FACTORS IMPACT CONSUMERS' BUYING DECISION IN SOCIAL NETWORK ONLINE PURCHASE - THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WORD-OF-MOUTH IN FUNCTIONAL FOODS MARKET: A STUDY IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

CÁC YẾU TỐ TÁC ĐỘNG ĐẾN QUYẾT ĐỊNH MUA HÀNG CỦA NGƯỜI TIÊU DÙNG TRONG MUA SẮM TRÊN MẠNG XÃ HỘI - TẦM QUAN TRỌNG CỦA TRUYỀN MIỆNG ĐỐI VỚI THỊ TRƯỜNG THỰC PHẨM CHỨC NĂNG: NGHIÊN CỨU TẠI THÀNH PHỐ HỒ CHÍ MINH, VIỆT NAM

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to evaluate the impacts of word-of-mouth, trust and perceived value as predicting factors on customers' behavior in functional foods market in social networks. Based on the proposed relationships of word-of-mouth, trust, perceived value, purchase intention and purchase decision, a model has been established. A survey was conducted and 381 responses were collected from people who used to buy functional foods through social networks. By using quantitative approach and verification techniques, the findings show that consumers' purchase intention and buying decision are predicted by word-of-mouth, trust and perceived value. Besides, word-of-mouth is considered as predicting factor that directly impacts trust. In addition, trust also has the positive effect on perceived value. Moreover, there is a significant signal of the positive relationship between customers' purchase intention and their buying decision. The study also provides some strategic recommendations to functional food sellers and suppliers in social networks which reflect the research findings and analysis.

Keywords: functional food; perceived value; social networking online purchase; trust; word-of-mouth.

TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu này nhằm đánh giá tác động của truyền miệng, sự tin tưởng và giá trị cảm nhận như là những yếu tố dự đoán hành vi khách hàng đối với thị trường thực phẩm chức năng trên các trang mạng xã hội. Dựa trên các mối quan hệ được đề xuất đối với các yếu tố truyền miệng, sự tin tưởng, giá trị cảm nhận, ý định mua hàng và quyết định mua hàng, mô hình nghiên cứu đã được thiết lập. Một cuộc khảo sát đã được tiến hành và thu thập được 381 phản hồi từ những người đã từng mua thực phẩm chức năng thông qua các trang mạng xã hội. Áp dụng phương pháp định lượng và các kỹ thuật kiểm tra, kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy, ý định mua hàng và quyết định mua hàng của người tiêu dùng được dự đoán dựa vào yếu tố truyền miệng, sự tin tưởng và giá trị cảm nhận; sự truyền miệng được xem là yếu tố dự đoán có ảnh hưởng trực tiếp đến sự tin tưởng; ngoài ra, sự tin tưởng cũng có ảnh hưởng tích cực đến giá trị cảm nhận. Bên cạnh đó, kết quả nghiên cứu cũng đã chỉ ra rằng, tồn tại mối quan hệ tích cực giữa ý định mua hàng và quyết định mua hàng của khách hàng. Dựa vào kết quả nghiên cứu, tác giả đã đề xuất một số chiến lược đối với người bán và nhà cung cấp thực phẩm chức năng thông qua mạng xã hội.

Từ khóa: thực phẩm chức năng; giá trị cảm nhận; mua hàng thông qua mạng xã hội; sự tin tưởng; truyền miệng

