

ANALYZING THE FACTORS AFFECTING THE ONLINE PURCHASE INTENTION OF GENERATION Z ON TIKTOK SHOP: THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF ATTITUDES TOWARD USER-GENERATED CONTENT – A CASE STUDY IN THE MEKONG DELTA, VIETNAM

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Abstract – This study aims to investigate the factors influencing Generation Z's online purchase intentions on TikTok Shop, focusing on the mediating role of attitudes toward user-generated content (UGC). Empirical data were collected from a sample of 394 consumers residing in the Mekong Delta region and subsequently analyzed through structural equation modeling (SEM) supported by SmartPLS 4.0 software. The findings of the study indicate that brand engagement and subjective norms influence online purchase intentions significantly. Furthermore, attitudes toward user-generated content serve as a mediating variable in the relationship between brand engagement, subjective norms, and online purchase intentions. Based on these findings, the study proposes several effective marketing strategies, including enhancing brand engagement, promoting favorable attitudes toward user-generated content, and leveraging social influence to foster consumer trust and loyalty. These strategies have the potential to help businesses on TikTok.

Keywords: attitudes toward UGC, brand engagement, online shopping intentions, subjective norms, TikTok Shop.

I. INTRODUCTION

Vietnamese people can now make online purchases using simple smartphones, thanks to e-commerce platforms created as a result of the current, extremely quick technological improvements. In 2024, Vietnamese consumers spent

9.5 billion USD shopping on e-commerce platforms in the first nine months [1]. With such immense potential, e-commerce platforms like TikTok Shop have witnessed intense competition among brands in driving the online shopping intentions of Vietnamese users. However, as the market share on TikTok Shop has gradually been divided among numerous brands, and promotional campaigns have become familiar to users, brands now face the challenging question of how to effectively, creatively, and sustainably drive online shopping intentions.

One of the most effective strategies that can be used in this situation is creating user-generated content (UGC). According to Mayrhofer et al. [2], with the growing importance of digitalization, brands have shifted their expenditure to direct marketing and social marketing as their mainstream marketing communication channel. Currently, UGC is a highly discussed marketing tool. Yasin [3] also agrees that UGC holds an influential factor in attracting consumers and making them engage online, as well as facilitating them to find the most interesting products. However, UGC also includes both positive and negative content. Therefore, users' attitudes toward UGC need to be examined to determine how such attitudes may positively impact purchase intentions, and which factors will enhance these attitudes to increase users' purchase intentions in e-commerce.

In this context, Generation Z (Gen Z) is selected as the research target because they are the first generation to grow up with digital technology and social media, showing strong

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adaptability to online platforms and playing a key role in shaping current consumption trends [4]. Particularly in the Mekong Delta region, Gen Z represents a promising yet underexplored consumer segment in the field of social commerce. Focusing on Gen Z helps this study clarify how this generation interacts with UGC and makes purchasing intentions in a digital environment, thereby contributing to the theoretical understanding of young consumers' behavior in Vietnam.

However, while studies have explored the impact of UGC on purchase intention [5, 6], there remains a research gap concerning the mediating role of attitudes toward UGC in the relationship between brand marketing factors and purchase intention, particularly in the Mekong Delta region. Furthermore, most existing research has predominantly focused on Western markets [7], with limited investigation into consumer intention and cultural nuances in Vietnam's social commerce environment. This study seeks to address these gaps.

This study focuses on exploring the factors influencing online purchase intention on TikTok Shop, with a focus on the mediating role of attitudes toward UGC in the Mekong Delta region. Additionally, the study proposes solutions to help businesses exploit TikTok Shop to increase brand awareness, shape positive attitudes toward UGC, and promote consumers' purchase intention. Specifically, the study sets three objectives: (1) identify factors influencing Gen Z's online purchase intention on TikTok Shop in the Mekong Delta; (2) analyze the mediating role of attitudes toward UGC in the relationship between brand engagement and subjective norms with online purchase intention, and (3) propose practical implications for businesses to build effective content and interaction strategies on TikTok Shop.

II. RESEARCH OVERVIEW

A. Literature review

Generation Z

Generation Z, commonly defined as individuals born between 1995 and 2012, is often referred to as the 'Digital Natives' or 'Net Generation' [8]. Growing up in an era of rapid technological advancement and widespread use of social media, Gen Z is highly tech-savvy, constantly connected, and heavily reliant on digital platforms for communication, education, and work [9, 10]. Their continuous exposure to digital environments has significantly shaped their preferences, values, and decision-making processes [9]. Notably, Gen Z's online purchase intention differs from that of previous generations. They are more sensitive to the influence of online communities and UGC, and they place strong emphasis on authenticity and social validation when making purchase decisions [10, 11]. Therefore, focusing on Gen Z within the TikTok Shop context is highly appropriate for capturing the unique and dynamic consumer behavior of this generation.

Online purchase intention

Online purchase intention refers to the likelihood or willingness of consumers to buy a product or service through online platforms [12]. It represents the transition from browsing behavior to taking concrete actions toward purchasing. As a psychological concept, it captures the consumer's commitment to buy, influenced by their perceived value, needs, and benefits associated with the product or service. The research identified purchase intention as a critical milestone in the online shopping journey, serving as a bridge between interest and action [9].

