

IS THERE ANY GENDER DIFFERENCE IN ONLINE SHOPPING DECISIONS
AMONG CONSUMERS?

An exploratory study on young Vietnamese consumers

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Objectives

This thesis aims to explore whether there are gender differences in the online consumer decision-making process. Furthermore, this study also expects to discover some of the most important factors impacting on purchase decisions of customers during analyses.

Summary

This thesis adopted a quantitative method to analyze findings. In particular, this paper applied the independent samples T-test in an attempt to discover whether men and women differ in each stage of the online buying model. In addition, this study also employed the linear regression analysis with intent to examine the influence of several factors, which are consumer review, shipping fee as well as brand reputation and policy, on purchase decisions of consumers.

Conclusions

The findings exhibited that there was no gender disparity in young Vietnamese consumer behaviors regarding online shopping. On a different note, the results of the content analysis revealed that reviews of prior customers, delivery charge as well as brand name and policy had a significant impact on online buying decisions of Vietnamese millennials.

Key words: gender, consumer review, consumer behavior, purchase decision, young customers, Vietnamese.

Language: English

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Since the internet was invented, it has changed and facilitated the lives of human beings for years. Indeed, the internet not only serves as the bridge leading to an endless source of information, but it also enhances the means of communication as well as interaction between people. Realizing these advantages of the cyberspace, many firms have utilized the internet to increase their brand awareness, bond relationships with customers, and seek potential opportunities to grow their business. In fact, the internet opens an era of e-commerce, which generates numerous benefits for companies such as inexpensive operational costs, the ability to run the business at all times as well as against geographical barriers (Niranjanamurthy et al., 2013). As a result of e-commerce, online shopping appears and gradually becomes a popular trend of buying goods. Since more and more people prefer purchasing merchandise via the internet, it is necessary for organizations to understand behaviors of their customers towards the virtual channel. Furthermore, enterprises should discover causes leading to those behaviors such as demographic factors, economic factors, situational factors, and social factors (Latuszynska et al., 2012). Therefore, studies scrutinizing factors which could have an impact on consumer conducts are beneficial to those firms. With respect to this issue, this thesis will examine a demographic factor which is gender regarding whether there are gender differences in online buying decisions of consumers. Additionally, this paper will solely focus on young Vietnamese customers due to the shortage of resources.

1.2. Research Problem

In a broad picture, the majority of enterprises concentrate on developing the marketing mix which consists of price, product, place, and promotion when they aim to expand their business. Some of them argue that a combination of products being priced corresponding to their quality, effective distribution channels, and good supporting programs is a key to success. However, this formula for sustainable growth still lacks several essential components such as demographic factors, economic factors, and social factors. In respect of demographic factors, many firms often do not regard gender as a factor that can have an impact on their business.

More specifically, they think that there is almost no gender difference in consumer behaviors. Thus, this thesis will conduct an empirical analysis with the purpose of examining whether this statement is applicable to the Vietnamese market since there is a shortage of research studying this issue concerning Vietnamese customers.

1.3. Research Questions and Objectives

With the purpose of addressing the aforementioned issue, the main focus of this thesis will surround the following research question:

Are there any gender differences in buying decisions made by online customers?
If there are gender differences, what are these differences?

This question aims to explore whether gender dissimilarity exists in the internet buying decisions of Vietnamese customers aged from 15 to 29. In order to offer a comprehensive answer, this paper proposes two following sub-questions:

a) What are the main issues that impact online purchase decisions?

The objective of this question is to explore major factors that have influences on online buying decisions.

b) Are there any differences in the online shopping process in regard to gender?
If there are gender differences, what are these differences?

This question aims to explore and understand whether and how dissimilar gender is in each stage of the internet buying process since the buying decisions are often significantly affected by prior different actions and thoughts of customers.

Such aforementioned objectives can be accomplished through a thorough literature review as well as an analysis of the results of a survey measuring consumer behaviors.

1.4. Thesis Structure

This thesis comprises six distinct sections. First, background knowledge is provided, which is followed by the research problem and objective identification. Then, a comprehensive literature review is given, which attempts to present the viewpoints of prior researchers on the topic of interest as well as a logical conceptual framework connecting concepts which are discussed throughout the narrative review. Next, the methodology section will describe the process of conducting a survey and garnering information. This amount of data will be then analyzed and discussed in the following sections to identify its contribution to the clarification of the research problem. Finally, the conclusion will highlight principal findings, expose current limitations of this paper as well as propose recommendations for future research that studies similar issues.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review firstly presents the consumer decision-making process, then provides descriptions of online shopping as well as its advantages and disadvantages. This narrative review also discusses numerous factors influencing purchase decisions of customers and several issues surrounding gender. Specifically, a detailed examination will concentrate on various definitions of gender as well as reporting gender dissimilarities in buying behaviors and internet usage in previous research. Finally, this paper will offer a conceptual framework illustrating relationships of the constructs which are discussed during the review of prior studies.

2.1. Consumer decision-making process

In 1910, the five-phase buying process was initially instituted by John Dewey – a famous American philosopher, psychologist, social and educational reformer (www.famousphilosophers.org). Bruner II and Pomazal (1988) claim that it is still a commonly recognized model and fundamental framework for studying consumer behaviors. Five steps which constitute the decision process shown in Figure 1 are: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. For the purpose of focusing on buying decisions made by customers, this thesis will examine all stages of the process except the last one, post-purchase behavior.

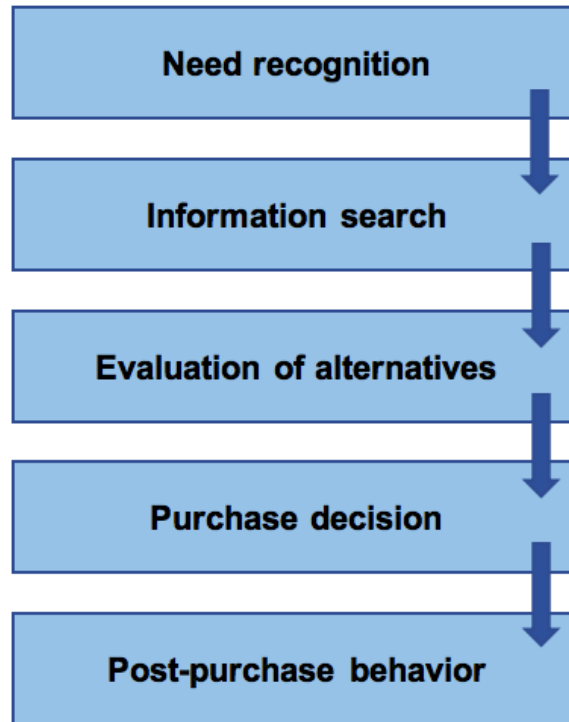


Figure 1: Consumer decision-making process

In the beginning phase of the process, customers identify their needs. Both Comegys et al. (2006) and Adofo (2014) indicate that individuals recognize a gap between their ideal and actual state during this stage. If they fail to do that, they will not consider fulfilling their desire by purchasing goods or services (Iram & Chacharkar, 2017). Normally, a need can be rendered by either internal or external forces (Comegys et al., 2006). For example, a need of food occurs when a person is hungry or thirsty (internal stimuli); in another way, the same need can be triggered when an individual goes through a fast-food restaurant (external stimuli). To generalize the latter concept, Khair (2013) states that advertisements on social media, friends, family members are external factors which may stimulate one's desires. Besides aforementioned stimuli, Comegys et al. (2006) also reveal other causes that can affect the need recognition of an individual such as demographic and psychological factors, which will be discussed later in this literature review.

After discerning requirements, an individual may want to search for information about the product that he is about to buy. Greig (2003) asserts that information can be gathered either internally or externally. Having the same point, Bettman (1979) claims that customers usually recall past memories of the product at first, then search

for it via external sources if they do not have adequate knowledge about that product to make a purchase decision. In his study, Greig (2003) also enumerates several popular channels of external search such as word of mouth, advertisements, in-shop or online search. By analyzing data garnered from Master's students studying at universities in the US, he finds out that respondents spend very little time on seeking information, including online search. Likewise, participants also report that online discussion is their last choice of information source. However, this result is contrary to that of a prior study conducted by Murray (1991), which suggests that word of mouth is favored as "other sources" of data. In addition to the external search, Greig (2003) further partitions it into four subtypes according to characteristics of the information seeking: active search, passive search, ongoing search, and successive search. Literally, the active search indicates that one actively gathers information about goods; the passive search refers to information unintentionally acquired through, for example, radio or television programs; the ongoing search is an activity of increasingly broadening knowledge about a product, even an excessive amount for making a buying decision; finally, the successive search suggests a continuous process of collecting information about a particular issue (Greig, 2003). In fact, consumers do not need to experience all these kinds of search. Instead, they regularly apply methods with which they are familiar or provide multiple credible sources of information about products.