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1. INTRODUCTION

Today, health care has become one of the top concerns of people in over the world in general and in Vietnam in particular. Most of us are aware of what need for a healthy lifestyle that reduces the risks of illness. However, modern life has made several changes in health problems. Increasing urbanization is also associated with busy lifestyles, our daily habits require less physical activities and more accessible to foods that has higher energy density. One of the best ways is to use products that are supposed to provide additional health benefits besides basic nutrients, one of which is functional foods. Vietnam is a country with a young population and Ho Chi Minh City is the largest city with a lot of young citizens. In the rise of modern lifestyles, people have more concerned about their basic needs, especially their health through using health-promoting products. That is the reason why it is considered as an attractive market of health care products. With great efforts from the media, science, health organizations and other concerning people, Vietnamese have been changing the way they consume food (Mergenthaler et al., 2013). According to the results of the National Food Safety Survey in Ho Chi Minh City, 48 out of every 100 adults use functional foods (Vtown, 2013). Nowadays, more and more

consumers are interested in buying functional products. People, especially young consumers, have begun choosing products that help them not only maintain mental health but also prevent and reduce health-related diseases.

In addition, in the era of technology, the demands on the form of service, the convenience of purchasing and payment are also considered. Along with this trend, buying functional foods through online sales is a suitable solution to the demands of young consumers. With their own strengths, online sales have become popular in the world, and one form of it is the sales through social networks. "Social Networking Sites" indicate the network where users (individual or groups) can interact with each other (Kempe et al., 2003). By doing many task and sharing videos, image, comments and thoughts and facilitating for communication (Kietzmann et al., 2011), many connections among users with others are greatly maintained through social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (Ellison et al., 2007). But in fact, because of their viral features, these shopping sites are not trusted by consumers. Hence, the decision of consumers to join and use social commerce dealers is very exciting to be investigated. In addition, because of the diversity and abundance of functional foods market, consumers have to choose carefully before deciding to buy. In consumption circumstances, there are many factors are considered to explain consumer's decision. In many cases, word-of-mouth is play an important role in making decision because consumers often believe in each other more than they believe in information or communication from sellers (Ng et al., 2011). Moreover, to extend the lead consumers and change these lead consumers into real buyers, buyers can review and give their feedbacks (positive or negative feedbacks) after using purchased products among their friends through social networking (Parson, 2013). Basing on the lack of research in this market, this research is aim to investigate the effect of word-of-mouth as essential factor that predicts buying decision of consumers to take part in social networking online purchase.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Word-of-mouth (WOM) and Trust

WOM is defined as consumer to consumer communication about goods and services. It is a powerful persuasive force, particularly in the diffusion of information about new products (Dean and Lang, 2008). According to Harrison, WOM communication is "informal, person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organization or a service" (Harrison-Walker, 2001). It is defined by Gremler et al. (2001), that this represents the image of the company and its services that is shared by customers. WOM can take one of many forms such as online review, review from friends or relatives, etc. An online review from another customer on a shopping website is a common example. Consumers also often acquire information about specific products from

various online communities such as blogs and product review websites.

Trust is defined as one's belief that a party will deliver desirable resources in a predictable manner (Foa and Foa, 1976). In term of business-to-business marketing, trust is considered an antecedent of engagement, and it is necessary for successful relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Furthermore, Ganesan and Hess (1997), stated trust as the level of sureness ensured by one party to other party in the case of given exchange relationship. In addition, trust is often tied to consumer expectations regarding the ability of the company to fulfill its obligations and keep its promise in the marketing concept (Barber, 1983).

Risk and uncertainty in purchasing and consumption could be reduced by the crucial role of WOM (Murray and Schlacter, 1990). Reviews from people experienced the products will gain the trust from customers. The study of Chen and Xie (2005), showed evidences that suggests consumers tend to base on other people's experiences and opinions during the decision-making process when purchasing a high-involvement products or services. Especially, this is the case of: *(i)* high transparency from the product; *(ii)* complicated products; *(iii)* the criteria for an objective evaluation of the product are difficult to assess; and *(iv)* high perceived risk (Chen and Xie, 2005). Therefore, the hypothesis proposed H_1, WOM has a positive relationship with trust.