Previous studies [13–17] have identified various factors influencing online purchase intention, including perceived trust, perceived risk, website quality, perceived value, and customer satisfaction. Among these, trust has been recognized as a key driver of online transactions [13, 14], while perceived risk exerts a negative effect [15]. Website quality and perceived value also play important roles in shaping purchase intentions [16, 17].

Recently, research has shifted toward examining social and emotional factors, especially

among Gen Z, a consumer group strongly influenced by online communities and user-generated content [18]. Among these, brand engagement and subjective norms are considered key constructs. Brand engagement captures the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral connections consumers form with brands, especially through digital interactions [8]. Higher engagement often leads to stronger trust and purchasing intentions [9]. Meanwhile, subjective norms, based on the Theory of Planned Behavior [19], reflect social pressure from peers, online reviews, and social media endorsements, all of which significantly impact purchase decisions [20, 21]. Therefore, focusing on brand attachment and subjective norms in the context of TikTok Shop is an appropriate approach to explain the online purchase intentions of Gen Z consumers.

Brand engagement

According to Gambetti et al. [22], brand engagement is a crucial topic in marketing and branding, formed through the interaction between consumers and brands. Maslowska et al. [6] also stated that brand engagement is the extent to which users actively participate and interact with content or brands on platforms such as Facebook business pages. Similarly, Yang [7] stated that participation is reflected through behaviors like posting, liking, commenting, and sharing, and influenced by emotions, UGC, and interactive features of the platform. Gass et al. [23] believed that engagement is influenced by factors such as user-generated content and community feedback, not solely driven by the brand. According to Hollebeek et al. [24], brand engagement goes beyond brand recognition, encompassing the levels of focus, inspiration, and active participation from customers has the same opinion, which is a two-way interaction process, where cognition reflects attention, emotion signifies attachment, and behavior measures the effort customers invest in the brand. These factors enhance positive brand attitudes, loyalty, and purchase intentions [25].

Subjective norms

Subjective norms refer to an individual's per-

ception of social pressure from family, friends, or influential people in their life, which affects their decision to perform or not perform a certain action, stemming from expectations or social norms that the individual considers important. In the context of shopping, subjective norms have been shown to significantly influence consumers' purchasing decisions [26–28]. Furthermore, cultural factors also play a considerable role; for instance, in China, consumers are more likely to change their decisions based on the words and actions of others [12, 24]. This pressure can either encourage or discourage a person's actions based on the opinions or beliefs of those significant others [15, 18].

Attitudes toward UGC

According to Ajzen [19], attitudes toward UGC refer to the degree to which an individual evaluates UGC positively or negatively. UGC often appears on social media, forums, or e-commerce platforms, reflecting how users perceive and assess content created by the community on digital platforms. Mathur et al. [29] showed that UGC enhances consumer trust, authenticity, and engagement with brands. This attitude is influenced by various factors such as demographics, reference groups, and technological advancements [30, 31]. Daugherty et al. [32] considered UGC an informal source of information, reflecting trust and connection among users in the digital environment.

B. Theoretical background

Theory of Planned Behavior

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Ajzen [19], explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence individuals' behavioral intentions. TPB posits that behavioral intention is the most immediate predictor of actual behavior and is shaped by personal attitudes, social pressures, and perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior. This study applied TPB to explain the relationships among subjective norms, attitudes toward UGC, and online purchase intention. Specifically, subjective norms are proposed

to influence attitudes toward UGC and online purchase intention directly, while attitudes toward UGC, in turn, affect online purchase intention. This framework aligns with TPB's assertion that individual intentions are formed based on social influences and personal evaluations of the behavior.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT), proposed by Tajfel et al. [33], describes how individuals define themselves based on their group memberships and how this social identification influences behavior. According to the theory, when individuals strongly identify with a group or brand, they are motivated to act in ways that are consistent with the group's norms and values. In the proposed model, SIT is employed to explain the impact of brand engagement on attitudes toward UGC and online purchase intention. Stronger brand engagement enhances the consumer's sense of belonging to the brand community, thereby fostering more positive attitudes toward UGC associated with the brand and increasing their intention to make purchases, consistent with the core principles of social identity theory.

C. Research hypothesis

The relationship between brand engagement and online purchase intention

Previous studies have shown that brand engagement has a positive impact on online purchase intention [34, 35]. In the digital era, customer interaction with brands through brand pages or UGC helps improve brand attitude, increase brand awareness, and foster loyalty [15, 36]. Furthermore, emotions, product experiences, and social influences also play a crucial role in strengthening brand engagement and enhancing purchase intention. According to Gummrus et al. [37], customer participation through interactive activities, creating, or consuming UGC helps customers perceive the brand's value and motivates them to engage in online shopping behavior. Furthermore, numerous studies have shown that brand engagement leads to brand love that drives purchase intention [38–40]. Based on theoretical

and empirical evidence, it can be concluded that brand engagement plays a significant role in increasing consumers' online purchase intention.