In the next stage, customers evaluate all available alternatives, then choose the optimal option. To simplify this process, they usually reduce the alternatives to a consideration set. Hauser and Wernerfeit (1990) define this evoked set as a selection of possibilities on which customers intensely ponder before purchasing. In other words, it is a compact version of choices which are the most beneficial or closest to requirements of customers. On a different note, while Gupta and Chowdhry (2017) enumerate specific criteria usually examined when assessing alternatives such as quality, price, and reputations of brands, Wright (1972) and Srinivasan (1987) introduce some practical rules that can be applied during the evaluation. The first is the compensatory rule which enables an individual to recognize the alternative having the most beneficial trade-off characteristic (Wright, 1972; Srinivasan, 1987). Other people may prefer the lexicographic rule which lets them select the possibility matching their most important personal criterion (ibid). Alternatively, they can

eliminate one possibility that does not have sufficient features after another, then take the remaining option, which is called the conjunctive rule (ibid). Hence, it is obvious that consumers have copious helpful methods to use in order to select the ultimate choice.

Following the assessment of alternatives, customers will make a decision as to whether they should buy a specific product. During this stage, some sub-decisions such as brand and seller preferences, means of payment, and the volume of product to buy may emerge and affect the final decision of the customers (McGaughey & Mason, 1998). From this point, it can be inferred that customers not only consider the product or the brand itself, but they also compare the credibility and payment facilitation among suppliers. In their study, Comegys et al. (2006) also revealed two factors that may prevent an individual from performing a real purchase. First, attitudes of others have a considerably strong influence on one's buying intention; for instance, it is unlikely that person will buy a product on which previous consumers give negative feedback (ibid). Second, an unforeseen circumstance may change decisions of an individual, which can be a sudden price increase or urgent major medical expenditure (ibid). Gupta and Chowdhry (2017) also supplement the list with the third factor which is perceived risk. The last influence can be described as the appearance of a novel superior product, uncertainty, or one's morale (ibid). Thus, it is noticeable that an individual does not need to make a real purchase in this stage as the buying decision of that person might be affected by unexpected events.

2.2. Online shopping

2.2.1. Definition of online shopping

Since 1994, online shopping also known as internet shopping or e-shopping has become a new method of buying for customers (Khabiti et al., 2006). Motwani et al. (2013) describe online shopping as a medium which allows consumers to purchase goods or services immediately from a supplier through the Internet, without any third party support. Likewise, according to Wu (2013), this process refers to "an exchange of time, effort and money for the receipt of products or services in a virtual store" (p. 167). In other words, customers do not have to visit a physical store to get what they want; instead, they might be comfortably at home and purchase products via the online channel (Jusoh & Ling, 2012).

One popular form of online shopping is mobile shopping. Wong et al. (2012) define mobile buying as “any monetary transactions related to purchases of goods or services through internet enabled mobile phones or over the wireless telecommunication network” (p. 25). This description suggests that mobile shopping only refers to purchases made by portable devices such as cell phones or laptop; desktop computers do not belong to this description. Thus, this research would use the term “online buying” to refer to purchasing activities via the internet due to the comprehensiveness of that expression. In addition, this thesis also uses “online shopping”, “internet shopping”, and “e-shopping” interchangeably as many prior studies do.

2.2.2. Benefits and drawbacks of online shopping

Due to its own characteristics, e-shopping offers plenty of benefits to customers. Babin et al. (1994) classify those merits into two small-scale categories: utilitarian and hedonic benefits. The former, also known as functional benefit, refers to tangible advantages which are convenience, cost-saving, and variety of goods. Indeed, the internet allows online buyers to access virtual stores for any occasion and in different places (Liu et al., 2013) as long as the internet is available there. Additionally, Jusoh and Ling (2012) also argue for time and fuel saving attributes of e-shopping. As stated in their study, online shopping not only enables customers to avoid using any means of transport to visit a brick-and-mortar store to purchase goods or services, but it also facilitates the sort-out and billing process. Another environmentally friendly aspect of internet shopping can be inferred from this point is that it helps reduce paper and printer ink usage, which enormously contributes to sustainable development. Regarding the availability of goods, online buying also gives consumers an abundant selection of merchandise and allows them to compare price, quality, and supplier with ease (Dittmar et al., 2004; Jusoh & Ling, 2012; Akroush & Al-Debei, 2015).

On a different note, hedonic benefit is described in terms of the entertaining and pleasure attributes of the buying process (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Put differently, customers may want to be involved in shopping purely for imaginative enjoyment or relaxation rather than for desire or need fulfilment (Babin et al., 1994). Indeed, participants in the research reported being fond of shopping because it helps

them neglect their current troubles as well as envisage a bright future in which they have sufficient financial sources to afford their present desirable merchandise (ibid). Similarly, Olivier and Terblanche (2018) also found that online buyers who use mobile devices to purchase goods and services considered this shopping mode as an entertaining activity. However, a prior study by Sarkar (2011) revealed the opposite findings. In this study, the majority of respondents chose to shop online because of convenience and tended to use another shopping mode when they preferred more enjoyment. This result indicates that customers engage in e-shopping due to its functional merits, rather than for intrinsic hedonic values.

Internet buying also has its weaknesses. One main drawback is that it can prompt customers to make the wrong assessment due to the lack of physical contact. Buyers cannot try on clothes to know whether that outfit beautifies them, taste and smell some goods to recognize if that flavor or aroma is their type, or touch materials of products to perceive whether those materials are suitable for them (Dai et al., 2014; Hanus, 2016; Devderea & Toader, 2018). The evaluation can be even worse when the image of the product is of poor quality or does not reflect the actual product (Hanus, 2016). Therefore, this issue raises another concern which is the delivery and return system. Some customers will hesitate to buy a product because of long delivery times, unreasonable shipping costs, or a complicated return and refund policy (Dai et al., 2014; Bobalca, 2015; Devderea & Toader, 2018). Bobalca (2015) also mentions the absence of personal communication as a pitfall. Some customers prefer to discuss the product directly with the seller as well as receive quick assistance from the supporting team. Above all, shoppers emphasize the importance of the security of transactions and privacy when purchasing online. They may be reluctant to pay via the internet due to the fear of financial loss or individual data leak (Ramus & Nielsen, 2005; Kwon & Noh, 2010). Since online shopping still has many limitations, consumers would prefer visiting physical stores to virtual ones given that they are not circumscribed whether by time or distance.

2.3. Factors affecting buying decisions of consumers

Before performing a real purchase, customers usually spend a certain amount of time on recognizing their needs, searching for information, and assessing all possibilities. During this process, customers are more or less affected by several stimuli. Among

those influences, Bakshi (2012) enumerates four main factors that can have an impact on buying decisions of consumers: cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors.

Indeed, as culture includes customs and beliefs, it helps buyers form a basic standard to select products which are appropriate to their societies. For instance, while fish is perceived as a specialty of Bengal, this type of food is deemed undesirable in Rajasthan (Ramya, N. & Ali, S. M., 2016). Similarly, brides and grooms typically dress in white ball gowns and tuxedos in their wedding parties in some societies, which illustrates that culture also sets a norm navigating people to dress in specific ways on several occasions (Akpan, 2016).

In respect of social forces, family, social status and reference groups such as friends may have an influence on their purchase decisions (Mohanty, 2008). In fact, the majority of shoppers regularly ask their friends or parents for valuable advice on a desirable product. To a certain extent, the buying behaviors of such customers may already be affected by the opinions and lifestyles of people who are close to them for a long time. On the same note, many people also believe that goods can help them show their social class and even earn the respect or admiration of others. This point implies that numerous customers buy a product not only for its utility but also for self-expression benefits.

