

## Research Article

# THE IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH (eWOM) ON PURCHASE BEHAVIOR FOR FUNCTIONAL BEVERAGES: CASE STUDY OF PROBI YOGURT DRINK FROM VINAMILK VIETNAM

\*Bui Thanh Thanh and Nguyen Anh Xuan Hong

International University – Vietnam National University, HCMC, Vietnam.

Received 18<sup>th</sup> September 2025; Accepted 19<sup>th</sup> October 2025; Published online 30<sup>th</sup> November 2025

### ABSTRACT

This study investigates how electronic word-of-mouth influences consumer purchase behavior in Vietnam's functional beverage market, using the extended Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as the research framework. Focusing on Generation Z consumers, the research uses Probi Yogurt Drink as a representative product to examine how electronic word-of-mouth and psychological factors—including Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Health Consciousness—shape Purchase Intention and Actual Purchase. Price Consciousness is incorporated as a moderating variable between intention and behavior. A quantitative survey was conducted with 310 Generation Z respondents in Ho Chi Minh City, all of whom had previous experience purchasing Probi Yogurt Drink. Data were collected through online platforms and analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS with Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling. The findings indicate that electronic word-of-mouth strongly affects Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Health Consciousness. Subjective Norms and Health Consciousness were the strongest drivers of Purchase Intention, which in turn significantly predicted Actual Purchase. Price Consciousness further strengthened this link for price-sensitive consumers. In contrast, Attitude and Health Consciousness showed no indirect effects on Actual Purchase, suggesting that internal motivations alone may not lead to action without external cues. These results offer practical guidance for engaging Generation Z consumers and future research.

**Keywords:** Electronic Word-Of-Mouth (eWOM); Consumer Behavior; Functional Beverages; Generation Z.

### INTRODUCTION

Demand for healthier food and beverage options has increased as consumers become more aware of the connection between diet and well-being (Manoj *et al.*, 2023). Functional beverages, which incorporate bioactive ingredients to support digestion and immunity, are a growing segment of this market (Nazir *et al.*, 2019). In Vietnam, the sector was valued at USD 2.4 billion in 2022 and is projected to expand steadily in the coming years (VnExpress, 2024).

Generation Z plays a central role in this growth. As a digitally native and health-conscious demographic, Gen Z relies heavily on online reviews, social media discussions, and influencer recommendations when choosing products, especially those related to wellness (VTV Digital, 2024; Minh Anh, 2025; Cheung & Thadani, 2012). With social media penetration reaching 73.3%, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has become a key factor shaping brand perceptions and product choices among this group (DataReportal, 2024).

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

Probi Yogurt Drink, a leading functional beverage from Vinamilk, represents an ideal case for investigating these dynamics. The product contains clinically supported probiotics and is promoted largely through digital channels, making it highly visible to Gen Z consumers. Vinamilk's strong market position—holding over 40% of the functional dairy segment (Nielsen, 2024)—further reinforces Probi's relevance as a representative product.

Although eWOM has been examined in various industries, its influence on functional beverages in Vietnam remains underexplored.

\*Corresponding Author: Bui Thanh Thanh,

International University – Vietnam National University, HCMC, Vietnam.

Prior studies often focus on Purchase Intention (PI), leaving a gap in understanding how intention translates into Actual Purchase (AP), particularly among price-sensitive and information-saturated Gen Z consumers. To address this gap, this study applies the Theory of Planned Behavior to examine how eWOM influences PI and AP through psychological factors such as Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Health Consciousness, while also assessing the moderating role of Price Consciousness.

