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The impact of online reviews and eWOM on impulse buying tendency: a study of Vietnamese Gen Z consumers

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Abstract: Impulse buying, also known as unplanned purchasing with little deliberation, has received considerable attention in consumer research for several decades. While impulse buying has been extensively studied in Western contexts, research remains sparse in emerging economies, particularly in Vietnam. This study investigates the impact of online social factors, namely online reviews and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), on impulse buying tendency (IBT); social influence theory is used to explain the relationship between these variables. Data were collected through a self-administered survey questionnaire distributed to 318 young consumers (Gen Z) living in Binh Duong province, south of Vietnam. A quantitative approach was employed, and structural equation modelling was used to analyse and interpret the data. The critical findings reveal the positive influence of online reviews and eWOM on IBT. Moreover, eWOM significantly mediates the relationship between online reviews and IBT. The findings also demonstrate a strong relationship between online reviews and eWOM, indicating that the more online comments generated, the greater the eWOM effects. The study also suggests that online retailers, especially those employing e-commerce platforms, should consider appropriate marketing strategies to stimulate online social interactions and, thus, trigger impulsive consumption in order to cultivate more loyal customer relationships.

Keywords: E-social factors; impulse buying; IB; electronic word-of-mouth; eWOM; online reviews; Gen Z.

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1 Introduction

Impulse buying (IB), as defined by Rook (1987), is characterised as an unplanned, compelling, irresistible, and emotionally driven purchase that has been a focal point of consumer research for several decades. Since the 1950s, IB has been studied extensively in mature markets whilst in emerging markets like Vietnam, it has gained attention since the early 2000s (Cho et al., 2014; Khuong and Tran, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2003), played a significant role in customer behaviour explanation, which directly related to the addictive behaviour of young consumers for online purchasing (Altintas et al., 2010).

While IB has traditionally been associated with physical retail environments, the digital age has brought about new dynamics to this phenomenon. As internet accessibility and acceptance have expanded rapidly around the world, the number of digital consumers grows yearly. More than two billion consumers made online purchases in 2020, with global e-commerce sales exceeding \$4.2 trillion (Statista, 2022). Because online shopping frees consumers from restrictions such as inconvenienced store locations and

short operating hours that they might experience during actual shopping activities, the online shopping environment has become a popular platform around the world (Chan et al., 2017). In recent years, increasing numbers of businesses in Vietnam have been realising the importance of social commerce activities due to the rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Zalo, TikTok, etc. These web-based business activities can take advantage of social media and social network sites which are known as 'the social commerce' (Zhang and Benyoucef, 2016). With the development of e-commerce activities, consumers now frequently make impulsive purchases online (Xu et al., 2020). Freed from the constraints of brick-and-mortar establishments, online shoppers are more likely to make impulsive buys (Chan et al., 2017).

According to a study by Jacobsen and Barnes (2017), social commerce websites influence more than 70% of all online purchases. A larger study by Nielsen (2016) reveals that 61% of female consumers and 54% of male consumers acknowledged engaging in online impulse purchases. Interestingly, customers are more prone to making impulsive purchases in social commerce settings because they have more opportunities to influence one another (Shi and Chow, 2015).

Researchers have examined how website characteristics (Chen et al., 2019), marketing cues (Hui et al., 2013), customer factors and situational factors (Bellini et al., 2017) affect online impulsive purchase behaviour in e-commerce situations in the literature that has already been published. However, a few empirical research studies investigate impulse purchasing in social commerce environments (Xiang et al., 2016). The effect of diverse social elements on impulse purchases on social commerce websites has not been adequately investigated (Xiang et al., 2016). In such situations, online social factors such as the influence of friends, family members or strangers, etc., may play a crucial role in the online impulsive purchase (Chen et al., 2016). In order to close this knowledge gap, this study will look at the effect of online reviews and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on the likelihood of impulse purchasing. In particular, online reviews are regarded as to a particular kind of social interaction, in which the information related to products or services is shared among customers in social commerce environments (Zhang et al., 2018). Meanwhile, eWOM is related to positive, negative, and neutral statements made by customers about products, services, or even organisations (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), could be regarded as an order of interpersonal communication and group communication through social media or other electronic media (Nisar et al., 2020).

As the most prevalent types of online social interactions, it has been established that online reviews and eWOM have substantial effects on consumers' purchase decisions (Zhang, et al., 2018). Previous research has also demonstrated that online reviews influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Xiang et al., 2016). Prior research also revealed that consumer recommendations could increase prospective purchasers' interest and willingness to buy on impulse (Floh and Madlberger, 2013). The research study is based on the Social influence theory to explain the importance of such social contacts in the impulse purchasing tendency. Social stimuli can easily influence consumers in the setting of social commerce because of the abundance of online content, especially the information disseminated by internet users (Kimiagari and Asadi Malafe, 2021). It is also possible to analyse one's own decisions by comparing one's actions to those of other consumers who have already made the same choices. Our research on impulsive purchases in the social commerce environment follows this notion. This study aims to address the following research questions:

- 1 What are the roles of online reviews and eWOM in producing an IB tendency (IBT)?
- 2 Does eWOM mediate the relationship of online reviews and an IBT?

Addressing these questions is vital for comprehending the impact of social factors such as online reviews and eWOM on IBT. This understanding can assist online marketers in fostering social interactions that have the potential to prompt impulsive consumption and, consequently, increase sales.