On a different note, consumer behaviors can be further impacted by numerous personal factors. In his study, Khaniwale (2015) highlights that age is a crucial personal factor which influences the purchase decisions of shoppers over time. To support this argument, Rehman et al. (2017) indicate that seniors tend to abstain from sweet and fat foods in order to reduce risks of health issues. Occupation and income are also claimed to be personal factors that can affect buying decisions in a research study by Rani (2014). She claims that the higher position an individual obtains, the more earnings that person generates; as a result, that individual will purchase higher-quality and expensive products (ibid).

With regard to psychological forces, Callwood (2013) classifies this type of stimuli into four categories: perceptions, motivations, learning, as well as attitudes and beliefs. Regarding the first element, Durmaz (2014) defines perception as the way customers interpret the environment surrounding them by using their senses.

Therefore, purchase decisions might be impacted by the perspectives of consumers on the product itself, the brand, or even the whole industry. For example, if a shopper perceives the price of a product is unreasonably high, such a customer will not put that item into his or her shopping cart. In his research, Durmaz (2014) also addresses the established Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) to illustrate the motivations of consumers. That model suggests the motives of customers to buy goods can range from basic needs such as food or health to higher desires such as self-esteem or accomplishments.

In respect of learning, Rani (2014) describes this term as changes in behaviors of a person through his or her involvement and interaction. Concerning purchase decisions, such associations can be the previous experience with products or current contact with those items during the buying process. Thus, if consumers are content with the merchandise or find the experience pleasing, they are likely to buy the goods and even repeat purchase in their later visits. With respect to the last element of psychological factors, Ajzen (1991) interprets attitudes as positive or negative assessments of an individual towards something. Thus, it can be logically inferred that stronger product images enhance the likelihood of consumer purchase decisions. On another note, Kotler and Keller (2014) consider beliefs as illustrative viewpoints of a person towards an object. Furthermore, according to Durmaz (2014), beliefs are built from understanding, trust, and even word of mouth which can affect the purchasing behaviors of consumers. Indeed, Ahmad et al. (2014) discovered the effect of hearsay on shoppers through questionnaires whose the outcomes reveal that most of the respondents would not try any product if they heard bad comments about it (ibid). The majority of participants also reported believing the word of mouth in daily shopping but not relying on it if they have to purchase costly merchandise (ibid). Hence, it can be understood that consumers generally trust the hearsay to some extent. Additionally, they are more careful in case of buying expensive items as well as have a tendency to search authoritative information and recommendations before the real purchase.

2.4. Gender issues

2.4.1. Redefining gender through identity

Many researchers view gender from different perspectives. On the one hand, several researchers perceive gender as sexual orientation or classification of male and female with respect to physical features (Saad & Gill, 2000; Hyde, 2007). In an aesthetic and literary way, and much earlier, Fowler (1875) made a comparison with natural elements: “gender is to marriage and offspring what seed and soil are to crops” (p. 50). However, many researchers state that gender should be described in terms of social meanings rather than natural identity which is ascribed to sex. Rider (2005) defines sex as “biological or physiological structures that are male or female, such as genitals or gonads” (p. 21). Specifically, Lorber and Moore (2007) categorize sexes regarding chromosomes as XX (female) and XY (male) or concerning hormones as estrogen (female) and testosterone (male). Crawford (2006) highlights the significance of differentiating between gender and sex in acknowledging that “biology is not destiny” (p. 26) as well as the gaps between men and women which perhaps result from societal impositions rather than nature or fate. He claimed that distinguishing gender from sex allowed scientists to separately concentrate on the social facets of gender rather than the biological perspectives of sex (ibid).

In an attempt to separate gender from sex, identity is one crucial dimension of gender which is needed to be discussed. In the article entitled “Toward a redefinition of sex and gender”, gender identity is described in terms of qualities which are enriched and internalized throughout a person’s life as a reaction to the basis of the biological sex (Unger, 1979). A later study by Fischer and Arnold (1990) elaborates on this definition by referring to the degree of self-identification as masculinity or femininity. In other words, feminine attributes dominate masculine ones in some men, and conversely, women can have more masculine qualities than feminine ones (Kolyesnikova et al., 2009). In fact, many researchers have enumerated some traits ascribed to masculinity such as autonomy, confidence, aggressiveness, reasoning, and individualism; on the other hand, qualities of femininity relate to rearing, reliability, tenderness, tactfulness, instinct, sympathy, and collectivism (see for example Keller, 1982; Easlea, 1986; Weinreich-Haste, 1986; Meyers-Levy, 1988; Cross & Markus, 1993). As gender identity is formed by individual perception, it can

be changed over time due to education or interaction with social environmental factors. However, it is still influenced by biological sex and parenting as foundations to orient an individual's identity. In respect of its role, Bem (1981) states that gender identity plays a fundamental part in managing personal information as well as perceiving events occurring in daily life. Furthermore, it can be used to construe the actions of individuals (Markus et al., 1982) and even to predict their attitudes and behaviors in particular circumstances (Fischer & Arnold, 1994).

With respect to the definition of gender identity, many authors give descriptions of gender in regard to femininity and masculinity with the emphasis on self-assessment. As defined by Rider (2005), gender refers to the development of feminine and masculine psychological characteristics during the process of socialization. Correspondingly, Smith (2007) expresses gender as "aspects of self that are an individual's masculinity and femininity, or in other words, his or her nonphysiological self" (p. 5). Numerous theorists who develop principles about gender also liken gender to an "accomplishment", the self-expression that people endeavor to make and expose in society (Butler, 2004). On the other hand, a large number of researchers interpret gender considering its facet of society. In her paper, Lips (2008) describes gender as a set of social beliefs regarding feminine and masculine duties. Similarly, Rothenberg (2004) construes gender as "socially constructed meanings that are associated with each sex" (p. 6). Additionally, Denmark et al. (2005) ascribe gender to conduct, interests, qualities established by societies and given to female and male. Gender also reflects cultural roles, interpretations as well as social impacts on each sex to a certain extent (Lerner, 1986; Goldberg, 2010). From those aforementioned descriptions, it is evident that definitions of gender vary from biological viewpoints to societal perspectives.

On a different note, several researchers use sex and gender interchangeably. Indeed, Glasser and Smith (2008) report that these terms are used exchangeably in one third studies reviewed by the two authors. Correspondingly, after scrutinizing numerous articles, Muehlenhard and Peterson (2011) further reach a conclusion that the difference between sex and gender has gradually become much less significant in studying behaviors or other facets of humans. From this judgement, it is reasonable to infer that papers pertaining to biological sex can have similar meanings and applications as those examining psychological gender. Thus, this thesis will not

consider the distinction between biological and psychological gender since the differentiation between gender and sex is not necessarily required for studies to produce meaningful applications or directions for specific industries and future research.

2.4.2. Gender differences in shopping behaviors

Multiple studies note that buying behaviors can vary according to gender. While women perceive shopping as a relaxing activity, men consider it as the needs fulfillment (Mitchell & Walsh, 2004; Kuruvilla et al., 2009). Put another way, an article entitled “Men Buy, Women Shop” (2007) shows that feminine individuals usually spend a large amount of time on shopping, whereas masculine counterparts will leave a store immediately after finding necessary merchandise. From this point, it can be understood that women are willing to invest copious hours in searching for information about products before reaching a final decision; by contrast, men often put little effort into comparing products regarding their prices and functions. Lakshmi et al. (2017) further indicate that women prefer discussion with sellers during shopping experience; alternatively, men value succinct information about products as well as find conversations between consumers and suppliers unnecessary.

Regarding advertisements, Lakshmi et al. (2017) also claim that commercials containing harmonious melodies mostly work on feminine individuals, whereas masculine ones are more interested in amusing pictures or stories. In terms of types of merchandise, men usually purchase electronic devices and leisure products, while women are inclined to buy more fashion products (McMahan, 2005). This gender difference is also true when men and women go online to purchase goods. Besides those aforementioned kinds of merchandise, Sebastianelli et al. (2008) further state that female customers regularly buy health products and cosmetics, while male shoppers usually pay for computer programs via the internet. However, since an increasing number of millennials are concerned about well-being and appearance, recent years witness many men purchase fitness goods as well as skin care merchandise.