This study examines the influence of eWOM on consumer purchase behavior in Vietnam's functional beverage market, using Probi Yogurt Drink as the focal case. First, the research applies the Theory of Planned Behavior to explore how electronic word of mouth shapes key psychological factors—Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Health Consciousness—that contribute to consumers' Purchase Intention. Next, it considers whether Purchase Intention translates into Actual Purchase and evaluates the moderating role of Price Consciousness in strengthening or weakening this connection. By addressing these elements, the study aims to provide practical insights that help businesses make more effective use of electronic word of mouth and consumer psychology to enhance engagement, improve conversion from intention to behavior, and refine marketing strategies in the functional beverage sector.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Theoretical Framework

This study draws on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which explains how Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control shape behavioral intention. Although TPB has been validated in various consumption contexts (Paul *et al.*, 2016; Yadav & Pathak, 2016), recent research suggests that it may

overlook important digital influences, particularly in markets where online information strongly shapes consumer choices.

To extend TPB, this study incorporates three constructs relevant to Vietnam's digital environment: eWOM, Health Consciousness, and Price Consciousness. eWOM including consumer-generated online content has been shown to influence psychological drivers in the intention-behavior process (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Zayed *et al.*, 2022), though its impact varies by platform credibility and cultural context (Filiari, 2015). Health Consciousness, a motivator of intention in health-related products (Tudoran *et al.*, 2009; Zheng *et al.*, 2021), may interact with eWOM when consumers rely on online cues to evaluate wellness benefits. Price Consciousness is included as a moderator, as affordability often shapes purchase decisions among young, digital-savvy consumers (Konuk, 2019; Sun & Wang, 2020).

## Hypotheses Development

eWOM refers to consumer-generated online content such as reviews, testimonials, and social media discussions (Babić *et al.*, 2020; Ramirez, 2020). Compared with traditional word of mouth, eWOM offers broader reach and easier access (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Prior studies show that eWOM influences key psychological components of TPB, including Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Gupta & Harris, 2010). Understanding these effects is increasingly relevant in health-oriented markets where consumers depend heavily on digital information.

Attitude reflects a consumer's positive or negative evaluation of a product. For functional beverages, perceptions of taste, quality, and health benefits shape consumer attitude. eWOM can strengthen or weaken these perceptions depending on review quality and user experience (Filiari, 2015; Park, Lee & Han, 2007).

### H1: eWOM positively influences Attitude.

Subjective Norms involve perceived expectations from social groups. In digital environments, online communities and peer discussions significantly guide purchase decisions (Cheung, Lee & Rabjohn, 2008; Chu & Kim, 2011). Positive and repeated online signals can validate choices, especially for younger consumers (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012).

### H2: eWOM positively influences Subjective Norms.

Perceived Behavioral Control reflects consumers' confidence in their ability to complete a purchase. eWOM reduces uncertainty by offering insights about product accessibility, risks, or convenience (Park *et al.*, 2007; Cheung & Thadani, 2012). When information increases clarity, consumers feel more capable of making the purchase (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012).

### H3: eWOM positively influences Perceived Behavioral Control.

Health Consciousness describes an individual's motivation to prioritize wellness (Huang *et al.*, 2022). Digital platforms amplify health messaging, making eWOM a key channel shaping health-driven choices (Gupta & Harris, 2010; Lahindah & Sanjaya, 2023). Exposure to credible content about probiotic benefits can reinforce Health Consciousness in the context of functional beverages (Lie *et al.*, 2023).

### H4: eWOM positively influences Health Consciousness.

Purchase Intention, as defined by TPB, stems from Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control (Ajzen, 1991).

When consumers hold positive beliefs about functional beverages, feel socially encouraged, and perceive purchasing as easy or manageable, their intention strengthens (Lim & Goh, 2019; Chia *et al.*, 2023).

### H5: Attitude positively influences Purchase Intention.

### H6: Subjective Norms positively influence Purchase Intention.

### H7: Perceived Behavioral Control positively influences Purchase Intention.

Health Consciousness further contributes to Purchase Intention by emphasizing wellness motives and sensitivity to health-related information, particularly in digital environments where health claims circulate widely (Tudoran *et al.*, 2009; Pan *et al.*, 2024).