2 Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1 Impulse buying

Rook (1987), Clover (1950) defined IB as a “unplanned purchase” and this definition compares a consumer’s pre-store buying list to their final purchases. However, such a description was inadequate and contentious because environmental factors may influence consumers’ plans (Rook and Fisher, 1995). In-store planning may help buyers decide on purchases (Nesbitt, 1959). A consumer’s purchase of a bottle of milk or toilet paper not on the list may not be an impulse buy because they may have utilised the store as a memory trigger (Stern, 1962). This sort of impulsive buying is called ‘reminder IB’ because environmental signals or viewing a product reminds customers of their wants (Liao et al., 2009). Stern (1962) coined the term ‘pure IB’ to describe spontaneous buying without the time-consuming information search and rational decision-making. Engel and Blackwell (1982) defined IB as a buying action without a problem or buying intention before entering the store, whereas Cobb and Hoyer (1986) defined it as a buying decision without a brand or category in mind. However, these definitions do not include customers’ emotional responses to impulse purchases or fully explain IB. Due to these limitations, Rook (1987) reframed IB as:

- 1 a sudden, often powerful, and persistent urge to buy
- 2 the hedonically complex impulse
- 3 temporary out-of-control
- 4 psychological conflict and struggle
- 5 reduction of cognitive evaluation
- 6 neglect of consequences.

2.2 Impulse buying tendency

According to Bashar et al. (2013), the likelihood that a buyer makes an impulsive purchase without planning is known as the IBT. Therefore, it can be considered as a personal trait and a characteristic (Jones et al., 2003; Rook, 1987), so its intensity varies amongst individuals (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998). Youn and Faber (2000) define IBT and the personality trait as a ‘lack of control,’ which describes people who have trouble controlling their impulses, and that was found to be correlated. Additionally, consumers with higher IBT are also found to be more susceptible to being persuaded by marketing stimuli, such as commercials, visual components, coupons and gifts. As a result, they are

also found to be more likely to browse in-store and react more frequently to the urge to make impulse purchases.

2.3 Gen Z consumers

According to the President of the Pew Research Centre (Dimock, 2019), Gen Zers are born between 1995 and the early 2010s; they are 'digital natives' since they grew up online (Adeola et al., 2020; Reinikainen et al., 2020). According to estimates, Gen Z will make up 32% of the worldwide population by 2030, making it the largest consumer group. Therefore, a research on this potentially influential generation cohort is crucial (Miller and Lu, 2018). Since this generation is expected to greatly impact global consumer expenditures, studying its impulsive buying tendencies may be interesting (Wolf, 2020).

Vietnamese Gen Z consumers are more likely to be interested in impulsive purchases since they are affected by non-traditional attitudes (Nguyen et al., 2003). Hence, they share common characteristics with their global counterparts: heavy internet users, embedded in social media sites, i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, etc. Therefore, understanding Gen Z's IB behaviour can bring valuable insights. This provides a useful opportunity to research the effects of online social characteristics on the propensity for impulse purchases in e-commerce settings.

2.4 Social influence theory

Social influence theory suggests that interactions with other people can cause people to modify their opinions, feelings, attitudes, or behaviours (Amblee and Bui, 2011). The theory splits into Normative and Informational branches (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). Normative social influence is defined as an influence to conform to the favourable expectations of another, while informational social influence is defined as an impact to accept information obtained from another as evidence of reality (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). Conceptually, these two types of social influence differ from one another (Lord et al., 2001). Normative influence is connected to self-upkeep and compliance, whereas informational impact is linked to the acceptance of certain knowledge and evidence (Kwahk and Kim, 2017).

2.5 The effect of social influence on impulse buying

Mattila and Wirtz (2008) define two categories of social factors, i.e., store employees and other customers, and their study finds that social influences have an impact on impulsive purchases. When looking at the significance of social aspects in impulsive buying, it is vital to remember that Rook and Fisher's findings reveal that anonymity may actually enhance impulse purchasing (Rook and Fisher, 1995). In general, social elements (as external factors) increase the likelihood of impulse purchases, such as social needs (Hausman, 2000), social contacts (Park and Lennon, 2006), consumer susceptibility, or the presence of others (Luo, 2005). Asch (1955) also defines social influence as the effects that individuals have on the opinions, sentiments and behaviour of others. The concept of an e-social influence has emerged as a result of today's prevalent tendency to utilise social media. Because of the potential risks of online shopping where people cannot see and touch the products as they can do in physical stores, to reduce this risk,

online shoppers frequently seek references from social media before making purchasing selections (Baber et al., 2016). This is especially true for intangible, perishable, and variable and inseparable products and services (Kotler et al., 2001). On social media, users communicate with others about their experiences by posting reviews, comments, ideas, photographs and videos (Buhalis and Law, 2008). As a result, people place a high value on recommendations from family or close friends on their social networks (Neirotti et al., 2016). Users' online impulsive buying decisions are predicted to be affected by this form of e-social impact.

2.6 *Online social interactions: online reviews and eWOM*

2.6.1 *Online reviews*

Prior studies have generally examined e-social interactions via the lenses of interpersonal impact, observational learning and social support (Zheng et al. (2019). To assess product quality and minimise risks in online settings, people prefer to read consumer reviews of products (Ullah et al., 2020). Online reviews are a particular kind of social interaction that emphasises sharing product or service-related information amongst consumers in social commerce environments where consumers may swiftly assess other consumers' online reviews and product sales (Zhang et al., 2018). In this study, we look at how online reviews, which produce an e-social element, affect people's propensities to make impulsive purchases. As a result, the characteristics of e-social interaction covered in this work are related to online reviews.