Other authors also study gender dissimilarity in online buying behaviors from various angles. Based on the result of his research, Hill (2002) concludes that men would tend to shop and pay more for goods than women do through the online channel. He further indicates that men use more time to search for information prior to buying decisions (ibid), which contradicts their behaviors when they purchase goods at store. Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that men are more careful and feel more comfortable as internet shoppers. With respect to online reviews, the results of an experiment conducted by Bae and Lee (2011) reveal that the purchase intention of female customers is greater than that of males after reading positive opinions of former users. Likewise, feminine individuals are found to be more susceptible to negative comments surrounding the product, whereas those assessments are less likely to affect the buying intention of masculine counterparts (ibid). This suggests that men usually make purchase decisions themselves, while women tend to contemplate the viewpoints of others prior to real purchases.

2.4.3. Gender gap in internet usage

The gender difference in internet usage has occurred since the advent of cyberspace. Nie and Erbring (2000) highlight the main activity when women go online is using email for contact purpose, which is later verified by a study by Joiner et al. (2012). In the result of their survey, feminine individuals show a propensity to use the internet for sending messages commonly through email or making phone calls via the online network; conversely, masculine individuals have a disposition to play games, download programs, and listen to music when they access the internet (ibid). Hence, it can be rationally inferred that women consider the internet to be more of a means to communicate with others, whereas men perceive that medium as a way of amusing themselves or relieving stress.

Concerning general cyber knowledge, women show less confidence than their counterparts in the digital domain (Helsper & Eynon, 2013; Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2015). In many articles, this self-underrating is reported having a negative impact on online activities of feminine individuals such as data search, information sharing as well as their involvement in virtual communities (Wasserman and Richmond-Abbott, 2005; Hargittai and Walejko, 2008; Hargittai, 2010; Helsper and Eynon, 2013; Hargittai and Shaw, 2015). Regarding academic performance in the technological

field, women also exhibit a lower level of competence than men do. Specifically, the number of men graduates majoring in science and technology are twice that of their counterparts in 2012 (Eurostat, 2014).

However, the disparity in internet usage with respect to gender tends to narrow according to the findings of Lebo (2004) from 14 countries. In particular, the study revealed only an 8 per cent gap between feminine and masculine individuals in terms of internet access (ibid). A recent report from EIGE (2016) also shows that men usually use the internet more than women, which constitutes 74% compared to 65% of women. From this point, it is evident to notice that the gender gap in internet surfing has remained approximately 10% since 2004. In the long run, this gap has an inclination to disappear as contemporary women are well-educated, in charge of computer-related positions, and involved in many advanced technological tasks.

2.5. Conceptual framework

The following conceptual framework provides a broader view of the relationship between factors and stages of the consumer decision-making process with respect to the online environment. It is evident that gender is separated from the forces affecting the process, which exhibits that it is the main focus of this thesis. It further should be noted that the paper will examine the effect of gender on all the phases of the online buying experience except the final stage which is “post-purchase behaviors”. This study also expects to identify other factors which can have an impact on online purchase decisions of customers beyond those aforementioned forces in the literature review.

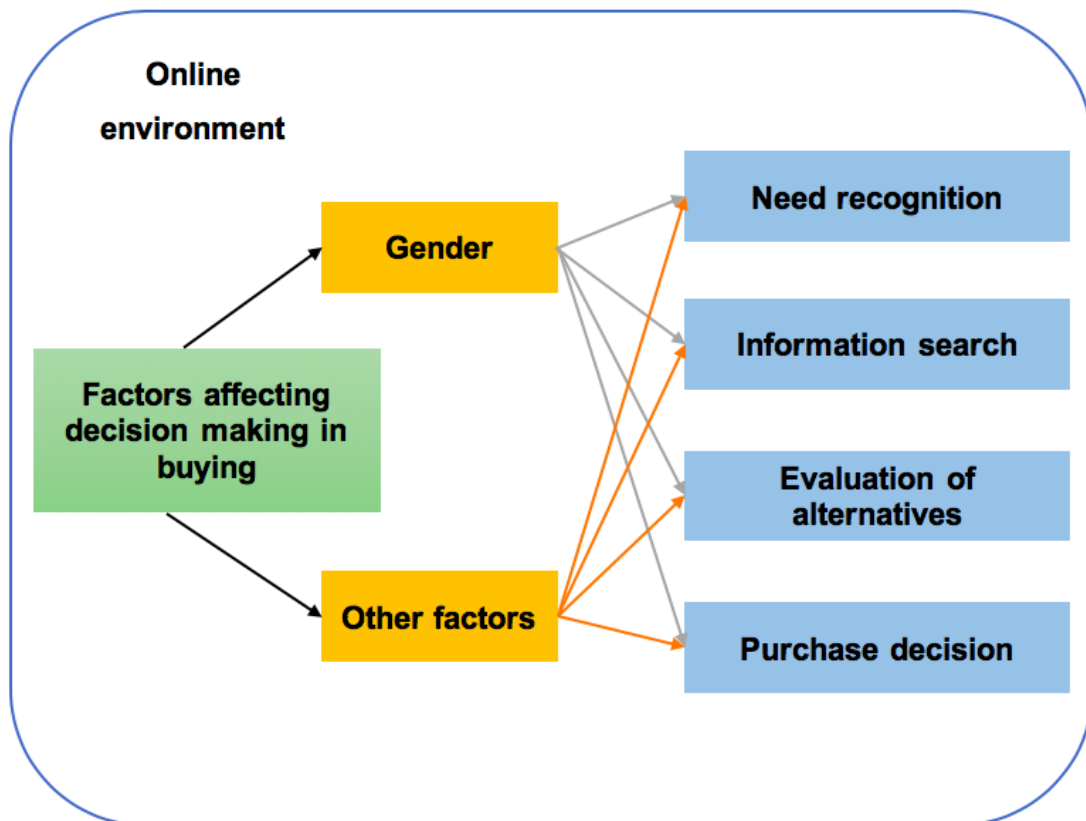


Figure 2: Conceptual framework

III. METHODOLOGY

This chapter will provide an adequate explanation of the survey conduction. In particular, it will give a general description of the research instrument, research design as well as helpful statistical methods used for the data analysis.

3.1. Research instrument and design

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was created and implemented through Webropol – an online survey tool which helps facilitate the surveying process. Particularly, it was activated in 63 hours and distributed to Vietnamese citizens who aged from 15 to 29 via personal messages on social networks, which was identified as a convenience sampling. The completion time was estimated approximately from three to five minutes, which is quite short in order to discourage participants from giving answers carelessly.

The survey consists of three demographic questions and eight questions related to consumer behaviors. Of those eight questions, there are seven questions using the Likert scale which allows respondents to assess the degree of their attitudes towards asked issues. Such seven questions are composed of sub-questions, which attempts to evaluate the opinions of participants more exactly from different angles. More specifically, participants were asked to rate the extent of several statements to best illustrate their conducts in certain circumstances such as the shopping criteria or the frequency of using search tools and relying on people who help facilitate the decision-making process. The other question among those eight ones requires respondents to select the devices that they regularly use for internet buying.

It is also worth noting that there are only two options which are “male” and “female” in the question asking participants to identify their gender. This might arouse controversy due to the lack of the “other” option which helps avoid offending those who belong to the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender) community. Specifically, the “other” option is concerned when there are inconsistencies between biological gender (male, female) and psychological gender (masculinity, femininity). However, as the distinction between these two perceptions of gender is not

particularly recognized in this thesis, the “other” option is omitted. Therefore, there are only two choices of gender for participants to select (male, female).

3.2. Methods of data analysis

3.2.1. The Likert scale

To make the results more concrete and straightforward, this study applies the five-point Likert scale to the majority of questions of the survey. There are many templates of this measuring scale used in the questionnaire as listed below:

- the frequency of activities (never – rarely – sometimes – often – always)
- levels of importance (not at all – slightly – somewhat – moderately – extremely important/concerned)
- the extent of tendency (not at all – a little – rather – much – very strong)

As data gathered from questions under the Likert scale will be converted into a 1-5 point scale according to the level of favorability, that data is interpreted as ordinal variables during the analysis.

3.2.2. Independent samples T-tests

With the intent to inspect whether there are gender disparities in each stage of the consumer decision-making process (except the post-purchase stage), the application of independent samples T-test to the data analysis is rational and appropriate. In order to interpret the results of the T-tests properly, a requisite step is establishing meaningful hypotheses as follows.

- H0a: there is no significant gender difference in the need recognition stage.
- H1a: there is a significant gender difference in the need recognition stage.