### H8: Health Consciousness positively influences Purchase Intention.

Actual Purchase reflects consumers' final buying action. Numerous studies demonstrate that Purchase Intention is a strong predictor of Actual Purchase in food and beverage contexts (Paul & Rana, 2012; Yadav & Pathak, 2016; Wee *et al.*, 2014).

### H9: Purchase Intention positively influences Actual Purchase.

Price Consciousness refers to consumers' emphasis on affordability. Highly price-conscious buyers often hesitate to purchase premium health products, even when intentions are strong (Sun & Wang, 2020; Konuk, 2019; Rihn *et al.*, 2018). Thus, Purchase Intention may not convert to Actual Purchase when price sensitivity is high.

### H10: Price Consciousness negatively moderates the relationship between Purchase Intention and Actual Purchase.

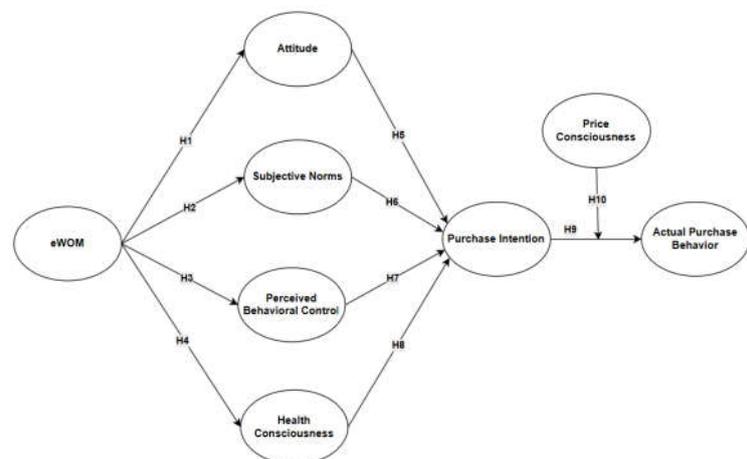


Fig 1. Research Model.

## METHODOLOGY

A quantitative survey was used to collect primary data through a structured online questionnaire, allowing efficient measurement of key variables within a short timeframe. The Google Forms questionnaire was distributed on major social media platforms—Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and Threads—to effectively reach Generation Z, the core consumer group of Probi Yogurt Drink (Ng *et al.*, 2019). Respondents were screened to ensure prior purchase experience, enabling the study to capture informed views on eWOM and other related purchasing factors in the functional beverage market.

**Table 1. Measurement Items**

Constructs	Items	Observed Variables	Sources
Attitude	ATT1	I think that purchasing functional beverages is a good choice.	Zayed et al. (2022)
	ATT2	I think that purchasing functional beverages is interesting.	
	ATT3	I think that purchasing functional beverages is important.	
	ATT4	I think that purchasing functional beverages offers health benefits.	
	ATT5	I think that purchasing functional beverages is a wise decision.	
	ATT6	I think that purchasing functional beverages is favourable.	
Electronic Word Of Mouth	eWOM1	I often read online reviews about functional beverages to make better purchase decisions.	Zayed et al. (2022)
	eWOM2	Before choosing a functional beverage, I frequently check online reviews.	
	eWOM3	I consult online reviews to help decide which functional beverage to buy.	
	eWOM4	I usually gather information from online reviews before purchasing a functional beverage.	
	eWOM5	If I do not check online reviews before buying a functional beverage, I feel uncertain about my decision.	
	eWOM6	Reading online reviews about functional beverages increases my confidence in my purchase decisions.	
Perceived Behavioral Control	PBC1	If I wanted to, I could easily buy functional beverages instead of regular drinks.	Zayed et al. (2022)
	PBC2	I find it convenient to purchase functional beverages.	
	PBC3	The decision to buy functional beverages is mostly up to me.	
Subjective Norms	SN1	My family encourages me to buy functional beverages rather than regular drinks.	Zayed et al. (2022)
	SN2	Most people I respect prefer functional beverages over regular drinks.	
	SN3	Influential people in my life, such as mentors or health-conscious peers, recommend functional beverages.	
	SN4	My close friends, whose opinions regarding diet are important to me, support buying functional beverages.	
Health Consciousness	HC1	I carefully select my beverages to ensure good health.	Zayed et al. (2022)
	HC2	I do not consider myself to be a health-conscious consumer.	
Purchase Intention	PI1	If functional beverages are available, I am interested in buying them.	Zheng et al. (2021)
	PI2	I intend to purchase functional beverages if they are available.	
	PI3	I plan to buy functional beverages during my next purchase.	
Price Consciousness	PC1	Functional beverages are relatively high.	Zheng et al. (2021)
	PC2	I look for discounts when purchasing beverages.	
	PC3	I compare prices of functional beverages across different brands.	
Actual Purchase	AP1	I regularly consume functional beverages as healthy food.	Zheng et al. (2021)
	AP2	I have purchased functional beverages five times in the last five years.	
	AP3	I choose to purchase functional beverages even if I need to search for the next shop.	