Word-of-mouth, Trust, Perceived value and Purchase intention

Perceived value is seen as a strategic dictate for manufacturers and retailers in the 1990s, and it will continue to be important in the twenty-first century (Vantrappen, 1992; Woodruff, 1997; Forester, 1999). Hence, it's necessary for managers to understand the value of customers and where they should concentrate on to gain the market advantages (Woodruff, 1997). According to Forester (1999), it is the balance between quality and price - the most commonly definition of perceived value. However, there so many authors have been arguing that seeing value as a trade-off between quality and price is too simple. This study used the definition of perceived value as Zeithaml (1988), suggested that perceived value is a consumer's overall evaluation of the product's utility (or service) relied on the perceptions of what they are received and given (Zeithaml, 1988).
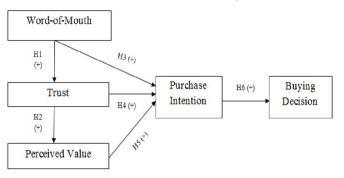
Purchase intention is a behavior tendency of a consumer who intends to buy the product (Dodds and Monroe, 1985). Kotler (2000), also defined that purchase intention is a common efficaciousness measure and it is often used to predict the response behavior. Li and Biocca (2002), also argued that purchase intention is a common effectual measurement and it is often used to previse a response behavior. Intention also refers to the extent of sensible effort that person will follow to confirm his/her behavior; intention is also concerned as one of the motivational

components of behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of e-commerce, online purchase intention can be stated as a circumstance when a person craves for buying a specific product or service through the website (Chen et al., 2010; Fygenson and Pavlou, 2006).

According to Kim et al. (2012), when consumers buy the products through the sellers' shopping sites, trust can decrease the non-monetary cost and increase the perceived value. In the online purchase context, Kim et al. (2012), have demonstrated the impact of trust on perceived value.

In some cases, e-shoppers wish to give their reviews about the adopted product. Such contributing activities allow consumers to exert both informational and normative influences on the product evaluation and purchase intention of fellow consumers (Bone, 1995). Previous researches conducted that organization's effectiveness has been profoundly impacted WOM communications. Purchase behavior is affected when consumers are thinking about purchasing products or services (Williams and Buttle, 2011). According to Sen and Lerman (2007), and Xia and Bechwati (2008), WOM is acknowledged to play a considerable role in influencing and forming consumer attitudes and behavior intentions.

In Jarvenpaa and Tractinsky's research (1999), trust was known as indirect predicting factor of purchasing intention. As the researchers suggest, a consumer's willingness to buy from an Internet seller is eventual on the consumer's attitude towards the store. However, most other prior researchers demonstrated that trust is a key factor that has a great directly influence on purchase intention. According to Gefen et al., (2003), trust helps lessen the complicacy of social that a consumer confront in e-commerce by allowing them to eliminate unwanted behaviors of the e-vendor including inconsequential use of purchase information. In this way business activities of online customers are encouraged by trust (Gefen et al., 2003). Besides, per reasonable action theory, internet shopping activity could be described as a kind of intentional activity phenomenon impacted strongly by consumer belief as well (Jong and Lee, 2000). Trust and purchasing intention is believed to have a direct and significant relationship, this is figured out by several researchers (Jang et al., 2005; Yu and Choe, 2003; Yoon, 2000).

A model of consumer evaluation of price, perceived quality, and perceived value is propounded by Dodds and Monroe (1985). They suggested that perceived value impacts on consumer's willingness to buy (Dodds and Monroe, 1985). According to Chong et al., (2003), the relationships among trust, perceived value and purchase intention, where customer trust will significantly lead to perceived value and subsequently perceived value will affect purchase intention. Because perceived value is the composition of transaction and acquisition utilities, it seems to be an important antecedent of consumers purchase intention (Thaler, 1985).