H1: Brand engagement has a positive impact on online purchase intention.

The relationship between brand engagement and attitudes toward UGC

Brand engagement has a significant positive impact on customers' attitudes toward UGC. According to Hollebeek [41], brand engagement is a motivational and context-specific variable driven by the interaction between consumers and the brand. This interaction evokes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements, thereby fostering a deeper connection with content like UGC [37]. Additionally, Liu et al. [42] emphasize that factors such as emotional appeal, product experience, and social influence, core components of brand engagement, play a crucial role in shaping customers' attitudes toward UGC. Building on this, Asta et al. [43] highlighted that when consumers actively engage with a brand, they form a profound emotional bond with it. This bond enhances their positive attitudes toward UGC related to the brand. The study underscores that when brands maintain high levels of interaction with their customers, consumers tend to perceive UGC as a reflection of the brand's values. This strengthens trust and builds enduring relationships between consumers and the brand through authentic and credible content. Thus, the study anticipates that brand engagement will have a positive impact on attitudes toward UGC.

H2: Brand engagement has a positive impact on attitudes toward UGC.

The relationship between attitudes toward UGC and online purchase intention

Studies have shown that consumers' attitudes toward UGC directly and positively impact online purchase intentions. Bahtar et al. [44] emphasized that a positive attitude toward UGC increases the likelihood of purchase, as consumers perceive UGC as a reliable source of information. A positive attitude toward UGC enhances consumers' purchase intentions when they perceive UGC as trustworthy and authentic [45]. Similarly,

Wang [46] found that consumers' attitudes toward UGC on the YouTube platform have a direct correlation with purchase intentions, highlighting the important role of UGC in shaping consumer behavior. Sethi et al. [47] added that Millennials' purchase intentions are strongly influenced by their attitudes toward online reviews on shopping websites. For younger generations, Ngo Kim Ngan [48] examined the impact of UGC on the TikTok platform on the online shopping behavior of Gen Z and found that a positive attitude toward UGC is directly linked to increased trust in the brand. This trust subsequently drives online purchase intentions, particularly among young consumers who value transparency and authenticity in shopping.

H3: Attitudes toward UGC have a positive impact on online purchase intention.

The mediating role of attitudes toward UGC in the relationship between brand engagement and online purchase intention

Brand engagement plays a crucial role in influencing online purchase intention by fostering emotional, cognitive, and behavioral connections between consumers and brands. When consumers have a high level of engagement with a brand, they tend to develop deeper trust and affection compared to other brands, which makes it easier to convert this engagement into purchase intention [24]. At the same time, attitudes toward UGC have become a powerful tool that shapes consumer perceptions and influences their online shopping behavior. UGC provides authentic, highly community-driven information, which is often more credible than traditional advertisements, thereby significantly impacting purchase decisions [49]. Brand engagement also affects attitudes toward UGC. Therefore, it can be observed that attitudes toward UGC may play a mediating role in the relationship between brand engagement and online purchase intention. From previous studies [24, 49], it is evident that while the direct effects of consumer attitudes have been widely studied, the findings regarding their mediating role remain limited and inconclusive. Hence, the following hypothesis has been developed to fill this gap.

oped to fill this gap.

H4: Attitudes toward UGC have a mediating role in the relationship between brand engagement and online purchase intention.

The relationship between subjective norms and online purchase intention

Ajzen [19] suggested that subjective norms, defined as the social pressure individuals feel to perform or not perform a behavior, play a critical role in shaping online purchase intentions. These norms reflect the influence of family, friends, and social groups on individual decision-making. In online shopping, subjective norms help reinforce the acceptability of purchasing behaviors within social circles. The research demonstrated that strong encouragement or validation from peers and social networks positively impacts consumers' online purchase intentions, especially in environments where trust in digital platforms is still developing [20]. Venkatesh et al. [50] emphasized that subjective norms are particularly impactful in collectivist cultures, where group expectations significantly influence consumer behavior. The study further highlighted that positive experiences and product reviews shared by trusted individuals on social media act as social proof, directly boosting others' purchase intentions [21]. This demonstrates how subjective norms serve as a powerful motivator in the online shopping context.

H5: Subjective norms have a positive impact on online purchase intention.

The relationship between subjective norms and attitude toward UGC

The study by Hasan et al. [51] emphasizes that subjective norms shape attitudes toward UGC by fostering trust and shared understanding. When individuals perceive that their peers value UGC positively, they tend to form more favorable attitudes toward such content. This influence is further strengthened in digital environments, where social proof, such as likes and shares, plays a crucial role in enhancing the credibility of UGC. Furthermore, Akmando et al. [52] further emphasized that subjective norms influence how individuals assess UGC's credibility,

particularly in digital spaces like social media. Peer recommendations and the visible support of content, such as likes and shares, strengthen attitudes toward the authenticity of UGC. By aligning with social expectations and leveraging validation from reference groups, subjective norms significantly enhance the positive attitude toward UGC, making it a trusted and valuable source of information in online environments.

H6: Subjective norms have a positive impact on attitudes toward UGC.