**DATA ANALYSIS**

**Demographic Information**

Of the 310 valid responses, 43.9% were male and 56.1% were female. All respondents belong to Gen Z, which aligns with the study's intended target group. In terms of place of residence within Ho Chi Minh City, the largest proportion of respondents came from the outskirts (19.4%), followed by the southern area (18.7%), western area (17.1%), central area (16.1%), northern area (14.5%), and eastern area (14.2%). Regarding monthly income, 19.7% of participants reported earnings from 5 to under 10 million VND, 18.1% earned under 5 million VND, 17.4% earned between 15 to under 20 million VND, while 15.2% were financially dependent on family. Only 14.5% reported earnings over 20 million VND. In terms of Probi consumption frequency, 17.1% of respondents consumed the product once every two weeks, followed by 15.2% who consumed once a week and 14.5% who consumed it daily. This indicates a relatively high engagement rate with the product among Gen Z consumers. Additionally, the study also explored the communication platforms through which respondents accessed information about Probi. The most cited source was friends or family recommendations (14.4%), followed by TikTok (13.7%), YouTube (13.6%), and television advertisements (13.6%). Other notable channels included flyers or in-store advertisements (12.8%), Facebook (9.8%), Instagram (7.7%), and Vinamilk's official website (7.6%). These results highlight the importance of both peer influence and digital media in shaping consumers' awareness of the product.

**Reliability Testing**

The measurement and structural model are presented in Figure 2, which illustrates the relationships between latent constructs and their observed indicators (outer loadings), as well as the structural paths between constructs with standardized path coefficients. All constructs in the model are modeled reflectively, as shown by the indicators pointing toward the latent variables.