Buying decision is noted as the purchase intention's results because consumers might have the intention to purchase before to deciding to buy products (Sri Fatianyet al., 2014). The Theory of Planned Behavior indicated the actual use behavior is a result of intention, and therefore, purchase intention should precede the purchase decision. Therefore, this study proposed: H_2, trust has a positive relationship with perceived value; H_3, WOM has a positive relationship with purchase intention; H_4, trust has a positive relationship with purchase intention; H_5, perceived value has a positive relationship with purchase intention; H_6, purchase intention has a positive relationship with buying decision. Research conceptual model in figure 1.

(Source: Modified from Sri Fatiany et al., 2014)

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research approach and instrument

Quantitative approach is applied in this research. Questionnaire is used as an instrument which contained brief description about the purpose and the significance of the research. The five-points Likert scale is used to measure the strength of each factor. Respondents are asked to rate their agreement among five statements ranged from 1 is "strongly disagreed" to 5 is "strongly agreed", which are: (1) is Strongly disagree; (2) is Disagree; (3) is Neutral; (4) is Agree; (5) is Strongly agree. The questions were adapted from previous researchers and slightly adjusted to make it appropriately in context of this research.

Before doing the actual survey, the pilot test was conducted. The draft questionnaires were distributed to about 30 respondents who used to buy functional foods through social network in one week. After using the pilot test, 30 collected responses are tried to check by reliability test and EFA test. Then, the questionnaires are adjusted to be fit with the normal respondents and some items are deleted from the draft questionnaire due to its similar concepts.

Data collection

The final questionnaires were distributed directly to respondents so that researcher can help to explain which point participants do not clearly understand when doing survey. After conducting the survey, 381 questionnaires are collected from customers who used to buy functional foods through social network after eliminating

unqualified ones. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of respondents.

Data Analysis

Collected data will be tested the reliability and validity by Cronbach's Alpha, Exploratory Factors Analyze (EFA), Confirmatory Factors Analyze (CFA), and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Test

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Measures	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	130	34.1
	Female	251	65.9
Age	Below 18 years old	5	1.3
	18 - 25 years old	194	50.9
	26 - 30 years old	150	39.4
	31 - 35 years old	24	6.3
	36 - 40 years old	8	2.1
	Above 40 years old	0	0
Occupation	Student	5	1.3
	Officer	331	86.9
	Businessman/woman	8	2.1
	Worker	3	0.8
	Other	34	8.9
Income	Below 10 million VND	161	42.3
	From 10 to below 20 million VND	176	46.2
	From 20 to below 30 million VND	32	8.4
	From 30 million VND to more	12	3.1
Frequency of social networking access	Below 1 times/day	1	0.3
	2 - 3 times/day	34	8.9
	3 - 4 times/day	99	26
	above 4 times/day	247	64.8

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and reliability test

Factor	N	Scale items	Mean	Cronbach's Alpha
Word-of-Mouth (W)	381	3	3.85	0.798
Trust (T)	381	3	3.61	0.810
Perceived Value (PV)	381	5	3.59	0.886
Purchase Intention (PI)	381	3	3.60	0.793
Buying Decision (BD)	381	5	3.71	0.886

To examine the concept of scale, Cronbach's Alpha is used to analyze the stability and consistency of scale. An acceptable score recommended is greater or equal to 0.6 ($\geq$ 0.6) by some researchers (Nunnally, 1978; Peterson, 1994; Slater, 1995). Relied on the results, all the variables with the value of the overall Cronbach's Alpha are greater than 0.6, which gratify at the required value and it proves the scale has a very good reliability. Therefore, all items are remained. Besides, the value of mean score of each variable

is at the good agreement (> 3.5), in which the value of mean score of WOM is highest (mean score = 3.85). It indicates that most respondents have the good level of agreement with each dimension. Table 2 presents the results of descriptive statistics and reliability test.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

EFA is the next testing. This step is used to reach the exploring the basic structure of a combination that includes related variables. This model is examined by KMO and Barltlett's test, Promax rotation and Principle axis factors. After running Cronbach's alpha without any item rejected, 19 items is used in this analysis.

