

MSc. In Marketing

***The examination of attitudes towards buying food online
in Ho Chi Minh City.***

By



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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment for the award of MSc. In
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Abstract

Title: **An examination of attitudes towards buying food online in Ho Chi Minh City**

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Background: Food category is a basic necessity that people consume daily, and it directly influences their health. Vietnamese consumers prefer to purchase food items mainly in retail to judge physical goods for measurement of quality. However, young Vietnamese generations (Gen Z and Millennials) face 'money-rich, time-less' in their life like living in a metropolitan – Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Therefore, they need to find a solution that assists their life more comfortably. Besides, online shopping is a current trend globally and has been rapidly grown in the Vietnam market in recent years. Thus, the consumers could go shopping on online channels to save time and convenience (like easily receive goods at doorstep). Therefore, online channels (eCommerce and social commerce) could be a good option to buy food products.

Objectives: This study aims to determine customers' awareness of Ho Chi Minh City online food purchases during their shopping experience. Also, the online market has potential growth in the future. The food businesses' perspectives also examine their purposes and the matching points between customers and companies in the infancy stage of the online market.

Method: A semi-structured interview (face-to-face) towards online meeting applications is the applied research tool. The answers of respondents were found based on open questions that gained rich and in-depth information. There were determined through 16 respondents being consumers aged 18 to 35, and 5 participants being businesses, and all of them live in Ho Chi Minh City.

Findings: The customers' awareness defined two main groups: *benefits (rich references and value for money)* and *barriers (inconvenience and uncertain quality product)*. These findings were resulted from their satisfactions of shopping experiences and comparison between its and offline shopping experiences. Then, in infancy stage of online shopping, the current food businesses' purpose is

increasing brand awareness. That helps to introduce and remind their products in customers' minds and also raise purchase intention.

Conclusion: The customers' awareness determined depended on the online shopping experience and comparison with the offline shopping experience. Although they recognized the *benefits* of online food purchased, especially in a busy period, they still prefer to purchase food items at physical stores. The *barriers* of online shopping and the significant development of retail influence their decisions. However, towards businesses' online activities increased *brand awareness*, searching and analysing products' information on online channels is a new customer behavior, which benefits their awareness.

Declaration
Submission of Thesis and Dissertation
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Chapter 1. Introduction

Chapter 1 provides an overview of this study, and is divided into three main parts: the project's background, research objectives, and research outline.

1.1. The background of the study

This section briefly describes the contemporary Vietnam online channel and the food consumption patterns.

1.1.1. Vietnamese economics and online market

Vietnam is a lower middle-income country and is known as a dynamic emerging nation in the East Asia region (World Bank, 2021). After 2020, GDP grew by 2.9% during the world pandemic. In other words, Vietnam is one of the few nations having a positive number in the growth of GDP in 2020. That proved the government in Vietnam to have a good strategy to face any problems, then reach the final target – the developing economy. The population in 2019 in Vietnam was more than ninety-five million, and 55.5% in total is under 35 years old, implying a young and abundant labor force. From this information, Vietnam is an attractive market for companies, including global and national ones.

Then, like other nations, the development of the internet and technology have affected Vietnamese consumers' lives. Online shopping is the current trend for customers, especially the young generation Gen Z and Millennials (Deloitte, 2019). People who were born from 1995 to 2005 are called Gen Z, and individuals born from 1983 to 1994 imply Millennials (Deloitte, 2021). That means these generations have the oldest age being 40, and this is the largest group in the Vietnam market. Furthermore, in 2019, 68.7% of the Vietnamese population – around 66 million people - browsed the internet daily (World Bank, 2019). Four hours per day was the average time spent on mobiles and around 65% of this time was on the internet and social media (Nguyen Q., 2019). This information is the critical signal for businesses and economic organizations to believe in the potential growth of online shopping in the Vietnam market.

In addition, in 2017, 4.9% was the market share that eCommerce gained in total traditional and modern retail value in Vietnam according to the Vietnam eCommerce Association. In 2019, the value of eCommerce in total business-to-

consumer (B2C) retail sales was defined as over ten billion US dollars (Statista, 2021). The most common five categories that Vietnamese customers buy on online channels are: electronics and physical media; fashion and beauty; furniture and appliances; toys, DIY and hobbies; food and personal care (Datareport, 2019). That consequence was the effort and contribution from the eCommerce businesses and social commerces.