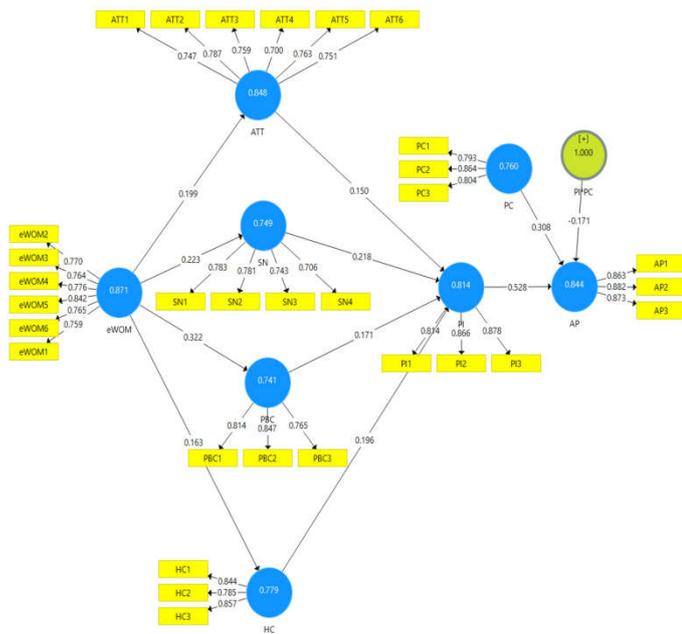


Fig2. Reflective measurement model with outer loadings and structural paths

Path Coefficient and Hypothesis Testing

Figure 3 illustrates the direct relationships among constructs and their significance levels, providing a visual summary of the tested hypotheses. From a managerial perspective, these findings imply that to effectively increase AP, firms should not only cultivate strong PI through psychological drivers and eWOM engagement but also consider strategies to maintain perceived value and minimize the dampening effect of price sensitivity.

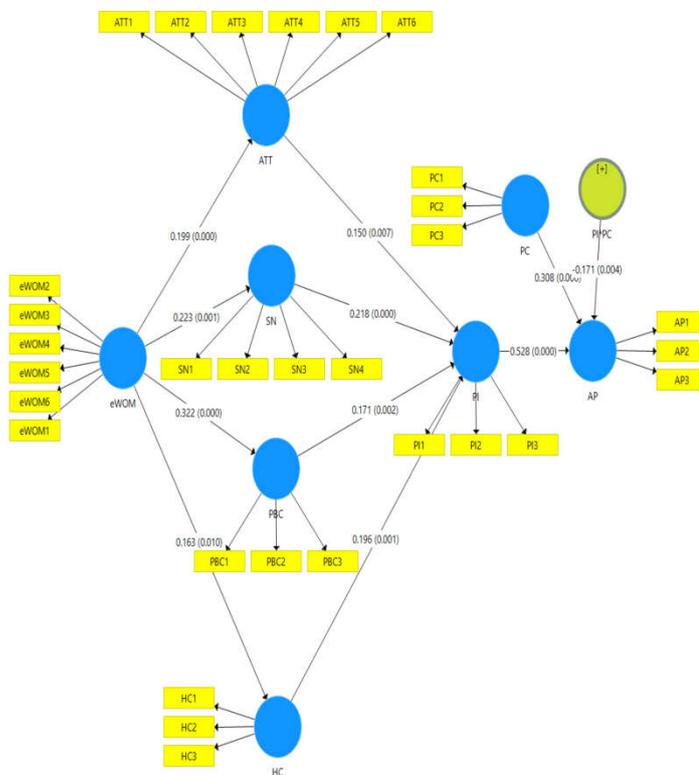


Fig 3. Results of Structural Equation Modeling

Following the evaluation of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000

resamples. The results, as presented in Table2, indicate that all ten hypothesized direct relationships (H1–H10) are statistically significant at the 5% level or better.

Table 2. Path coefficients for PLS-SEM

	Path coefficient	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV)	P Values	Results
H1: eWOM -> ATT	0.199	0.054	3.683	0.000***	Supported
H2: eWOM -> SN	0.223	0.064	3.457	0.001***	Supported
H3: eWOM ->PBC	0.322	0.062	5.167	0.000***	Supported
H4: eWOM -> HC	0.163	0.063	2.586	0.010**	Supported
H5: ATT -> PI	0.150	0.056	2.686	0.007**	Supported
H6: SN -> PI	0.218	0.058	3.737	0.000***	Supported
H7: PBC -> PI	0.171	0.055	3.096	0.002**	Supported
H8: HC -> PI	0.196	0.059	3.328	0.001***	Supported
H9: PI -> AP	0.528	0.044	12.061	0.000***	Supported
H10: PC -> AP	0.308	0.075	4.088	0.000***	Supported
PI*PC -> AP	-0.171	0.059	2.878	0.004**	Supported

Note: Using two-tailed t-test, \*: p value < 0.05; \*\*: p value < 0.01; \*\*\*: p value < 0.001

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

Vietnam’s functional beverage market has become increasingly competitive as rising health consciousness drives demand. In this context, eWOM plays a central role in shaping consumer perceptions, particularly among Gen Z, who rely heavily on digital content when evaluating products. While prior studies mainly explored eWOM’s impact on intention, its influence on actual behavior remains under examined, leaving a theoretical gap (Nguyen *et al.*, 2024).