- H0b: there is no significant gender difference in the information search stage.
- H1b: there is a significant gender difference in the information search stage.

- H0c: there is no significant gender difference in the evaluation of alternatives stage.
- H1c: there is a significant gender difference in the evaluation of alternatives stage.

- H0d: there is no significant gender difference in the purchase decision stage.
- H1d: there is a significant gender difference in the purchase decision stage.

3.2.3. Linear regression analysis

As this study aims to explore a variety of factors not only gender which can affect purchase decisions made by young Vietnamese consumers, the application of the linear regression analysis to suspect factors is reasonable. Through this technique, we can conclude whether those factors predict the buying decisions as well as what percentage of the decisions can be explained by those factors. In other words, we can assess whether such forces have an impact on the shopping decisions. In this thesis, three factors which will be examined are reviews of prior customers, the shipping fee as well as the brand reputation and policy.

Since the purpose of the linear regression analysis is to anticipate the value of a dependent variable based on the value of an independent one, three factors which are reviews of former users, the delivery cost as well as the brand reputation and policy will be treated as independent variables. On the other hand, the purchase decision will be considered as a dependent variable.

In order to construe the results of linear regression analyses correctly, an essential step is building meaningful hypotheses as follows.

- H1e: reviews of prior consumers predict the purchase decision.

- H1f: shipping fee predicts the purchase decision.

- H1g: brand reputation and policy predict the purchase decision.

3.2.4. Subscales

Subscales creation is required to test the aforementioned hypotheses as well as for the purpose of the linear regression analysis. As every couple of hypotheses refers to each stage of the buying model, four subscales are constructed to measure the extent of gender dissimilarities in corresponding phases of the process. On the other hand, other three subscales are devised to measure their influence on the buying decisions made by consumers.

- “Need recognition” (coded as Need_recognition): this construct measures the activeness in approach online channels of respondents when they acknowledge their desires.
- “Information search” (coded as Information_search): this construct measures the engagement in seeking information of the participants before making purchases.
- “Evaluation of alternatives” (coded as Evaluation_of_alternatives): this construct measures the involvement of participants in assessing and comparing criteria which are related to the product itself as well as the brand and the supplier of that product.
- “Purchase decision” (coded as Purchase_decision): this construct measures the circumspection about external factors of the respondents.
- “Reviews of prior consumers” (coded as Reviews_of_prior_consumers): this construct measures the importance of opinions of former users to the respondents.
- “Shipping fee” (coded as Shipping fee): this construct measures the significance of the shipping fee to the partakers.

- “Brand reputation and policy” (coded as Brand_and_policy): this construct measures the power of brand reputation and policy to the concern of the partakers.

To calculate the numeric value of the aforementioned constructs, all of their components are added together and then divided by the number of the components. It is also worth noting that the constituents are responses of participants which are converted into the scale from one to five points. Thus, all of the options of these constituents which are asked to rate according to the Likert scale will be correspondingly presented below according to their constructs or subconstructs.

- **“Need recognition”:**

I'm attracted by online advertisements (question 2)

When I'm hungry or thirsty, I order food and drinks online (question 2)

I buy a product online because of its attractive advertisement (question 2)

I buy a product online because of its good word of mouth (question 2)

I buy a product online because of family members' recommendations (question 2)

I buy a product based only on my impulses and emotions (question 2)

- **“Information search”:**

I spend time searching for information before making buying decisions (question 2)

Search for prior consumers' reviews (question 3)

Search for information about the product on the internet (question 3)

Recall the website and buy that product from that website (question 4)

- **“Evaluation of alternatives”:**

Price (question 5)

Quality (question 5)

Terms of warranty (question 5)

Reviews of prior consumers (question 5)

Reputation of the brand (question 5)

Eco-friendliness (question 5)

Means of payment (question 5)

User-friendly website (question 5)

Free shipping (question 5)

Reliability of the supplier (question 5)

Time of delivery (question 5)

- **“Purchase decision”:**

I'm likely to buy a product from its official website (question 6)

I'm likely to buy a product from a third-party website to get a lower price (question 6)

I'm likely to buy a certain number of goods to get free shipping (question 6)

Price too high for such quality (question 7)

Delivery (question 7)

Quality (question 7)

Terms of warranty or return policy (question 7)

Negative actions associated with the brand (question 7)

Customer service (question 7)

Packaging (question 7)

You're likely to buy it, even if your friends and family members disagree with you (question 8)

You're likely to buy it, even if a staff member unfriendly gives you advice (question 8)

- **“Reviews of prior consumers”:**

Reviews of prior consumers (question 5)

Price too high for such quality (question 7)

Delivery (question 7)

Quality (question 7)

Terms of warranty or return policy (question 7)

Negative actions associated with the brand (question 7)

Customer service (question 7)

Packaging (question 7)

- **“Shipping fee”:**

Free shipping (question 5)

I'm likely to buy a certain number of goods to get free shipping (question 6)

- **“Brand and policy”:**

- Terms of warranty (question 5)
- Reputation of the brand (question 5)
- Eco-friendliness (question 5)
- Means of payment (question 5)
- User-friendly website (question 5)
- Free shipping (question 5)
- Reliability of the supplier (question 5)
- Time of delivery (question 5)

3.2.5. Reliability tests

The purpose of reliability tests is to assess the compatibility and meaningfulness of variables of a construct. A construct producing a Cronbach's alpha above 0.58 satisfies the fundamental consistency of internal variables, which indicates the acceptability of that construct to later analyses (Taber, 2018). Therefore, conducting reliability tests of all the constructs is imperative in order to improve the accuracy of this study. The results of all the reliability tests are presented as follows. In short, the reliability tests of all the concepts are above 0.58, which means that those concepts are eligible for later examinations.

➔ Reliability

Scale: Need–recognition

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	118	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	118	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.636	6

Reliability

Scale: Information–search

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	118	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	118	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.584	4

Reliability**Scale: Evaluation-of-alternatives****Case Processing Summary**

		N	%
Cases	Valid	118	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	118	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.693	11

Reliability**Scale: Purchase-decision****Case Processing Summary**

		N	%
Cases	Valid	118	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	118	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.631	12

➔ Reliability**Scale: Reviews of prior consumers****Case Processing Summary**

		N	%
Cases	Valid	118	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	118	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.717	8

Reliability**Scale: Shipping fee****Case Processing Summary**

		N	%
Cases	Valid	118	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	118	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.645	2

→ Reliability

Scale: Brand and policy

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	118	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	118	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.670	8

IV. FINDINGS

4.1. Sample characteristics

Due to the objective of this study, which is to explore whether gender dissimilarities exist during the decision-making process of young Vietnamese consumers, all the participants in the survey are Vietnamese citizens aged from 15 to 29. In fact, a total of 119 respondents anonymously and voluntarily completed the questionnaire, of those, were 60 male identities compared with 59 female ones. Regarding this sample, there was one male participant giving his response to the question about occupation as “...” which was invalid. Due to this phenomenon, all of the answers of that partaker were carefully and separately scrutinized. Specifically, 99% of the responses of this person were the first options of alternatives for each question. This phenomenon is identified as the primacy effect which is an order bias usually occurring in multiple-choice questions (Cooper & Schindler, 2013), obviously indicating that the bias of that participant in giving responses will negatively affect the data analysis. Therefore, all files of that partaker will be removed during the scrutiny in an attempt to guarantee the reliability of this research.

After the filtering process, this study will take 118 valid responses from 59 male participants (50%) and 59 female ones (50%). This gender balance in the survey participation ensures that the results of the examination of gender disparities in consumer behaviors will be impartial and objective. In more detail, most of the respondents aged 22 (20.34%) and 23 (37.29%), while the other age groups constitute under 10% of this category. As a result, the average age of the participants is calculated at 22.271. Those participants also have different occupations, of which students are the majority (51.70%) followed by engineers (5.93%) and officers (4.24%).

4.2. Electronic devices frequently used for online shopping

According to the chart below, it is evident that Vietnamese millennials prefer shopping online via mobile phone to the other devices which are laptop, desktop computer, and tablet in descending order.

