to their decisions.

The research results identified three factors affecting the Purchase intention Vegan Cosmetics of Gen Z women in Vietnam. The impact levels from high to low are as follows: Trust (β = 0.26), Subjective norm (β = 0.11), Electronic word-of-mouth (β = 0.03).

In order to turn consumers' intentions to purchase vegan cosmetics products on social media into future decisions,

businesses selling these products need to take appropriate measures. First, provide transparent and accurate information about the product's origin, ingredients, and production process. Certifications and documentation proving that the product is cruelty-free and fully vegan should be made public to reassure customers when making purchasing decisions. Additionally, leverage the power of user reviews and feedback by encouraging customers who have used the product to share their reviews and experiences on social media. Posts and video reviews from influencers or real consumers will help build trust, especially when these reviews reflect satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of the product. Lastly, businesses can collaborate with influencers or key figures in the vegan cosmetics community to promote their products. These individuals already have trust from their followers and can help the brand reach the right target audience.

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