An online consumer testimonial is a significant kind of online communication, offering information, commentary and evaluations about a business, a product (Chatterjee, 2001) or a service, especially in tourism and hospitality industry (Dewani, 2022). Numerous online communities participate in consumer reviews, which may be found on the majority of e-commerce websites that feature reviews of products or vendors (Chen and Zhang, 2015). As a result, online consumer evaluation has become a crucial kind of marketing communication, as the majority of shoppers now consult reviews before buying a product (Zhang et al., 2018). Indeed, online reviews play a significant role in predicting the sales of a variety of products (Dellarocas et al., 2007). There are many studies showing the influence of negative online reviews on retailers and items (Chatterjee, 2001), and the motivations for reading consumers' online evaluations have also been examined (Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2004). By identifying the elements that motivate consumers to read or post online reviews, previous research has substantially added to the literature on online marketing communication. However, one essential point remains unanswered: 'How do different forms of online reviews affect consumers' impulse purchases?'

In the framework of this study, online reviews are divided into two dimensions: *Online comments and other users' recommendations* (Chen and Zhang, 2015). First, when it comes to Online comments, purchasers are the customers who comment on particular products they have purchased. Hankin (2007) discovers that purchasers are particularly sensitive to unfavourable feedback. In a similar vein, Laros and Steenkamp (2005) suggest that the significance of product reviews diminishes as the duration of sales increases, and when sales have stabilised, it is no longer necessary to offer incentives to encourage positive reviews. On the other hand, *other users' recommendations* are those made by shoppers who are not in the consumer's network or relationship, yet have made

a purchase (Chen and Zhang, 2015). A savvy online shopper who discusses his or her buying experience and suggests a product is an example of someone else's recommendations (Madhavaram and Laverie, 2004). Therefore, impulsive purchase behaviour for online shopping is significantly influenced by online reviews.

2.7 eWOM

When a product or an organisation is made available to a substantial number of internet users, eWOM is frequently characterised as any good or unfavourable statement made by a prospective, present or former customer regarding a product or an organisation (Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2004). Online platforms used for eWOM include blogs, emails, forums, websites for user evaluations, consumer virtual communities and social networking sites (SNS) (Chu and Kim, 2011). Interaction between customers has been conceptualised as being a fundamental principle of the interpersonal relationship in the marketplace (Walsh and Mitchell, 2010). Because of its higher perceived trustworthiness, it might affect consumer attitudes towards firms and purchase decisions (Sridhar and Srinivasan, 2012).

We must first assess user engagement in eWOM communication in order to rationalise the impact of eWOM on consumers. This could offer a greater understanding of how each particular eWOM user prefers to communicate (Mahrinasari et al., 2017). Customer engagement is the term used to describe the emotive responses to circumstances and other stimuli that create a link or relationship between the customer and the stimulus (Kapoor, 2011). Customer engagement is the behaviour a customer displays towards a business, such as influencing the business in ways other than making purchases (Bijmolt et al., 2010). Relevant examples include eWOM, suggestions, assisting other consumers, blogging, posting reviews and participation in the brand communities (Hollebeek et al., 2014). The tendency to ask for, or share, online information with other customers is the definition of eWOM participation in this study. Customers participating in eWOM communication are more likely to purchase a product (Yu and Natalia, 2013). Several academics have investigated how eWOM affects customer purchase intentions (Baber et al., 2016; Erkan and Evans, 2016; Mortazavi et al., 2014; Wu and Wang, 2011; Yu and Natalia, 2013). For instance, it has been found that there is a favourable association between eWOM and consumer purchasing intent (Sharifpour et al., 2016). Therefore, it is anticipated that customers that participate in eWOM via e-commerce environments are, therefore, quite likely to produce a larger buy intention (Bangsawan et al., 2017) and, as a result, make more impulsive purchases.

2.7.1 eWOM on social networking sites

SNS facilitate customer eWOM and act as a significant source of information and reviews about products (Graham and Havlena, 2007). The ability to share product-related information and opinions with close friends and family quickly and easily, regardless of distance or time constraints, has changed how consumers make their purchasing decisions (Chu and Kim, 2011). Because of how frequently these websites are used, it is impossible to underestimate the potential value of social network marketing based on eWOM, which has become an integral component of brand communication strategies (Chu and Kim, 2011).

Numerous researchers have focused on consumer engagement in eWOM on SNS over recent years (Brown et al., 2007; Chu and Kim, 2011; Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2004; Libai et al., 2010). Despite an increase in study interest in this area, the concept of engagement remains largely misunderstood and lacks strong empirical backing (Bolton, 2011; Hollebeek, et al., 2014; Verhoef et al., 2010). Online involvement has been conceptualised as a multidimensional construct by the consumer research (Calder et al., 2009). By demonstrating that consumer intention to receive (ITR) and intention to send (ITS) are the cornerstones of behavioural eWOM involvement, this study aims to add this construct to the body of knowledge.