Independent and Mediator variables: Based on the results of EFA, the KMO value is 0.876 (> 0.5), the signification value of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is 0.000 (< 0.05), the cumulative value of Variance Explained is 59.984% (> 50%) and Eigen-value of all factors are higher than 1. All values are acceptable. Besides, there no item is rejected because they are satisfied criteria of EFA (all items have loading factor > 0.5).

Dependent variables: The results shows that the KMO value is 0.845 (> 0.5), the signification value of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is 0.000 (< 0.05), the cumulative value of Variance Explained is 61.534% (> 50%) and Eigen-value of this factor is higher than 1. All values are acceptable. In addition, there no item is rejected because they are satisfied criteria of EFA (all items has loading factor > 0.5).

After running Exploratory Factor Analysis, 19 items are remained for further analysis.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling

Following EFA test, CFA is used to examine if the collected data fit a hypothesized measurement model. It allows this research to assume the number of factors, if these factors are correlated or not, and which items/measures load into and which factors reflect.

After running CFA, for 05 variables and 19 indicators, the result of Fit Indices showed a good fitness. In particular, the value of Chi-square = 283.511 ($\neq$ 0) and df = 140; hence, CMIN/DF = 2.025 (< 5.0); p-value = 0.000 (< 0.05); RMSEA = 0.052 (< 0.08); GFI = 0.931 (> 0.9); TLI = 0.953 (> 0.9), and CFI = 0.962 (> 0.9). In summary, the model fit well to the collected data. And it can be said that theoretical model of the research in accordance with collected data from the market.

Following CFA test, SEM is often used to assess unobservable latent constructs for validating the measurement model because of its ability to impute relationships between unobserved constructs (latent variables) from observable variables. Based on the results of SEM, the value of Chi-square is 288.685 ($\neq$ 0) and df = 142; hence, CMIN/DF = 2.033 (< 5.0); p-value = 0.000 (< 0.05); RMSEA = 0.052 (< 0.08); GFI = 0.929 (> 0.9); TLI = 0.953 (>

Table 3. The results of Hypothesis testing

No	Hypothesis	β	Sig.	Conclusion
1	H_1: WOM has a positive relationship with trust.	0.375	0	Supported
2	H_2: Trust has a positive relationship with perceived value.	0.163	0.002	Supported
3	H_3: WOM has a positive relationship with purchase intention.	0.194	0.012	Supported
4	H_4: Trust has a positive relationship with purchase intention.	0.216	0	Supported
5	H_5: Perceived value has a positive relationship with purchase intention.	0.414	0	Supported
6	H_6: Purchase intention has a positive relationship with buying decision.	0.224	0	Supported

0.9), and CFI = 0.961 (> 0.9). With all those values, it means that good-of-fitness criteria were met and SEM model fit with collected data.

Hypothesis testing

The results in table 3 show that WOM plays a role as predicting factor that impacts on trust (β = 0.375, p = 0). It explains 14.1% of the variation of trust. Besides, trust also has the positive influence in perceived value (β = 0.163, p = 0.002), in which trust explains 9.6% of perceived value variance. In addition, WOM (β = 0.194, p = 0.012) and trust (β = 0.216, p = 0) and perceived value (β = 0.414, p = 0) all impact on purchase intention with the explanation of 45.6% of variance, in which perceived value has the largest effect on purchase intention. Finally, buying decision is predicted by purchase intention (β = 0.224, p = 0), in which its variance is explained 12.3% by purchase intention.

From the result of hypothesis testing, it can be seen that all six hypotheses of this study have the significant support. All of those hypotheses have P-value < 0.05 respective with each determinant, all six hypotheses are accepted at 5% level of significant.

Discussion

This research aims to evaluate the impacts of WOM, trust and perceived value as predicting factors on customers' behavior toward functional foods market in social networks. The results present that WOM has a strongly positive effect on trust. According to Alam and Yasin (2010), WOM has a significant influence on trust, in which respondents in their research agreed that information about brands that given by their relatives or friends are really trustworthy. This result also confirms their finding.