The mediating role of attitudes toward UGC in the relationship between subjective norms and online purchase intention

The mediating role of attitudes toward UGC in the relationship between subjective norms and online purchase intention remains limited in quantity and quality of research. Subjective norms, considered the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform a specific behavior [19], influence how individuals evaluate and interact with UGC. Attitudes toward UGC act as a bridge, transforming the influence of subjective norms into specific purchase intentions. For instance, Shahidi [53] demonstrated that subjective norms significantly enhance the trust consumers have in UGC, fostering positive attitudes that ultimately impact purchase decisions. Similarly, Zaidi et al. [54] found that attitudes toward UGC serve as a mediator in the relationship between subjective norms and travelers' intentions to use UGC as a decision-making tool in virtual travel communities. Based on these arguments, this study anticipates that attitudes toward UGC will mediate the relationship between subjective norms and online purchase intention.

H7: Attitudes toward UGC have a mediating role in the relationship between subjective norms and online purchase intention.

D. Proposed model

Based on the above analysis, the proposed research model is presented in Figure 1. Then, the research hypotheses mentioned in the figure are summarized in Table 1.

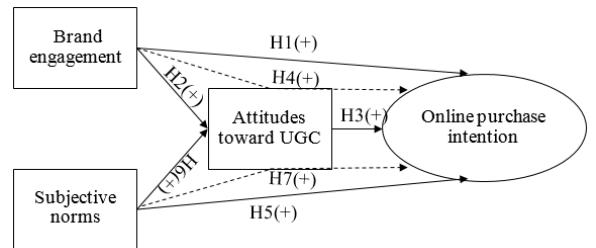


Fig. 1: Proposed research model

Table 1: Summary of research hypotheses

Research hypothesis	Hypothesis statement	Expected impact
H1	Brand engagement has a positive impact on online purchase intention.	(+)
H2	Brand engagement has a positive impact on attitudes toward UGC.	(+)
H3	Attitudes toward UGC have a positive impact on online purchase intention.	(+)
H4	Attitudes toward UGC mediate the relationship between brand engagement and online purchase intention.	(+)
H5	Subjective norms have a positive impact on online purchase intention.	(+)
H6	Subjective norms have a positive impact on attitudes toward UGC.	(+)
H7	Attitudes toward UGC mediate the relationship between subjective norms and online purchase intention.	(+)

Source: Authors' compilation

III. RESEARCH METHODS

A. Quantitative survey

This study was conducted with consumers using TikTok Shop in the Mekong Delta region. The research sample consisted of 394 consumers, selected through a random sampling method. This approach ensures that all individuals in the consumer population have an equal chance of being selected for the study, free from external influence. It helps minimize bias and enhances objectivity, thereby allowing the results to accurately reflect the characteristics and behaviors of consumers in the region. To collect data, the author employed an online survey method using digital survey forms. After designing and finalizing the questionnaire, the survey was distributed primarily via social media platforms highly popular among Gen Z, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Zalo. Specific online communities, university groups, and TikTok pages focusing on online

shopping and Gen Z interests were strategically targeted to maximize relevance and participation. The choice of these distribution channels is based on previous research, which shows that Gen Z is very active and highly interactive on social media platforms [21]. Throughout the data collection process, the research team ensured that participation was entirely voluntary, with full confidentiality and anonymity guaranteed for all participants' personal information. With 18 observed variables, according to the method of Wolf et al. [55], the minimum required sample size for this study is 90 (18 x 5). With 394 responses collected, the study fully satisfies the sample size requirement, ensuring representativeness and high reliability of the findings.

The research team is committed to conducting the entire survey process in a transparent, professional manner and in compliance with research ethics principles. The data collected will only be used for academic research purposes and will not be disclosed to any third party.

B. Scale development

To measure the key constructs of the research model, including brand engagement, subjective norms, attitudes toward UGC, and online purchase intention, this study adopted measurement scales from prior validated research, with careful adjustments to ensure suitability for the TikTok Shop context and the Gen Z demographic in Vietnam's Mekong Delta region.

The brand engagement scale was adapted from Yang [7], which emphasizes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of consumer interaction with brands on digital platforms. Yang's scale was selected because it specifically measures brand-related engagement behaviors on social media business pages, aligning well with the TikTok Shop environment, where brand-consumer interactions are dynamic and highly social. The subjective norms scale was based on Glass et al. [56], which operationalizes subjective norms as the perceived influence of important others on online behavior. This scale was chosen because it captures both peer and influencer

effects, which are particularly salient among Gen Z users in e-commerce and social media contexts [18]. The attitudes toward UGC scale were primarily drawn from Demba [12] and Yüksel [57]. These scales evaluate consumers' positive or negative evaluations of content created by other users, particularly concerning brand trust and purchase intention. Given the central role of UGC on TikTok Shop, where purchase intentions are often triggered by user reviews and short videos, this measurement framework was highly applicable. Finally, the Online Purchase Intention scale was adopted from Demba [12], focusing on consumers' likelihood and willingness to engage in purchase intention after exposure to online stimuli. Demba's scale has demonstrated strong reliability and validity in digital retail environments, making it a robust choice for measuring the outcome variable.