eWOM should include the evaluations from actual consumers and also comments left by customers on online retailers' websites or other published sources that are shared or republished by prospective, actual or previous buyers to discuss a certain product or brand (Hu et al., 2014). These authors divided eWOM into four categories considering the range of uses and communication channels. The first type is 'Specialised eWOM' which refers to consumer testimonials placed with ratings or comparison-shopping websites that do not really intend to sell anything. The second category is 'Affiliated eWOM' which relates to customer reviews placed on shopping sites like Amazon and eBay. The third term, 'Social eWOM,' refers to any brand-or-product-related information shared by social networking site members. The last term, 'Miscellaneous eWOM,' refers to brand-or product-related content posted on other online platforms. The focus of this study is to examine both the eWOM occurring on various social media networks, e.g., a Facebook fan page, e-commerce sites' forum, as well as the recommendations and suggestions made on customers' profile pages to evaluate this effect. Marketers see a social media fan page (i.e., on Facebook) as an essential tool for growing eWOM communication because of its interactive and community-based character (Hu et al., 2014). Although earlier studies conducted by Jahn and Kunz (2012) focus on how fan pages affect brand affection and loyalty, there is a lack of studies looking at SNS from an eWOM communication perspective and how it affects impulse purchases. Furthermore, the current research partially reveals the content relationship between eWOM and online reviews with little empirical evidence in the social commerce context (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Simultaneously, a lack of research to reveal the integrative framework of eWOM to explain the impact of online reviews – as the primary reference on customer behaviours based on previous literature review (Chong et al., 2018) Thus, we suggest the following association between online reviews and eWOM based on the evidence from existing studies and the aforementioned comments.

Hypothesis 1 Online reviews (online comments and others' recommendations) positively associate with IBT.

Hypothesis 2 Online reviews (online comments and others' recommendations) positively associate with eWOM.

2.7.2 Dimensions of eWOM

We adhere to the behavioural approach to consumer involvement in this study. As a result, we emphasise non-transactional consumer social contact with knowledge about the products (Calder et al., 2009) Consumer engagement can thus be passive (i.e., limited to viewing brand-related content) or proactive (i.e., producing or disseminating brand-related content) (Muntinga et al., 2011) As a result, customer intents to transmit

and receive eWOM which are conceptualised as a two-dimensional entity called the consumer eWOM participation (Chu and Kim, 2011). Consumers' intention to submit (ITS) eWOM reflects their behaviour in expressing and passing along their opinions. Consumers that actively produce and disseminate brand-related content within their social networks exhibit these characteristics (Calder, et al., 2009), whilst those who express opinions are often technologically savvy, are knowledgeable about a range of product-related topics and are good conversationalists (Barnes and Pressey, 2012; Geissler and Edison, 2005). By disseminating this information to others, opinion-passers help the spread of product-related information (Norman and Russell, 2006). Consumer ITR eWOM describes the actions taken by those looking for reviews when they are directly interacting with the message (Calder et al., 2009). They might actively seek out brand-related information or just be exposed to it in a passive way (Chu and Kim, 2011). As previously indicated, the three components of eWOM are *Opinion seeking*, *Opinion offering* and *Opinion passing*, and these three categories are detailed further below.

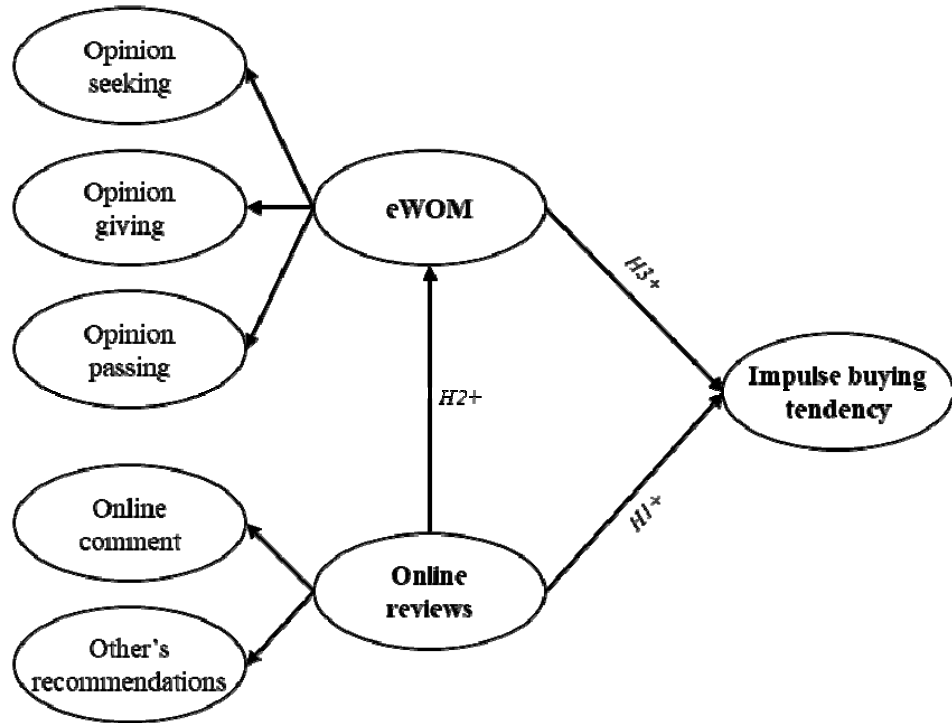
- **Opinion seeking** – Prior to making a purchase, consumers with a high level of opinion-seeking frequently seek the advice and opinions of others (Flynn et al., 1996). In the online world, opinion-seekers may consider recommendations from their friends as reliable, hence they rely on them when making purchasing decisions. When individuals sense a danger in a certain circumstance, are unfamiliar with a product or think that the experience of others would be valuable, they may actively search for information or advice to support their decision (Brown et al., 2007). On the other hand, opinion leaders have a tendency to talk about ideas and viewpoints regarding products with other customers in a larger social setting (Chu and Kim, 2011).
- **Opinion giving** – People with an 'opinion-giving' disposition are more likely to convey information, thus influencing the attitudes and behaviours of others through the expression of their thoughts (Kim et al., 2014). Individuals' attitudes and behaviours may be more susceptible to the impact of opinion leaders and others with high levels of opinion-giving behaviour (Feick and Price, 1987). Within the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR), consumers can serve as opinion leaders on SNS by expressing comments and messages on their accounts on various social or environmental issues or by leaving comments on webpages and photographs related to these issues. Many opinion leaders may also be opinion seekers because they want to learn more or enhance their knowledge, in part, because they are interested in a certain topic or issue.
- **Opinion passing** – Opinion passing, which enhances the flow of information, is defined by Huang et al. (2009) as the transmission of behaviour that involves spreading a particular type of content rather than exchanging personal images, stories or feelings (Sun et al., 2006). According to Chu and Kim (2011), in online contexts, where people are increasingly prone to concealing their own opinions and forward those of others, it is asserted that passing activity is becoming more widespread.