However, the online shopping market in Vietnam has to face a social infrastructure. In reality, electricity and internet connections are not applying to all regions in Vietnam, especially rural. But more than 60% of the population, including the young generation, adults, and old generation, currently live in rural Vietnam (Statista, 2021). In other words, this condition is the biggest limitation for expanding the online market in Vietnam to be more popular.

1.1.2. Food markets in Vietnam

Among the five favourite buying categories in online channels, food products are the essential goods that are consumed daily in every family. In this project, food products include fresh foods (vegetables, fruits, meat, seafood), canned food, beverages, processed food, and instant products like noodles, confectionery. In fact, traditional Vietnamese consumers' frequently go to retail stores and wet markets to purchase food products (Nguyen, 2021b) because they can examine physical goods in purchase decision-making. In 2020, in Vietnam, for modern trade, they have nearly 6 thousand hypermarkets, supermarkets and mini-supermarkets, convenience stores, and around 700 thousand traditional grocery outlets in 2019 (Nguyen, 2021b).

Besides, the barrier on online channels tends to be product performance risk; that means customers cannot judge physical goods (Masound, 2013) before purchase decision-making. Moreover, in Vietnam, the trustworthiness of customers in online channels is originally low because they wonder about the risks (quality and customer service) (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, the trust created from the manufacturers and sellers to customers plays an important role before ordering or purchasing (Dickinger, 2011).

On the other hand, the regulation of online shopping in Vietnam is in the process of setting up. Especially, the Vietnamese Food Administration has many limitations of law and exact guidelines to manage the quality and hygiene of food products in general to protect the customers' benefits (Dang, 2018). Thus, to protect customers' benefits by themselves, the Vietnamese consumers prefer to buy food products at retail outlets to have a judgement of physical goods. Moreover, this information is a priority and big challenge for the food businesses when they want to expand their online market share more.

However, for Vietnamese Gen Z and Millennials, food delivery service, providing cooked meals to readily consume, is booming (Nguyen, 2019). This behaviour could lead to re-educate the customer habit in purchasing food products through a good shopping experience (Nguyen, 2019). In this way, the online services for food products and food businesses could create trust and increase brand equity and brand awareness to customers. Hence, this information is the fundamental condition to predict the online channels as a potential sales channel for food products in the future.

1.2. Research objectives

Based on the globally modern trend and the development of the internet and infrastructures, online shopping in Vietnam is the new and potential market to any business for growth in the long term, especially in metropolitan cities like Ho Chi Minh City and other cities. Therefore, this market is the new channel with many opportunities and challenges for the food and beverage industry to reach new audiences and expand their market share in online and digital channels.

The priority problem for most businesses is Vietnamese consumer behaviour; for a long time the way of purchasing food products has been in physical stores. From this behaviour, the author did interviews for both consumers and businesses in Ho Chi Minh City that aim:

- To explore the current consumer attitudes for online shopping of food products.
- To discover several factors that affect purchase decision-making for the current situation.

- To figure out the businesses’ perspectives about Vietnam online and digital channels, and examine how they match customers’ requirements.

1.3. Thesis structure

The key elements and structure of this project are shown in figure 1.