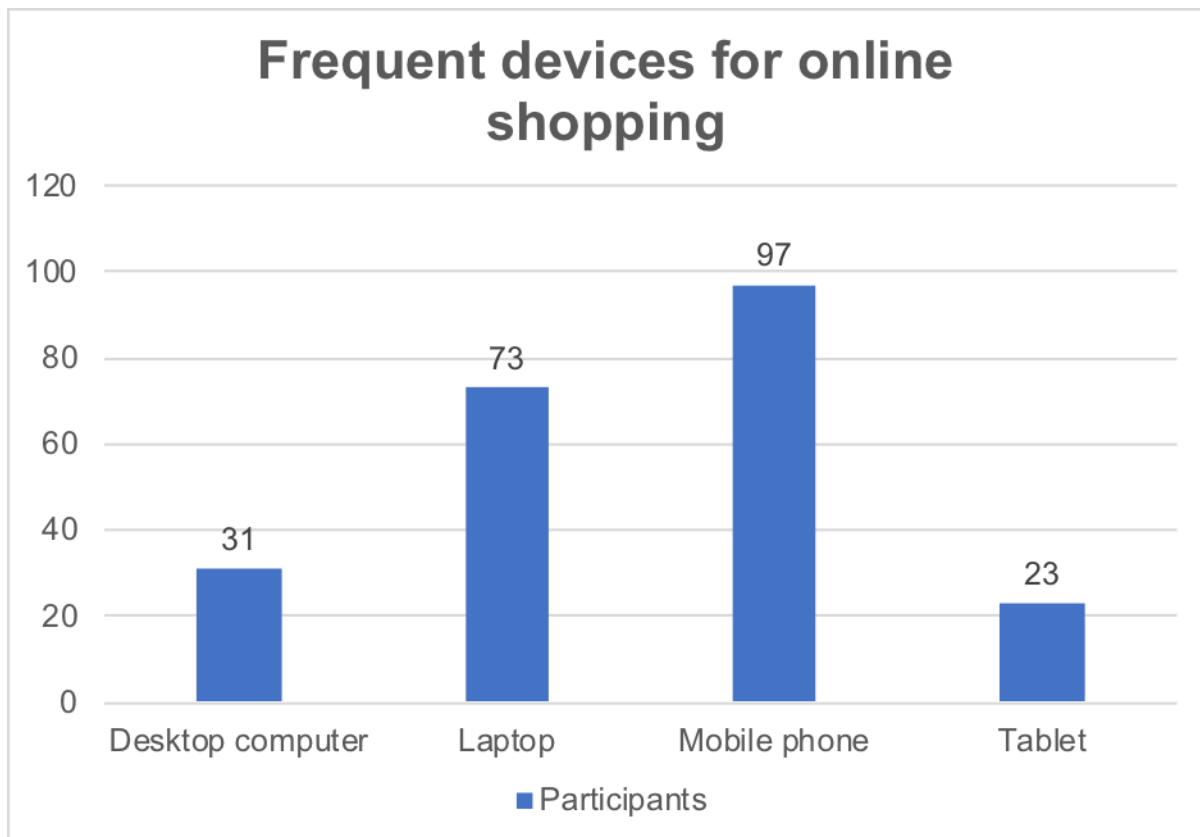


Figure 3: Frequent devices for online shopping

4.3. Testing of hypotheses about gender differences

The independent samples T-tests were administered at the significance level of $\alpha=0.05$. The outcomes of those T-tests on the four constructs are presented below.

→ T-Test

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Need_recognition	Male	59	2.8362	.64512	.08399
	Female	59	2.8588	.48425	.06304
Information_search	Male	59	4.0847	.57350	.07466
	Female	59	4.0466	.59174	.07704
Evaluation_of_alternatives	Male	59	3.6102	.45924	.05979
	Female	59	3.7458	.49672	.06467
Purchase_decision	Male	59	3.4915	.44708	.05820
	Female	59	3.4689	.45060	.05866

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Need_recognition	Equal variances assumed	1.046	.308	-.215	116	.830	-.02260	.10502	-.23060	.18540
	Equal variances not assumed			-.215	107.610	.830	-.02260	.10502	-.23077	.18557
Information_search	Equal variances assumed	.200	.656	.355	116	.723	.03814	.10728	-.17435	.25062
	Equal variances not assumed			.355	115.886	.723	.03814	.10728	-.17435	.25062
Evaluation_of_alternatives	Equal variances assumed	.305	.582	-1.540	116	.126	-.13559	.08807	-.31003	.03884
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.540	115.293	.126	-.13559	.08807	-.31004	.03885
Purchase_decision	Equal variances assumed	.082	.776	.273	116	.785	.02260	.08264	-.14108	.18628
	Equal variances not assumed			.273	115.993	.785	.02260	.08264	-.14108	.18628

According to the figure, the p-values (sig. 2-tailed) of the “need recognition”, “information search”, “evaluation of alternatives” as well as “purchase decision” are 0.830, 0.723, 0.126, and 0.785 respectively. As the figure shows that all of the p-values of the constructs are higher than $\alpha=0.05$, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the means of the male and female groups on “need recognition”, “information search”, “evaluation of alternatives”, and “purchase decision”. Thus, H0a, H0b, H0c, and H0d are not rejected at $\alpha=0.05$.

4.4. Linear regression analysis of suspect factors affecting consumer buying decisions

4.4.1. Reviews of prior consumers

Regression

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Reviews_of_prior_consumers ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase_decision

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.865 ^a	.748	.746	.22549

a. Predictors: (Constant), Reviews_of_prior_consumers

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	17.486	1	17.486	343.900	.000 ^b
	Residual	5.898	116	.051		
	Total	23.384	117			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase_decision

b. Predictors: (Constant), Reviews_of_prior_consumers

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.997	.136		7.357	.000
	Reviews_of_prior_consumers	.676	.036	.865	18.545	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase_decision

Referring to the Coefficients table, the sig. (p-value) < 0.0005 and t(116) = 18.545, which indicates that consumer reviews statistically significantly predict the purchase

decisions of shoppers. Thus, H1e is acceptable. The simple linear regression equation also provides an estimated y value (purchase decision) for the observation of x (reviews of prior consumers) and can be written as $y = 0.997 + 0.676x$. It can be noticeable that $\beta = 0.676 > 0$, which suggests that there is a positive linear relationship between purchase decision and reviews of prior consumers. In other words, the more shoppers care about the experience of former users, the more cautious about their final purchase decision they are.

Additionally, as it is shown in the ANOVA table, an F test for significance of the regression analysis is provided. Reviews of prior consumers explain a significant proportion of variance in purchase decision by presenting the R Square = 0.748, $F(1, 116) = 343.9$, and $p < 0.0005$. In other words, the reviews of prior consumers can significantly predict the buying decisions of customers. Furthermore, the value of R Square indicates that 74.8% of the purchase decisions can be explained by the opinions of former users. Thus, it can be concluded that the reviews of prior consumers have a significant impact on the purchase decisions made by young Vietnamese consumers.

4.4.2. Shipping fee

Regression

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Shipping_fee ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase_decision

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.502 ^a	.252	.246	.38833

a. Predictors: (Constant), Shipping_fee

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.892	1	5.892	39.071	.000 ^b
	Residual	17.493	116	.151		
	Total	23.384	117			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase_decision

b. Predictors: (Constant), Shipping_fee

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.685	.132		20.304	.000
	Shipping_fee	.227	.036	.502	6.251	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase_decision

According to the Coefficients, the sig. (p-value) of the regression model is also less than 0.0005 and $t(116) = 6.251$, implying that the shipping fee can strongly predict the buying decisions of customers. This result definitely supports H1f. The simple linear regression equation also offers an expected y value (purchase decision) for the observation of x (shipping fee) and can be expressed as $y = 2.685 + 0.227x$. The positive slope of this equation ($\beta = 0.227$) indicates a positive linear relationship between purchase decision and shipping fee, suggesting that the more customers consider shipping fee as an important factor, the more circumspect about their purchase they are.

On the same note, the ANOVA table also displays the R Square = 0.252, $F(1, 116) = 39.071$, and $p < 0.0005$, which indicates that purchase decision is considerably explained by the shipping fee. Put differently, the shipping fee has a strong influence on the purchase decisions made by young Vietnamese shoppers. From the value of R Square, it is also reasonable to conclude that 25.2% of the purchase decisions can be explained by the delivery cost.