Online forwarding/passing is a critical eWOM-related behaviour that enhances the information flow (Sun et al., 2006). Because of the distinctive attributes of the internet, which enables two-way contact and rapid global dissemination of information within a few clicks, opinion-passing behaviour is more widespread in online social situations. As a

result, opinion-passing behaviour is an improved element of eWOM on SNS. We propose the following conclusion based on the above data:

Hypothesis 3 eWOM (opinion seeking, opinion giving and opinion passing) positively associates with IBT.

Figure 1 Hypothesised model



In summary, the above session highlights critical extant literature concerning IB, characteristics of Gen Z consumers; social influence theory and its impacts on IB' the online social factors: online reviews and eWOM and the effects on IBT. The research hypotheses were to be established based on the existing literature.

3 Methodology

3.1 Data collection and sampling

To investigate the given hypotheses, this study employs a cross-sectional survey design with a small number of participants (Ha, 2022), proposed over three hundred valid responses in this research. By employing a cross-sectional survey based on the given questionnaire to target respondents, the results could be expected to describe the influence of eWOM and online reviews on IBT. Prior to data collection, a limited sample of people who participated in the survey was employed in a pretest survey. The goal of this pretest is to assess the instrument's construct validity by identifying whether any

items were designed adequately in terms of sentence length, language, phrasing or terminology (Colton and Covert, 2015), proving the instrument's construct validity (Shadish et al., 2002). The authors employ a non-probability sampling method with a convenience sampling technique. After surveying 487 undergraduate students representing Gen Z consumers who are heavily impulsive buyers in the age of materialism (Jelihovschi et al., 2018), only 318 valid questionnaires were used for the data analysis after eliminating incomplete and invalid responses, yielding a response rate of 65.3%. The sample consists of 66% females. Most of the participants in the survey are university students representing Gen Z consumers who over 20 years old (nearly 77%). Their monthly income or pocket money received from their parents was around 1 mil. – 6 mil. VND (roughly about \$US40–\$US280) by over 77% of total valid samples (51% for \$US40–\$US130 per month). Social network sites (e.g., Facebook, Zalo) and E-commerce sites (e.g., Tiki, Shopee, Lazada) were their favourite platforms for shopping online (over 83%). Most of the participants spent around \$US9 per monthly visit, and nearly 55% spent around \$US10–\$US20 for clothing (51%), food (21%), and electronic devices (12%).

For detail of the sample, Table 1 presents the descriptive characteristics of the valid respondents.

Table 1 Sample characteristics

<i>Characteristic</i>		<i>Percentage</i>
Gender	Male	34.0%
	Female	66.0%
Age	18–20	23.3%
	20–22	37.7%
	> 22	39.0%
Income*	\$US 40–\$US 130	39.6%
	\$US 130–\$US 280	37.4%
	> \$US 280	23.0%
Frequency for Impulse buying	Most of the times	23.6%
	Sometimes	54.1%
	Rarely	22.3%
Average spending for one visit*	< \$US 10	15.7%
	\$US 10–\$US 20	54.7%
	\$US 20–\$US 40	20.1%
	> \$US 40	9.5%
Platforms	Social network sites	32.9%
	E-commerce sites	50.8%
	Brand owned websites	16.3%
Kind of products	Clothing	51.0%
	Foods	21.3%
	Electronic devices	11.9%
	Others	15.8%

Note: * 23,260 VND/USD.

3.2 *Measurement of constructs*

A 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 for ‘strongly disagree’ to 5 for ‘strongly agree’) was used to evaluate each study issue. Based on the literature on IBT and relevant definitions in the previous part, some of the items were adapted and modified to improve the fit of scales in Vietnam’s context. The study covers the second-order scale for eWOM and the online reviews’ variables, and IBT works as the first-order scale and plays a principal role in the proposed model, as explained by eWOM and online reviews in the structured model. The study measures three dimensions of eWOM engagement adapted from Chu and Kim (2011) in the social network sites context to the online shopping context proposed in the research orientation. The items used to measure online reviews were taken from Chen et al. (2015), modified from the review of the online commodity scale with two dimensions. The measures of IBT were adapted from Rook and Fisher (1995). Finally, the researchers created the background-related questions covering the respondents’ internet buying habits, gender, age and monthly income.

A pretest survey was conducted with 55 participants, primarily to evaluate and change the measured items suitable for the research setting in Vietnam, thus ensuring the questionnaire’s clarity and ease of comprehension. During the pretest interview, respondents were questioned about their personal information, including their online shopping behaviour, e-social factors influencing the IBT and the clarity of the wording. They were also asked to identify and discuss any ambiguous words or phrases to help clarify the questionnaire’s instructions. IBM statistical package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), descriptive analysis, CA and EFA were carried out based on the data received. AMOS was used for path analysis, CFA and structural equation modelling (SEM).