However, these scales needed to be adapted to fit the cultural, economic, and behavioral context of Gen Z in the Mekong Delta region. To adjust the scales appropriately, the research team conducted a qualitative study with the two following steps.

Step 1: Compiling scales from previous studies

The team compiled measurement scales from relevant international studies and selected the most suitable ones. These scales measured factors such as the level of brand interaction, subjective norms, attitudes toward UGC, and the influence of that content on online purchase intention.

Step 2: Conducting focus group interviews to adjust the scales

Focus group interviews were conducted with members of Gen Z in the Mekong Delta to gather feedback on the relevance and clarity of the scales. The feedback was used to revise and refine the observed variables to ensure they accurately reflect the intended constructs in the model and are appropriate for the context of using TikTok Shop.

A qualitative phase was conducted through focus group interviews before the large-scale survey to validate and refine the questionnaire. Two focus groups were organized, with 10 participants

aged between 18 and 24 who had prior experience purchasing products on TikTok Shop. The participants were recruited via social media outreach and direct invitations at local universities. During the discussions, participants were asked to review the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the preliminary questionnaire items. Key insights from the focus groups included suggestions to simplify certain terminology related to UGC, add practical examples for better understanding of subjective norms, and adjust the phrasing of brand engagement items to better match Gen Z's language style. Based on the feedback received, minor revisions were made to the wording and structure of several survey items to ensure greater cultural and contextual alignment with the target demographic (Table 2).

Table 2: The officially refined measurement scale

Code	Scale	Source
Brand engagement		
BE01	I like to express my opinions about the brand.	Yang [7]
BE02	I often share my satisfaction when I have positive experiences with the brand.	
BE03	I feel excited to recommend good products from the brand that I have experienced to others.	
BE04	I frequently support the brand by interacting with user-generated content about the brand.	
BE05	I feel happy when engaging with and supporting other users in the brand's community.	
Subjective norms		
SN01	My friends think I should refer to UGC (social media, online reviews, websites, blogs, etc.) when deciding whether to purchase a brand's product.	Glass et al. [56]
SN02	The people who are important to me think I should refer to UGC when I intend to make a purchase.	
SN03	I often view content from celebrities or influencers to decide whether I should make a purchase.	
SN04	Many people I communicate with use UGC to make decisions.	
SN05	Among the people I frequently interact with, many refer to UGC before making purchasing decisions.	
SN06	People I interact with at work or school believe that they will continue to use UGC to make decisions in the future.	
Attitudes toward UGC		
UGC01	I feel positive when shopping for the brand's products.	Demba [12] Yüksel [57]
UGC02	I want to try new products from the brand after referring to UGC.	
UGC03	My attitude toward products often changes based on UGC.	
UGC04	I think referring to UGC is a wise decision.	
Online purchase intention		
OPI01	I will purchase and transact with the brand in the future.	Demba [12]
OPI02	I intend to try new products from the brand shortly.	
OPI03	I expect that I will use product samples recommended by users.	

Source: Authors' compilation

C. Evaluation of the SEM model and quantitative data analysis

The data were evaluated for scale reliability using Cronbach's Alpha and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Subsequently, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) were conducted to assess the model's fit with market data and to test the research hypotheses using Smart PLS 4.0 software.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Research results

Survey data description

The survey sample consisted of 394 individuals belonging to Gen Z in the Mekong Delta region. Among them, females accounted for the majority at 56.46%. Regarding age, the 19–22 age group made up the largest proportion (52%), followed by the 23–28 age group (31%), while the 14–18 age group accounted for the remaining 17%. Most participants had an educational level of college/university or higher (59.4% held a university degree, and 17.8% had postgraduate qualifications). Concerning occupation, students dominated with 57.9%, while other groups, such as office workers, managers, and homemakers, accounted for smaller proportions. In terms of income, the majority earned less than 7,500,000 VND per month (67.5%), reflecting the general economic characteristics of Generation Z in this region. This sample is representative of the appropriate target group for studying online shopping behavior on TikTok Shop.

Results of the reliability and validity assessment of the measurement scale

To ensure the reliability of the relationships and variables in the model, Cronbach's Alpha and average variance extracted (AVE) were used as measurement indicators (see Table 3). Cronbach's Alpha was employed to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement items within each construct. According to Hair et al. [58], a Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.7 indicates an acceptable level of reliability, whereas values exceeding 0.8 and 0.9 demonstrate good and excellent reliability, respectively.

AVE was used to evaluate the convergent validity of the constructs. An AVE value of 0.5 or higher, as suggested by Fornell et al. [59], indicates that a construct explains more than half of the variance of its observed variables, thereby confirming adequate convergent validity. In this research, all AVE values exceeded the 0.5 threshold, providing evidence of good convergent validity for the measurement model.

All Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.862 but remained below the upper limit of 0.95. This indicates a high level of internal consistency among variables without significant overlap or redundancy among the observed variables.

Specifically, the Cronbach's Alpha values for the variables ranged from 0.646 to 0.827, with intermediate values observed at 0.664 for brand engagement, 0.646 for subjective norms, 0.709 for attitudes toward UGC, and 0.827 for online purchase intention. These results reflect strong internal reliability across all constructs. The consistently high-reliability scores further emphasize that the measurement scales are robust and suitable for further analysis, establishing a solid foundation for subsequent testing phases.