4.4.3. Brand reputation and policy

→ Regression

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Brand_and_policy ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase_decision

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.524 ^a	.275	.268	.38242

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand_and_policy

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.420	1	6.420	43.898	.000 ^b
	Residual	16.964	116	.146		
	Total	23.384	117			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase_decision

b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand_and_policy

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.014	.224		8.989	.000
	Brand_and_policy	.420	.063	.524	6.626	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase_decision

Based on the Coefficients table, the regression model applied on the variable “Brand and policy” also shows the very small p-value (the sig.) which is less than 0.0005 and $t(116) = 6.626$, proving that the brand reputation and policy can significantly predict the buying decisions of customers. Therefore, H1g is not rejected. The simple linear regression equation also gives an approximate y value (purchase decision) for the

observation of x (brand and policy). The equation can be illustrated as $y = 2.014 + 0.42x$, showing the $\beta = 0.42 > 0$ which proves a positive linear relationship between purchase decision and the brand name and practice. In other words, the more shoppers regard the brand prestige and policy, the more prudent they are when making a buying decision.

Namely, the brand image and course of action affect the purchase decisions made by young Vietnamese consumers to such a great extent. This conclusion is reached based on data in the ANOVA table showing the R Square = 0.275, $F(1, 116) = 43,898$, and $p < 0.0005$. Regarding the value of R Square, it is also evident that 27.5% of the shopping decisions can be explained by the brand reputation and policy.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Main findings

Overall, two sub-questions of this thesis are answered with the empirical analytics as well as knowledge from the literature review. In particular, the answers for each research question are succinctly provided as follows.

a) What are the main issues that impact online purchase decisions?

According to the empirical analytics, reviews of prior consumers, shipping fee, brand reputation and policy are factors having a significant impact on online purchase decisions of young Vietnamese customers. On the other hand, as reported in the literature review section, prior studies show that cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors can further affect buying decisions of consumers.

b) Are there any differences in the online shopping process in regard to gender?
If there are gender differences, what are these differences?

There is no significant gender difference in each stage of the decision-making process.

5.2. Discussion of findings

Regarding factors which are found to impact on online purchase decisions of young Vietnamese consumers in this thesis, it is worth noting that reviews of former users, shipping fee, brand reputation and policy are considered as psychological forces. Thus, it is evident that this thesis has supported prior research proving that psychological factors can have an influence on purchase decisions of customers. Specifically, a former study by Yayli and Bayram (2012), which examines a sample of 604 participants as well as uses the Likert scale to measure responses, also reveals that the reviews affect buying decisions of shoppers. In terms of shipping fee, a study by Javadi et al. (2012) further discovers the same findings of this thesis. In particular, the research inspecting 107 valid questionnaires and applying the Likert scale to the analysis proves that shipping fee can impact on the final decisions of buyers. In addition, the research further discovers that low delivery charges or free shipping fees will positively impact on behaviors and attitudes of customers. On a different note, this thesis also reinforces the conclusion of a prior study by Mirabi et al. (2015) which reveals that the brand name has a strong influence on purchase intention of customers. In more detail, that research also uses the five-point Likert scale to analyze responses of 384 participants. On a similar note, a study conducted by Malik et al. (2013) proves a significant relationship between the brand image and consumer behaviors. Particularly, the better the brand image is, the likely to purchase products of the brand the customers are.

With respect to the online buying process of young Vietnamese consumers, this thesis does not find any evidence to reveal gender disparities in the process. However, prior studies show the results of differences in stages of the decision-making model in regard to gender. Concerning the need recognition phase, a study by Seock and Bailey (2008) proves that there are gender dissimilarities. Specifically, the research discovers that women buy products via the internet because of hedonic motivation, while men do that due to utilitarian motivation. In other words, female customers shop online for enjoyment, whereas their counterparts purchase goods online for saving time. Thus, one reason which can be given to explain why the results of that study and those of this thesis are different is that this study aims to examine whether there is any difference between male and female shoppers in the

need recognition stage regarding the impact of external and internal stimuli; conversely, the research by Seock and Bailey (2008) studies gender disparities in that phase but concerns the aspect of consumer motivation. However, as internal and external stimuli are the main driving forces triggering needs and desires of buyers while motivation is solely an ancillary factor encouraging shoppers to purchase products online, this thesis does not examine the motivation of customers in the stage of need recognition.

In terms of information search, Barber et al. (2009) assert that gender differs in seeking information before the final purchases. Indeed, their findings reveal that women usually use both internal and external search methods, while the majority of men prefer external sources of data. Put differently, female respondents in that study are found to have flexibility in asking friends or using personal sources to search for information, whereas the male ones report tending to seek information through public sources. Although this thesis aims to examine the same facet of data search as that study, the much smaller size of the sample (118 participants) compared to 543 of that study might make the analysis bring a different result. In addition, this thesis applies the Independent samples T-test to analyses, while Barber et al. use the Box's M test for understanding their findings. Therefore, the differences in methodology might cause the dissimilarities in the results.

In respect of the evaluation of alternatives stage, Lim and Yazdanifard (2014) interpret the assessment of possibilities as reading consumer reviews. Therefore, they mentioned prior research studying gender differences in consideration of former user reviews to elaborate on how men and women vary in evaluating options. For instance, Park et al. (2009) conclude that women read online reviews much more than men through an analysis of data of 890 people. To support and contribute to this conclusion, later studies by Bae and Lee (2011) as well as Fan and Miao (2012) discover that female consumers are more impacted by reviews than their counterparts. Furthermore, Bae and Lee (2011) find that the final buying decisions of women are more influenced by negative reviews than positive ones compared to that of men. In other words, the inclination not to buy a product when female shoppers read bad comments about it is higher than the propensity to purchase it when they read good judgements about that product. Conversely, there is no significant difference to be found between the effects of negative and positive reviews on male

buyers in that study. Regarding the dissimilarity between findings of gender difference of aforementioned research and those of this thesis in terms of assessing alternatives, those studies only examine online consumer reviews, while this thesis studies more other facets of evaluation beyond opinions of former users such as services, means of payment, and attributes of products.

Concerning the purchase decision stage, Lin et al. (2018) prove that men and women differ in buying intention. It is worth noting that they ascribe the shopping decision of customers to their attitudes towards the online merchandise exhibition. However, this thesis attributes consumer buying decision to customer reviews, which is proposed by a study by Comegys et al. (2006). In that study, they find that the opinions of prior buyers have a significant impact on the final decisions of shoppers. Thus, the disparities in the outcomes of analyses of former research and those of this thesis might derive from the interpretation of the issue from different angles.

5.3. Revised conceptual framework

As this paper does not find any significant gender dissimilarity in the online decision-making process of young Vietnamese consumers, it is rational to remove the factor “gender” from the suggested conceptual framework. On a different note, this thesis further proves that consumer reviews, shipping fee as well as brand reputation and policy have a strong influence on purchase decisions of young Vietnamese customers. Hence, it is proper to replace these factors as causes which affect the decision making in buying of shoppers with “other factors” in the framework to make the model more concrete. The revised structure is displayed as follows.