3.3 *Data analysis*

SEM is utilised for data analysis because it is highly robust and can estimate parameters using maximum likelihood with full information, which yields consistent and asymptotically efficient estimates (Ramlall, 2016). Our model is conceptualised from the Social influence theory which guides our understanding of IBT and ultimately helps to explain the relationships between eWOM and online reviews (Collier, 2020). Therefore, SEM is appropriate for data analysis. We analysed the data using IBM SPSS Statistics and IBM Amos 22 for the proposed research model including the measurement model and structural model by using the SEM.

4 **Empirical findings**

4.1 *Evaluation of measurement model*

Before using the CFA for analysing the measurement model, the proposed research model’s validity and dependability were examined. Besides, the absolute value results of the skew index are less than 3.0 and kurtosis indexes are less than 7.0 (Kline, 2015). Thus, the assumption of data normality was ensured in the dataset.

Table 2 presents the Cronbach’s alpha (CA) and factor loading value in exploring factor analysis (EFA), proceeding with the principal axis factoring (PAF) and Promax rotation. The CA values for each construct were greater than 0.70 as the recommended

value of Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). After removing two items in EFA of Others' online recommendations (online reviews) and IBT construct, all items' loading was above 0.50 and was kept based on the recommended value of Hair et al. (2010).

Table 2 Construct's reliability and validity

<i>Construct name</i>	<i>Coding</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Loadings</i>	<i>CA</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>MSV</i>
<i>eWOM</i>				<i>0.82</i>	<i>0.82</i>	<i>0.60</i>	<i>0.57</i>
eWOM – online opinion seeking	OOS1	When I consider buying things online, I ask my contacts (friends,...) online for advice	0.73				
	OOS2	I like to get my contacts' opinions before I buy new products	0.72				
	OOS3	I feel more comfortable choosing products when I have received my contacts' opinions about them	0.60				
eWOM – Online opinion giving	OOG1	I often persuade my contacts to buy products that I like	0.73				
	OOG2	My contacts pick their products based on what I have told them	0.79				
	OOG3	I often influence my contacts' opinions about products	0.67				
eWOM – Online opinion passing	OOP1	When I receive product-related information or opinion from a friend, I will pass it along to my other contacts	0.64				
	OOP2	I like to pass along interesting information about products amongst my friends/social groups	0.62				
	OOP3	I tend to pass along my contacts' positive reviews of products to other contacts	0.60				
<i>Online reviews</i>				<i>0.78</i>	<i>0.79</i>	<i>0.65</i>	<i>0.57</i>
Online reviews – online comment	OC1	Many online comments are worthy and reliable	0.66				
	OC2	Many comments strongly recommend buying	0.71				

Notes: CA means Cronbach's alpha; CR means composite reliability; AVE means average extracted variance; MSV means maximum shared variance.

Table 2 Construct's reliability and validity (continued)

<i>Construct name</i>	<i>Coding</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Loadings</i>	<i>CA</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>MSV</i>
<i>Online reviews</i>				<i>0.78</i>	<i>0.79</i>	<i>0.65</i>	<i>0.57</i>
Online reviews – online comment	OC3	I am more willing to purchase if product comments are detailed	0.65				
	OC4	I am more willing to purchase if product comments are easy to understand	0.58				
Online reviews – others' online recommendations	OR1	I believe the suggestions and recommendations of my friends	0.55				
	OR2	I am willing to refer to buying experiences provided by others on the internet	0.65				
	OR4	My shopping mood is affected by others' recommendations	0.55				
	OR5	I often buy a product based on others' recommendations	0.62				
<i>Impulse buying tendency</i>				<i>0.81</i>	<i>0.81</i>	<i>0.51</i>	<i>0.44</i>
Impulse buying tendency	IBT1	I often buy things immediately	0.71				
	IBT2	I use the unplanned purchase items regularly.	0.68				
	IBT3	'I see it, I like it and I buy it' describes me	0.60				
	IBT4	I buy things without considering the consequences	0.85				

Notes: CA means Cronbach's alpha; CR means composite reliability; AVE means average extracted variance; MSV means maximum shared variance.

The constructs of validity and reliability were then evaluated and estimated using CFA on all of the variables' items using IBM Amos 22. According to Hair, et al. (2010), the validity of the convergent, discriminant and reliability were evaluated before doing the SEM analysis. First, the reliability of the measurement model was examined using the CA and composite reliability (CR) methods. In Table 2, both CA and CR were greater than 0.70 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Second, all individual items passed the convergent validity guideline since the average extracted variance (AVE) and maximum shared variance (MVS) of all individual constructs were both more than 0.50. Finally, as evidenced by the data in Table 3, the discriminant validity was approved because the AVE was higher than the equivalent squared inter-construct correlation values. The measurement model had a good fit, and all the fit indicators were satisfied and better than the recommended standard for model fit evaluation: $\chi^2 = 279.99$ ($p = 0.000$), $\chi^2/df = 1.52$

(< 3 by Carmines and McIver (1981), RMSEA = 0.04 (< 0.08 by Steiger (1990), both CFI = 0.95 and TLI = 0.94 (> 0.90 by Bentler and Bonett (1980).

Table 3 Discriminant validity

	<i>IBT</i>	<i>eWOM</i>	<i>Online reviews</i>
IBT	0.71		
eWOM	0.62***	0.74	
Online reviews	0.67***	0.73***	0.81

Note: ***p < 0.001.