This study addresses that gap by tracing the full pathway from eWOM to actual purchase using the TPB framework, extended with health consciousness and price consciousness. Results show that eWOM strengthens perceived behavioral control more than any other TPB construct, suggesting that clear, experience-based online information helps consumers feel more confident in their decisions. Subjective norms and health consciousness exert the strongest effects on purchase intention, highlighting the influence of peer approval and wellness motivations among Gen Z. However, attitude and health consciousness did not significantly translate into behavior, reflecting an intention–behavior gap shaped by contextual factors.

The model confirms that subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and intention mediate the eWOM–purchase link, while price consciousness directly affects behavior and moderates the intention–action relationship. Among price-aware Gen Z consumers, emphasizing value—rather than purely health claims—proves most effective in converting intention into actual purchase.

## CONCLUSION

This study suggests that businesses seeking to increase sales of functional beverages among Vietnamese Gen Z consumers must adopt a multi-dimensional strategy. This includes leveraging eWOM to activate key psychological constructs, enhancing perceived control and social influence, sustaining health awareness through education, and addressing price concerns through transparent and appealing value propositions. When executed effectively, such strategies can enable brands like Probi Yogurt Drink to bridge the gap between digital engagement and real-world purchase, strengthening consumer trust, satisfaction, and long-term loyalty in a competitive and health-conscious market landscape.