Besides, this finding indicates that trust has the positively influence in perceived value. This is also proven by Carver and Scheier (1990), that positive trust can reduce uncertainty and helps the customer build perceived value in the form of reliable expectations of the suppliers.

In addition, purchase intention is positive predicted by WOM, trust and perceived value, in which perceived value has a greatest impact. This is also confirmed by Chi et al., (2009), with their result that consumers will follow perceived value of a product/service to make purchase decision. Hence, businesses need to create their customers' perceived value base on their products/services to gain the customers' intention. This finding also consistent with what Gefen (2000), explored that when customers believe that sellers have high level of trust, it helps to encourage their inquiries and enhance their intention to purchase products from that sellers' websites. This conclusion is in the line with what Yousef et al. (2016), examined that the effect of WOM on purchase intentions need to be understood to emphasize the importance of communication and efficiency of the social media tools used in modern marketing communication. This is also consistent with the result of Nekmat and Karla (2012), that WOM have a significant impact on consumers' purchase activities.

Finally, this finding also confirms that purchase intention plays a role as predicting factor of buying decision. According to Sri Fatianyet al., (2014), consumers' trust is important to influence in their perceived value and purchase intention. Then, purchase intention significantly predicts the consumers' making purchase.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The finding of this research shows that customers appreciate the feedbacks of experienced customers when they want to choose functional foods through social network sites. It means WOM is considered as important factor that predicts purchase behavior in current context, especially in social network online purchase. Besides, trust and perceived value also have the effects on buying behavior. In addition, among WOM, trust and perceived value, there are interrelated relationships, in which WOM is play the role as predictive factor of trust; and trust also has the influence in perceived value. Moreover, this study also presents the positive relationship between purchase intention and buying decision. When customers trust the products, they will have significant perceived value, which will affects the purchase intention and lead them the make the purchase.

The research also gives out several practical implications for functional foods sellers and suppliers to enhance their values based on WOM, trust and perceived value to achieve their goals in business. It is recommended that functional food sellers and suppliers should listen to the views of customers to make customers feel that their feedbacks and reviews be properly concerned and should create an interactive forums to interact with customers so that potential customers can interact with the community in a place where they can share their experiences of

products. Besides, to increase the level of trust, functional food sellers and suppliers should give the real information of products provided on their social network sites; provide updated and accurate information of products (e.g., availability, function, prices, uses, etc.) and the clearly transaction process. Establishing a proper relationship with customers at the beginning is also very necessary by explaining everything customers want to know, providing them with the help that functional food sellers may be able to demonstrate the clear in purchasing and helping them to build trust in the customer, increase their chances of returning in the coming times. In addition, understanding of customer's value perception and the role of perceived value in the relationship between perceived value and purchase behavior are really important. There are many ways for functional food sellers and suppliers to increase their customers' perceived value: one of the most effectiveness ways of enhancing perceived value is advertising. They should give their products to beauty bloggers (may be their best selling's products or new products) so that beauty bloggers will share their views, their evaluations on the products as an advertising of products. The reviews of beauty bloggers that are posted in social network sites have caught the interest of a large number of people who tend to rely on the information provided in those bloggers are often perceived to have credibility. However, functional food sellers and suppliers need to choose beautiful bloggers with their characteristics carefully based on the target customers. Pricing is also a way to enhance the perceived value. Functional food sellers and suppliers should set the price of products based on what customers is willing pay for it.

Limitations

The research also has its own limitations. First, this study is just focuses on functional foods market, it necessary to demonstrate the dimensions of these variables in different markets. Second, the sample size of this study is not very large, so further researches should have a larger sample size and extend the study space to have more excellent results. And the researches in the future should evaluate the relationships among the constructs by other approaches for better understanding about consumers' behavior.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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