4.2 Evaluation of structural model

The structural model had a good fit with all indicators being better than the recommended value of the previously described model in CFA. According to the statistics measuring the goodness of fit, the structural model reasonably fits the data. The results of the hypothesis testing, which highlight the importance of the relationship between these factors, are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Hypothesis testing

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Standardised estimate</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>C.R.</i>	<i>P</i>
Online reviews → Impulse buying tendency	0.47	0.18	3.05	0.00
Online reviews → eWOM	0.73	0.13	5.44	***
eWOM → Impulse buying tendency	0.28	0.17	1.97	0.05

Note: ***p < 0.001.

All the hypotheses were supported at different significant levels. Online reviews had the most positive impact on eWOM ($\beta = 0.73$) with a significant level of 0.05, indicating that online reviews performed the principal role and were an important antecedent of eWOM behaviour. Also, eWOM positively affected IBT, with $\beta = 0.28$; $p = 0.05$. Finally, the hypothesis of the relationship between online reviews and IBT was supported and had a strong positive effect with $\beta = 0.47$, $p = 0.00$ (Figure 2). In addition, all the stability of parameter estimates in the research was ensured by Bootstrapping method being applied in the research with the samples $N = 5,000$ (Kline, 2005).

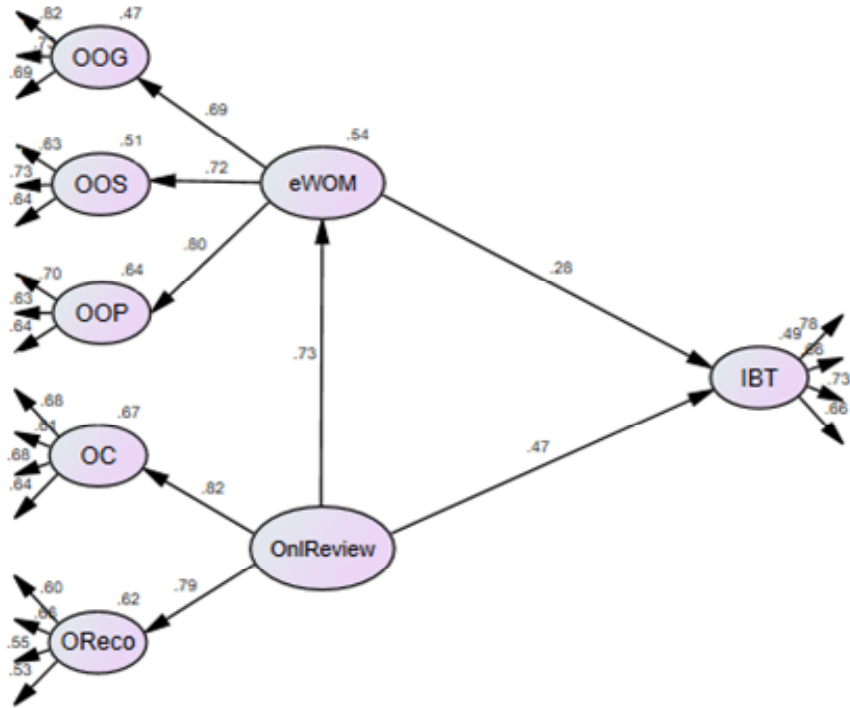
Table 5 Mediation effects of eWOM

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Dependent variables</i>	<i>Direct effect</i>	<i>Indirect effect</i>	<i>Mediating role</i>
<i>Online reviews → eWOM → impulse buying tendency</i>				
Online reviews	Impulse buying tendency	0.47	0.20	Partial mediator

In addition, indirect analyses in Table 5 were conducted to confirm the indirect effect between online reviews and IBT with eWOM considered as the mediating role. The results showed that eWOM significantly mediates the relationship of online reviews and IBT with a significant level of 0.1. Thus, eWOM has emerged as a partial mediator

between these constructs (standardised indirect effect = 0.20, 2 – tailed significant level = $0.06 < 0.1$).

Figure 2 Structural model (see online version for colours)



5 Discussion

This study examines how online or e-social interactions (online reviews and eWOM) affect IBT. Customers rely on social content, such as reviews and suggestions from others, to meet their purchasing demands may be impacted by the social influence of these social contents. For instance, Zhang et al. (2018) demonstrated that customers' perceptions of the utility of reading online reviews influence their propensity to make impulsive purchases. Therefore, our findings suggest that social influence, made possible by social networking websites and social content, is a key factor in online impulse purchases. Specifically, the findings reveal that both online reviews and eWOM have a beneficial impact on consumers' tendency to make impulsive purchases whilst shopping on e-commerce sites. This is in line with the findings of Xu et al. (2020), who showed that not only do online reviews affect IBT, but the quality of online reviews also has a substantial impact on impulsive purchasing. The quality of online reviews can be defined through several key criteria such as credibility of the review, review content, unbiased and balanced perspective, language and writing style, user profile information, source and platform reputation (Xu et al., 2020).

This study also reveals that the association between online reviews and eWOM is fairly strong, which means that the more online comments generated, the larger the

eWOM impacts are. In this instance, the findings indicate that eWOM strongly mediates the association between online reviews and IBT. Thus, eWOM emerged as a partial mediator between these constructs. Because there has been little prior evidence examining this relationship, this is a novel contribution to the existing body of knowledge. Whilst many previous authors have confirmed positive relationships between social factors and IB (Chuang et al. (2015), e-social factors are firmly proven to be important stimuli that can influence online IBT and, as a result, can considerably influence impulse purchasing behaviour, along with the expansion of social network sites and social commerce. It is advised that future research should look at additional characteristics that were not considered in this study, for instance, using a credit card (Akram et al., 2018), customer satisfaction (Bressolles et al., 2007), hedonic shopping experience and product knowledge (Zou, 2018).