## REFERENCES

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211.
- Babić Rosario, A., De Valck, K., & Sotgiu, F. (2020). Conceptualizing the electronic word-of-mouth process: What we know and need to know about eWOM creation, exposure, and evaluation. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48(3), 422–448.
- Chia, R. C. J., Efendi, M., & Liew, V. K. S. (2023). Consumer PI on Boba drinks in Kuching during Covid-19. *Cogent Business & Management*, 10(2), 2177399.
- Cheung, C. M., & Thadani, D. R. (2012). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth communication: A literature analysis and integrative model. *Decision Support Systems*, 54(1), 461–470.
- Cheung, C. M., Lee, M. K., & Rabjohn, N. (2008). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth: The adoption of online opinions in online customer communities. *Internet Research*, 18(3), 229–247.
- Chu, S. C., & Kim, Y. (2011). Determinants of consumer engagement in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in social networking sites. *International Journal of Advertising*, 30(1), 47–75.
- DataReportal. (2024, February). Digital 2024: Vietnam. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-vietnam>
- Filieri, R. (2015). What makes online reviews helpful? A diagnosticity-adoption framework to explain informational and normative influences in e-WOM. *Journal of Business Research*, 68(6), 1261–1270.
- Gupta, P., & Harris, J. (2010). How e-WOM recommendations influence product consideration and quality of choice: A motivation to process information perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 63(9–10), 1041–1049.
- Jalilvand, M. R., & Samiei, N. (2012). The effect of eWOM on brand image and PI: An empirical study in the automobile industry in Iran. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 30(4), 460–476.
- Konuk, F. A. (2019). The influence of perceived food quality, price fairness, perceived value and satisfaction on customers' revisit and word-of-mouth intentions towards organic food restaurants. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 50, 103–110.
- Lahindah, C., & Sanjaya, R. (2023). Analisis Pengaruh WOM, eWOM, dan Brand Image terhadap Purchase Decision Bidang Food and Beverage (Studi Kasus CV. Sembilan Matahari Sejahtera). *Journal of Management and Business Review*, 20(3), 256–265.
- Lie, B., Tjokrosaputro, M., Ariniputri, N., Krisnaputra, A., & Devotyasto, M. (2023). Factors Affecting PI of Healthy Drinks. *International Journal of Application on Economics and Business*. <https://doi.org/10.24912/ijaeb.v1i4.2639-2649>
- Lim, C. C., & Goh, Y. N. (2019). Investigating the PI toward healthy drinks among Urban consumers in Malaysia. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 22(3), 286–302.
- Manoj, P. M., Mohan, J. R., Khasherao, B. Y., Shams, R., & Dash, K. K. (2023). Fruit based probiotic functional beverages: A review. *Journal of Agriculture and Food Research*, 14, 100729.
- Minh Anh. (2025, March 16). Gen Z và mạng xã hội: Cần có “sức đề kháng” mạnh mẽ. *Báo Thái Nguyên*. <https://baothainguyen.vn/xa-hoi/202503/gen-z-va-mang-xa-hoi-can-co-suc-de-khang-manh-me-4573d47/>
- Nazir, M., Arif, S., Khan, R. S., Nazir, W., Khalid, N., & Maqsood, S. (2019). Opportunities and challenges for functional and medicinal beverages: Current and future trends. *Trends in Food Science & Technology*, 88, 513–526.
- Ng, A., Hong, H., Abdullah Saleem, H., Lim, K. Y., & Wong, C. H. (2019). The Influence of EWOM in Social Media on Generation Z's PIs: A Review. *INTI JOURNAL*, 2019(4).
- Nguyen, T. T. T., Limbu, Y. B., Pham, L., & Zúñiga, M. Á. (2024). The influence of eWOM on green cosmetics PI: evidence from young Vietnamese female consumers. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 41(4), 406–423.
- Pan, P. L., Bhandari, M., & Meng, J. (2024). Toward an Integrated Model of Healthy Food Purchase via the Impact of Online Nutrition Information Seeking. *American Behavioral Scientist*.
- Park, D. H., Lee, J., & Han, I. (2007). The effect of on-line consumer reviews on consumer purchasing intention: The moderating role of involvement. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 11(4), 125–148.
- Paul, J., & Rana, J. (2012). Consumer behavior and PI for organic food. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 29(6), 412–422.
- Ramirez, D. (2020). User-generated content vs eWord-of-Mouth (UGC vs eWOM).
- Rihn, A., Khachatryan, H., & Wei, X. (2018). Assessing purchase patterns of price conscious consumers. *Horticulturae*, 4(3), 13.
- Sun, Y., & Wang, S. (2020). Understanding consumers' intentions to purchase green products in the social media marketing context. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 32(4), 860–878.
- Tudoran, A., Olsen, S. O., & Dopico, D. C. (2009). The effect of health benefit information on consumers' health value, ATTs and intentions. *Appetite*, 52(3), 568–579.
- VTV Digital. (2024, August 25). Thế hệ Gen Z có xu hướng quan tâm tới sức khỏe gia đình. <https://vtv.vn/doi-song/the-he-gen-z-co-xu-huong-quan-tam-toi-suc-khoe-gia-dinh-20240824155458574.htm>
- VnExpress. (2024, November 22). Dư địa tăng trưởng của thực phẩm chức năng Việt Nam. <https://vnexpress.net/du-dia-tang-truong-cua-thuc-pham-chuc-nang-viet-nam-4816400>
- Wee, C. S., Ariff, M. S. B. M., Zakuan, N., Tajudin, M. N. M., Ismail, K., & Ishak, N. (2014). Consumers perception, PI and AP of organic food products. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research*, 3(2), 378.
- Yadav, R., & Pathak, G. S. (2016). Intention to purchase organic food among young consumers: Evidences from a developing nation. *Appetite*, 96, 122–128.
- Zayed, M. F., Gaber, H. R., & El Essawi, N. (2022). Examining the factors that affect consumers' PI of organic food products in a developing country. *Sustainability*, 14(10), 5868.
- Zheng, G. W., Akter, N., Siddik, A. B., & Masukujjaman, M. (2021). Organic foods purchase behavior among generation Y of Bangladesh: The moderation effect of trust and PC. *Foods*, 10(10), 2278.