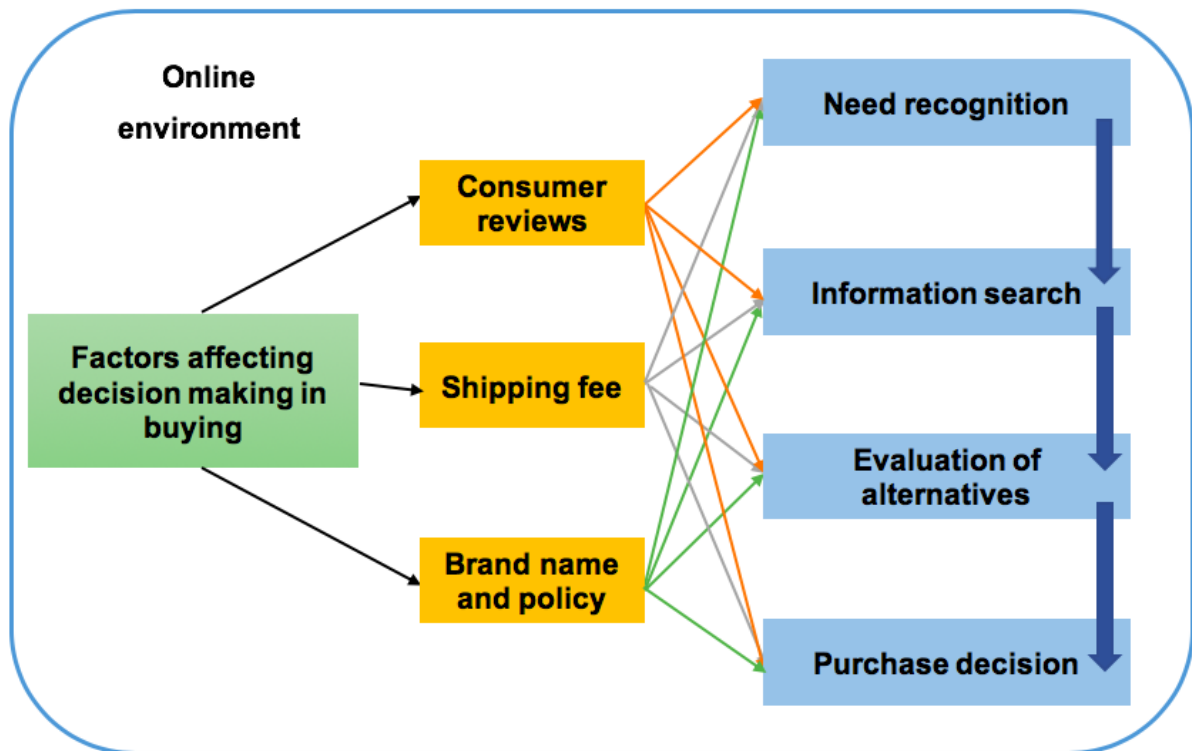


Figure 4: Revised conceptual framework

5.4. Implications for international business

Although this thesis cannot make highly well-grounded conclusions due to the lack of past experience, resources, and the limited scope, it still suggests several meaningful implications for businesses to enhance their online marketing strategies which aim to target young Vietnamese consumers.

Referring to statistics of common mobile devices used for online shopping, it is suggested that businesses should push their marketing campaigns more intensively on cellular phones. For example, they can show their new products, great deals of the day as well as bestsellers on in-app advertisements. Additionally, firms can adopt push notifications which enable them to display their messages on the lock screen of mobile users. As a result, organizations will draw more attention from phone consumers as well as trigger their desires to purchase goods. It is also worth noting that the aforementioned tactics can be further applied to tablets.

When people intend to buy a product, they normally ask their friends or family members for advice. However, those ones might not never use that product as well as have sufficient knowledge about it in order to give value recommendations for potential customers. Therefore, young Vietnamese shoppers usually seek reviews of prior consumers who have directly experienced the product to get genuine advice. From this point, online businesses should consider displaying perspectives of customers on their websites as an effective advertising tool to market their merchandise. Nonetheless, the companies also ought to be prepared to deal with negative comments about the products. They could give explanations for each specific circumstance, present solutions for the problem, or even offer compensation for the mistake. Overall, organizations should take care of online reviews by regular interactions with customers such as answering inquiries, settling complaints as well as showing gratitude to their valuable customers.

Vietnamese millennials are also regarded as price-sensitive shoppers. Besides the price of a product itself, they further consider its shipping fee. In their article, Kachersky and Kim (2010) discover that consumers prefer the price incorporating the delivery cost rather than the one separating the value of the product and the shipping charge. This pattern is also true for young Vietnamese buyers. Thus, companies

should contemplate applying the inclusive pricing model to their business since Vietnamese millennial shoppers prefer the hidden cost of supplementary services.

Another aspect of a product that Vietnamese customers aging from 15 to 29 consider important is the brand image and policy. To establish and improve the image of their brands, companies could commit to environmental sustainability, invite celebrities to endorse goods, or organize community campaigns. They also might need to update their websites and other online associations frequently as well as ensure those connections are user-friendly. Concerning policies, firms should create reasonable and flexible regulations in terms of warranty, return and refund as well as payment methods.

Since findings of this thesis are a piece of evidence that there is no significant gender difference in young Vietnamese consumer behaviors regarding online buying, businesses which target Vietnamese millennials might build marketing strategies without separating them into two distinct approaches for men and women. Furthermore, they might want to concentrate on other factors to understand attitudes, preferences, and inclinations of their young Vietnamese customers rather than gender.

5.5. Limitations and suggestions for future research

It cannot be denied that this thesis proposes several valid implications for businesses to a certain extent. However, there are still some constraints which need to be identified in order to enhance the quality of future research examining the similar phenomenon.

First, the sample size of the methodology is quite small, which hardly produces meaningful findings to reach a valid conclusion for the whole Vietnamese millennials. Additionally, half of the participants are students who also have the lowest income compared to other groups, which can yield biased results for analyses. Thus, future research should extend the sample size as well as diversify categories of partakers to obtain more representative findings for a thorough investigation.

Second, the questionnaires are conducted in English which is not the first language of Vietnamese consumers. Although the wording and explanation in the surveys are

very basic and easy to understand, it is inevitable that there might be some confusing words for a few respondents. Therefore, some questions might be answered inappropriately, which produces inaccurate results. This suggests that empirical materials of further studies should be constructed in the mother tongue of participants to be able to yield more precise outcomes.

Third, the thesis examines the attitudes and behaviors of young Vietnamese customers in terms of online shopping in general rather than focusing on one specific industry. This can confuse participants when giving responses to the questionnaire because their criteria for online shopping might vary according to every type of product. Hence, further research should concentrate on one particular industry when studying a questionable factor in order to reach more legitimate conclusions.

Fourth, although the Cronbach's alphas of some reliability tests of examined factors are acceptable for analyses, future studies could increase the value of the Cronbach's alphas of reliability tests to improve the quality and credibility of later results and conclusions. Thus, sets of questions of future research should be more comprehensive and relevant, which helps researchers gain better findings. However, an excessively detailed questionnaire can make respondents carelessly provide opinions. Therefore, researchers should balance between the content of the survey and the time of completion.

Finally, although this thesis employs the five-point Likert scale to analyze data, which yields reliable and meaningful results, future researchers can apply the seven-point Likert scale to their methodology to produce more precise findings.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Content of the survey

Young Vietnamese consumer behaviors

1. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey examining young Vietnamese consumer behaviors (age: 15-29). This survey takes about 3-5 minutes. Your participation is anonymous and voluntary as well as your answers will be kept completely confidential.

2. Please rate each following statement. *

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I'm attracted by online advertisements *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I'm hungry or thirsty, I order food and drinks online *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I buy a product online because of its attractive advertisement *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I buy a product online because of its good word of mouth (other people say good things about it) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I buy a product online because of family members' recommendations *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I spend time on searching for information before making buying decisions *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I buy a product based only on my impulses and emotions (sudden wants or without planning) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. When you buy a product online, you *

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Ask family members and friends for advice *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Search for prior consumers' reviews (reviews/opinions of customers who used the product) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contact a salesperson or supporting staff member for details of the product *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Search for information about the product on the internet *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. If you had bought a product from a website previously, in the next time, you would *

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Recall the website and buy that product from that website (same product - same website) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Search for the product on the internet and maybe buy it from another website (same product - maybe another website) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. When you buy a product online, you consider *

	Not at all concerned	Slightly concerned	Somewhat concerned	Moderately concerned	Extremely concerned
Price *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Terms of warranty *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reviews of prior consumers (reviews/opinions of customers who used the product) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reputation of the brand (good or bad things about the company) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eco-friendliness *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Means of payment *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
User-friendly website *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Free shipping *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reliability of the supplier (trustworthiness of a company which provides goods or services) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time of delivery *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Please rate each following statement. *

	Not at all	A little	Rather	Much	Very strong
I'm likely to buy a product from its official website *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I'm likely to buy a product from a third-party website to get a lower price *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I'm likely to buy a certain number of goods to get free shipping (buy many products to get free shipping) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. You won't buy the product if you read a negative review about *

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Moderately important	Extremely important
Price too high for such quality *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Delivery *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Terms of warranty or return policy *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Negative actions associated with the brand (bad things related to the brand) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Customer service *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Packaging *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Given that you really want to buy a product and think that it is very suitable for you *

	Not at all	A little	Rather	Much	Very strong
You're likely to buy it, even if your friends and family members disagree with you *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You're likely to buy it, even if a staff member unfriendly gives you advice *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. Which means do you use for online shopping? (You can choose more than 1 option) *

Desktop computer

Laptop

Mobile phone

Tablet

10. Age *

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11. Gender *

Male

Female

12. Occupation (a job or profession) *