6 Conclusions and research implications

This study reveals that both online reviews and eWOM have a considerable impact on IBT based on 318 responses from Vietnamese Gen Z consumers. Furthermore, the strong relationship between online reviews and eWOM can significantly bring a crucial practical implication to online retailers concerning the implementation of online marketing strategy. Also, this study verifies the mediation effects by eWOM as the partial mediator in the relationship between online reviews and IBT.

6.1 Theoretical implications

With regard to theoretical implications, by expanding the social influence theory, which effectively explains how online social interactions affect young Vietnamese consumers' propensity to IB, this research conceptually adds to the body of literature already in existence. Specifically, this study examines the relationships between online reviews, eWOM and the IBT that cement the existing literature concerning the effect of social interactions and consumers' online behaviours (Zhang et al., 2018). In addition, the relationship between online reviews and eWOM was significantly confirmed in this study. Based on the literature review of eWOM, Cheung and Thadani (2012) explained the effects of online reviews on consumer behaviour, with eWOM as the typical case. Thus, online reviews play a principal role in the source of eWOM and even lead the insights for marketing communication (Park et al., 2007).

Another finding of this study confirms the involvement of eWOM as a partial mediator in the association between online reviews and IBT and this is in line with the previous studies conferred the role of eWOM as the mediator on the consumer's purchase tendency (Sardar et al., 2021), without the effects of online reviews in the buying intention context. Besides having a strong effect on consumers (King et al., 2014), higher levels of eWOM can lead to higher levels of a positive relationship between online reviews and IBT; the positive or negative eWOM communication can explain the volume of the number of posted online reviews via the spreading of recommendations and arguments from consumer experience perspectives, which can lead the persuasive impacts on the targeted consumers and encourage the attitude of their urge to buy specific products or services.

6.2 *Practical implications*

In terms of practical implications, the results of this study can be employed in various online purchasing situations because many online stores now post information regarding product sales and customer feedback. First of all, eWOM and online reviews greatly encourage impulsive purchases. As part of their efforts to hasten the propagation of favourable eWOM, online retailers can also offer incentives for product reviewers to encourage their decision to give feedback and product suggestions. Additionally, it is advantageous to promote these kinds of social connections amongst users by encouraging them to utilise their current social networks online. This may make it simpler for many prospective buyers to engage in triggering social interactions like online reviews and comments.

In addition, based on the findings about the mediating roles eWOM in the relationship between online reviews and IBT, businesses can capitalise and emphasise the effect of eWOM, which can stimulate and boost the tendency for IB among customers. Therefore, the strategy related to encouraging positive eWOM in the business's platform can be considered the effective strategy to increase sales in the e-commerce environment and thus can help in building and nurturing an online community among satisfied customers. Finally, online businesses should create online platforms where consumers and potential buyers can share their thoughts, make comments and interact with each other since the more comments and reviews generated online, the greater the eWOM mediation effects will be to trigger IB, thus bringing more sales, and develop the community of satisfied customers.

7 **Research limitations and future research directions**

This study offers both restrictions and potential directions for further research in this area. First, 318 valid questionnaires were collected for this study in Vietnam, with the majority of the respondents being university students who do not have their own income and thus buying power is not strong. Therefore, future research can focus on the larger groups of customers, such as Gen Y or Gen X to generalise the findings and implications of this research to the whole market, focused on the behavioural perspective of cause-related marketing of Gen Z would be considered as the future adoption in research about Gen Z behaviour (Nair et al., 2021) Second, Vietnamese customers are more prone to heed the advice of others when making purchasing decisions since Vietnam is a collectivist society which is based on groups's advice, future investigation can also focus on consumers from individualistic cultures (e.g., western countries), and it would be interesting to conduct a comparative study to examine the young consumer's IB behaviour from the two different cultural dimensions (individualism Vs. collectivism). Third, whilst emphasising the impact of consumer-generated interactions on online impulse tendency, this study has not tapped into the influence of individual factors such as materialism and hedonic value as well as product-related factors such as pricing and availability as well as other potential marketing stimuli which is proposed by Ali and Sudan (2018) and highly recommend considering the antecedents, that affect customer behaviour, especially for the Vietnamese young customer (Nguyen and Pham, 2021). Consequently, future studies may incorporate marketing-generated stimuli into the research paradigm, such as the influence of trust through eWOM on online buying intention (Monfared et al., 2021) or

social motives factors in the Gen Z community (MacDonald and Elahee, 2003), e-service quality in the effect of mobility application and AI shopping (Sawmong and Ahadi, 2023), the role of influencer marketing Ahuja and Loura (2020) and the effect of advertisements on marketing communication, especially regarding the use of sexual appeal in advertisements (Bains and Dewani, 2022). Last but not least, this study measures impulse purchase tendency by using a self-reported approach (survey questionnaire) and a single measurement, and this method may be criticised due to the potential for answer bias. Therefore, future research can also employ more detailed assessments to quantify IB behaviour, and a mixed methods study (e.g., a survey paired with focus groups or personal interviews) would be an effective option for gaining additional consumer insights towards impulsive purchasing behaviour.

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