Table 3: Reliability and AVE of measurement scales

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand engagement	0.873	0.664
Subjective norms	0.889	0.646
Online purchase intention	0.896	0.827
Attitudes toward UGC	0.862	0.709

Source: Authors' compilation

Results of the outer loadings assessment

To evaluate the convergent validity of the measurement scales, the authors used outer loadings derived from the variance-covariance matrix. A high outer loading for a measurement item indicates a strong association with the underlying construction it is intended to measure. On the other hand, a low outer loading suggests that the

item may contribute less to capturing the overall construct and may need to be revised or removed from the model. According to Hair et al. [60], an outer loading value greater than 0.7 indicates that the item shares sufficient variance with the latent construct, thus contributing effectively to its measurement. In this study, the analysis revealed that all convergent validity values exceeded the 0.7 threshold, ranging from 0.702 to 0.911, confirming consistent convergent validity.

Table 4: Results of outer loadings assessment

Outer loadings	
Brand engagement	
BE01 ← BE0	0.732
BE02 ← BE0	0.813
BE03 ← BE0	0.856
BE04 ← BE0	0.834
BE05 ← BE0	0.833
Subjective norms	
SN01 ← SN0	0.817
SN02 ← SN0	0.849
SN03 ← SN0	0.866
SN04 ← SN0	0.702
SN05 ← SN0	0.766
SN06 ← SN0	0.812
Attitudes toward UGC	
UGC01 ← UGC0	0.839
UGC02 ← UGC0	0.864
UGC03 ← UGC0	0.881
UGC04 ← UGC0	0.780
Online purchase intention	
OPI01 ← OPI0	0.911
OPI02 ← OPI0	0.906
OPI03 ← OPI0	0.912

Source: Authors' compilation

Results of exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Firstly, EFA analysis for two independent variables is performed in Table 5.

- KMO coefficient = $0.890 > 0.5$, which is suitable for analysis.

- Bartlett's Test: $\text{Sig.} = 0.000 < 0.05$, indicating a correlation of items in each factor. There are three components extracted from EFA.

- Eigenvalue of all factors is $1.198 > 1$: Qualified.

- Total Variance Explained (TVE) is $51.895\% > 50\%$, showing that 11 observed variables could

explain 51.895% of the data variation from the 2 extracted factors.

The loading factor from 0.5 is a good quality observed variable, the minimum should be 0.3, according to Hair et al. [61]. The results of the rotation matrix show that 11 observed variables are classified into two elements, all observed variables have factor loading coefficients greater than 0.5, and there are no bad variables.

Table 5: Results of EFA for independent variables

	Items	Factor	
		1	2
Brand engagement (BE)	BE4	0.790	
	BE5	0.722	
	BE1	0.715	
	BE2	0.714	
	BE3	0.711	
Subjective norms (SN)	SN5		0.671
	SN1		0.667
	SN3		0.641
	SN6		0.615
	SN4		0.612
	SN2		0.602

KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy) = 0.890
 Bartlett's Test: Sig. = 0.000
 Eigenvalues = 1.198
 TVE (Total Variance Explained) = 51.895%

Source: Authors' compilation

The mediating variable, attitudes toward UGC, has four observed variables. EFA results show KMO = 0.729 (> 0.5) and Bartlett's Test sig = .000 (< 0.05), confirming EFA is appropriate. One factor was extracted, explaining 49.721% of the variance. All observed variables have factor loadings > 0.5 and there are no bad variables. Thus, attitudes toward UGC are correlated with the independent variables (brand engagement, subjective norms) and the dependent variable (online purchase intention). EFA results are presented in Table 6.

The dependent variable, online purchase intention, has three observed variables. EFA results

Table 6: Results of EFA for mediating variable

	Items	Factor	
		1	2
Attitudes toward UGC (AT)	UGC2	0.737	
	UGC1	0.725	
	UGC3	0.684	
	UGC4	0.672	

KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy) = 0.729
 Bartlett's Test: Sig. = 0.000
 TVE (Total Variance Explained) = 49.721%

Source: Authors' compilation

show KMO = 0.634 (> 0.5) and Bartlett's Test sig = .000 (< 0.05), confirming EFA is appropriate. One factor was extracted, explaining 57.883% of the variance. All observed variables have factor loadings > 0.5 and there are no bad variables. Thus, online purchase intention is correlated with the independent variables (brand engagement, subjective norms) and the mediating variable (attitudes toward UGC). EFA results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Results of EFA for dependent variable

	Items	Factor	
		1	2
Online Purchase Intention (OPI)	OPI1	0.796	
	OPI2	0.786	
	OPI3	0.696	

KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy) = 0.634
 Bartlett's Test: Sig. = 0.000
 TVE (Total Variance Explained) = 57.883%

Source: Authors' compilation

Testing the significance of regression coefficients and evaluating mediating factors

The study began by testing multicollinearity among independent variables. Multicollinearity can distort regression coefficients and p-values, potentially leading to inaccurate conclusions about relationships in the model. A variance inflation factor (VIF) below 5 indicates no significant concern regarding multicollinearity [61]. After conducting the analysis, the authors found that all VIF values were below 5, with the highest being 4.013 in the relationship between attitudes toward UGC and Online purchase intention. This suggests that multicollinearity is unlikely to be a problem in this model.

To assess the influence of independent vari-

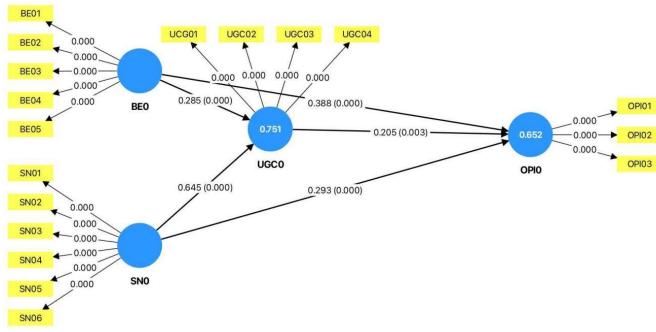


Fig. 2: PLS-SEM structural model path coefficient results

ables on dependent variables, the f^2 value was used. Hair et al. [60] defined the levels of effect as follows:

$f^2 < 0.02$: negligible or no effect

$0.02 \leq f^2 < 0.15$: small effect

$0.15 \leq f^2 < 0.35$: moderate effect

$f^2 \geq 0.35$: large effect.

The data in Table 8 shows that all relationships exhibit some level of effect. The magnitude of these relationships was statistically validated by evaluating the regression coefficients and their corresponding p-values. Using a 5% significance threshold (0.05), all relationships showed p-values below this level, ranging from 0.000 to 0.013, confirming their statistical significance. Furthermore, the analysis also explored the mediating roles within the model (as presented in Table 8). With all p-values under 0.05, the results confirm the mediating effects of attitudes toward UGC, highlighting its importance in the structural model relationships.

The path coefficient (original sample – O) shows the degree of influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The larger the value, the stronger the impact. Attitudes toward UGC significantly influence online purchase intention with $O = 0.205$, demonstrating that a positive attitude can strongly promote purchase intention. Brand engagement also has a significant impact on online purchase intention ($O = 0.388$) and directly influences attitudes toward

UGC ($O = 0.285$). This indicates that strong brand engagement increases the likelihood of forming related behavioral intentions. Subjective norms have the strongest impact on attitudes toward UGC, with $O = 0.645$, indicating that when individuals feel social support, they tend to form more positive attitudes. In addition, Subjective norms also affect online purchase intention with $O = 0.293$, meaning that support from people around can promote intention.

T-statistics indicate the reliability of the relationship between variables. If T is greater than 1.96, the relationship is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Based on the data table, all hypotheses have T values greater than 1.96, such as H4 (2.485) and H6 (15.593), meaning that the relationships in the model are statistically significant. The T-statistics for H4 (2.485) and H7 (3.000) exceed the critical value of 1.96, indicating that the indirect effects through attitudes toward UGC are statistically significant. These results confirm that attitudes toward UGC function as a meaningful mediator in both relationships, strengthening the overall explanatory power of the model.

B. Discussion

The study's findings provide several important insights into the determinants of Gen Z's online purchase intentions on TikTok Shop. First, the

Table 8: Results of regression coefficient significance testing, multicollinearity check, and mediation analysis

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original sample (O)	T-statistic	F	VIF	P-value	Result
H1	BE0 → OPIO	0.388	7.597	0.193	2.246	0.000	Accept
H2	BE0 → UGC0	0.285	6.713	0.170	1.920	0.000	Accept
H3	UGC0 → OPIO	0.205	2.955	0.030	4.013	0.003	Accept
H4	BE0 → UGC0 → OPIO	0.058	2.485	-	-	0.013	Accept
H5	SN0 → OPIO	0.293	4.586	0.069	3.587	0.000	Accept
H6	SN0 → UGC0	0.645	15.593	0.868	1.920	0.000	Accept
H7	SN0 → UGC0 → OPIO	0.132	3.000	-	-	0.003	Accept

Source: Authors' compilation

positive relationship between brand engagement and online purchase intention ($O = 0.388$, $p < 0.001$) is consistent with prior studies by Gummmerus et al. [37] and Dessart [38], which demonstrated that higher levels of engagement with a brand foster greater trust, emotional attachment, and ultimately purchase intention. However, compared to previous studies mainly conducted in Western or more developed Asian contexts, this study enriches the literature by confirming the same pattern among Gen Z consumers in the Mekong Delta, a region with distinct socio-economic and cultural characteristics. This suggests that despite regional differences, brand engagement remains a universal driver of purchase intention in the digital age.

Second, subjective norms were found to positively influence both attitudes toward UGC ($O = 0.645$, $p < 0.001$) and online purchase intention ($O = 0.293$, $p < 0.001$). This supports the TPB [19] and aligns with findings from Pavlou et al. [17] and Chu et al. [21], who emphasized the powerful role of peer and social group influence in online shopping decisions. However, an interesting observation is that the direct effect of subjective norms on purchase intention in this study was relatively modest ($O = 0.293$) compared to its stronger impact on attitudes toward UGC ($O = 0.645$). This indicates that for Gen Z on platforms like TikTok Shop, peer influence primarily shapes attitudes toward information (UGC) first, rather than immedi-

ately triggering purchase intention. This insight suggests that marketing strategies targeting Gen Z should prioritize building favorable attitudes toward peer-generated content before pushing for conversion intention.

Third, attitudes toward UGC demonstrated a strong positive influence on Online Purchase Intention ($O = 0.205$, $p < 0.001$), confirming previous findings by Bahtar et al. [44] and Nugraha [45], who noted that consumers perceive UGC as more trustworthy and authentic than brand-generated content. This research highlights that for Gen Z users in Vietnam, especially in a developing regional market like the Mekong Delta, UGC is not merely supplementary but serves as a core determinant of purchase intention.

Moreover, the study confirmed that attitudes toward UGC function as a mediating variable in the relationships between brand engagement and subjective norms with online purchase intention. This mediating role has been theorized but rarely empirically validated in the context of social commerce, making this study a meaningful contribution.

The research findings reveal the mediating role of attitudes toward UGC in the relationship between brand engagement and online purchase intention. This implies that brand-building strategies should focus on fostering consumer engagement with the brand and ensuring that such engagement translates into a favorable attitude toward user-generated content. A positive attitude toward UGC is a critical link that enhances

consumers' online purchase intention, especially in the context of e-commerce, which increasingly relies on user reviews, comments, and shared experiences.

Similarly, the relationship between subjective norms and online purchase intention is also mediated by attitudes toward UGC. This indicates that social influence originating from peers, family members, or online communities may not directly shape consumers' purchasing intention but rather does so by cultivating a positive perception of content generated by other users. Accordingly, mechanisms leveraging social influence should be designed to promote trust and credibility in UGC, thereby indirectly boosting sales performance on digital commerce platforms.

While prior research primarily focused on examining the direct relationships between brand engagement or subjective norms and purchase intention, this study extends the literature by highlighting the critical mediating role of positive attitude toward UGC. Unlike Wang [46], who found that direct peer influence had a stronger impact on Millennials' purchase intentions, the present study reveals that for Gen Z, attitudes toward UGC mediate and account for much of this social influence. Furthermore, compared to Ngo Kim Ngan [48], who examined only the direct effects of UGC on Gen Z's behavior, this research provides a more integrated framework by linking brand engagement, subjective norms, and UGC attitude into a coherent and comprehensive model.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

This study has clarified the factors influencing online shopping intention among Generation Z on TikTok Shop, emphasizing the mediating role of attitudes toward UGC. The results indicate that brand engagement and subjective norms significantly impact online purchase intention, with attitudes toward UGC acting as the mediating variable, linking these factors to purchase intention. This shows that in today's digital environment,

UGC is not just a marketing tool but a primary driver of consumer purchase intention, especially for Gen Z.

B. Practical recommendations

Based on the research results, several recommendations can be made for businesses, especially brands on the TikTok Shop platform, to enhance the effectiveness of their marketing strategies and stimulate consumer purchase intentions.

First, businesses should build and maintain strong engagement with consumers through frequent interaction strategies, encouraging users to participate in brand and product-related activities. Building a strong and active community will generate positive feedback from consumers, thereby enhancing loyalty and the likelihood of purchase.

Second, given the important role of UGC in forming positive attitudes and driving purchase intention, businesses should encourage consumers to create and share content related to products. Consumer-participatory advertising campaigns and sharing real-life reviews will help increase trust from consumers.

Third, brands should recognize the importance of social influence on Gen Z, especially in online environments. This group is highly influenced by people within their social networks, including friends, family, and influencers. Therefore, businesses should leverage these relationships to create marketing strategies not only based on traditional advertising campaigns but also utilizing social elements and community endorsements. Building trust and credibility from reference groups can drive online purchase intention.

Finally, it improves user experience and product transparency. Gen Z places great emphasis on transparency regarding product information. Businesses need to ensure that all product information is fully, clearly, and understandably provided. At the same time, real reviews from user experiences should be more widely shared to create trust. Developing a user-friendly and intuitive online shopping platform also helps increase satisfaction and encourages purchase intention.

Additionally, special attention should be paid to providing effective and timely customer service to resolve any issues consumers may encounter during their shopping process.

C. Limitations and future research

Although this study provides important insights into the online purchase intentions of Gen Z on TikTok Shop, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to consumers in the Mekong Delta region, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Second, the use of a cross-sectional survey design captures consumer attitudes at only one point in time, limiting the ability to assess changes in intention over time. Future research should expand the sample to include participants from other regions or countries to enable broader comparisons and enhance external validity. Additionally, adopting longitudinal research designs would allow scholars to better capture the dynamic evolution of Gen Z's attitudes and purchasing intention in response to changes in social commerce platforms. Finally, future studies could employ mixed methods to reduce bias and gain deeper insights into the factors influencing online purchase intentions.

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