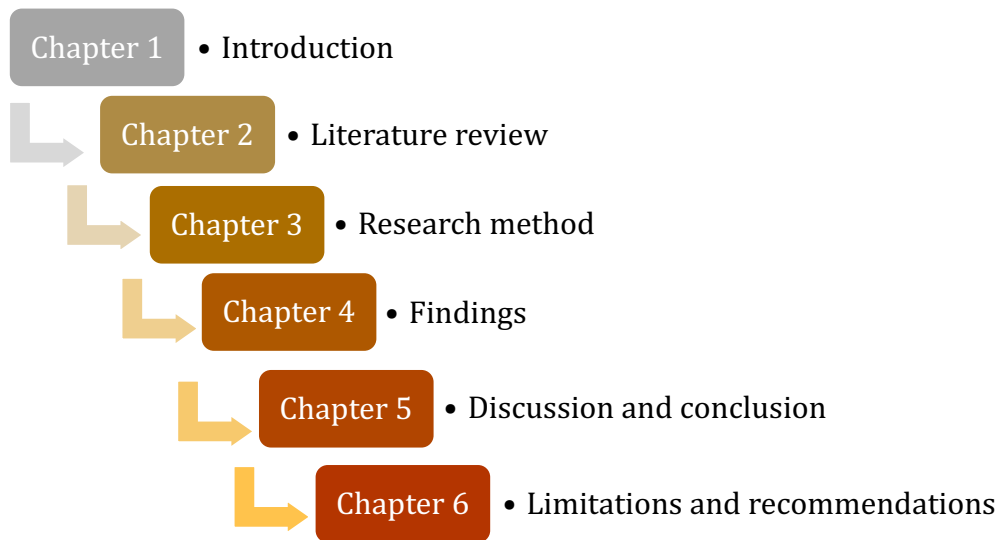


Figure 1. Dissertation structure

Chapter 1 reviews the market background and explains the fundamental objectives to develop and find the conclusion of this research. Then, in chapter 2, the literature review is the academic evidence to support and prove the statements in a report to be valuable toward previous academic studies. Next, chapter 3 shows how to design research, collect and analyse data to get the critical points for the next two chapters. Then, in chapters 4 and 5, from the data gained from both participants (consumers and businesses), the final and efficient conclusion clarifies the possible answers to each research question through the technical research method. Finally, in chapter 6, this section outlines the limitations of the project and provides several recommendations to applying in reality.

Chapter 2. Literature review

The literature review chapter aims to examine the relevant academic resources to prove the valuable findings and conclusions for this research. Chapter 2 combines four main sections: current food consumption patterns, channels through which food is bought, online customer attitudes and behaviors, and reviewing buyer groups.

2.1. Vietnamese food consumption patterns

Like the rest of the world, in Vietnam, food products are basic necessities in human life (Deloitte, 2020). These products are divided into three categories: non-alcoholic beverages, confectionery, and packaged foods. Vietnamese consumers, especially in urban areas, normally spend around 40% to 50% in total income to purchase food (Deloitte, 2020), as shown in figure 2.

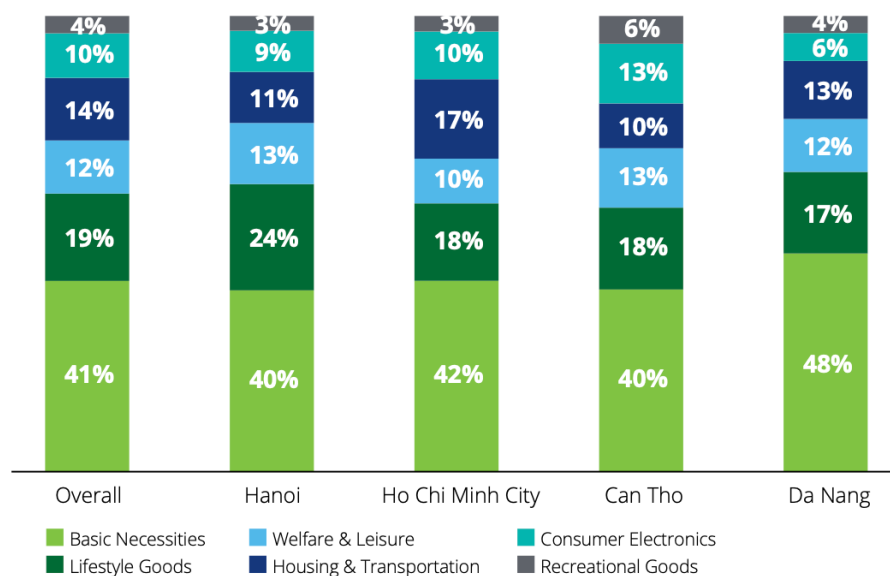


Figure 2. Household expenditure by categories monthly in 2019.

Source: Deloitte, 2020

Moreover, in the future, it is predicted that Vietnamese customers will increase the budget of buying food items (figure 3). This prediction resulted from a recent survey of Statista (a global research organisation) published in 2021. They surveyed respondents who live in two metropolitan cities of Vietnam – Ha Noi City and Ho Chi Minh City. Also, as figure 11, the survey's graph showed that among other categories, only food categories (canned, packaged, and fresh items) were going to be raised by reducing other expenditures. This implied for Vietnamese consumers that the food category is the greatest concern at any time and they are willing to pay more for the quality of products, even decreasing other necessary categories.

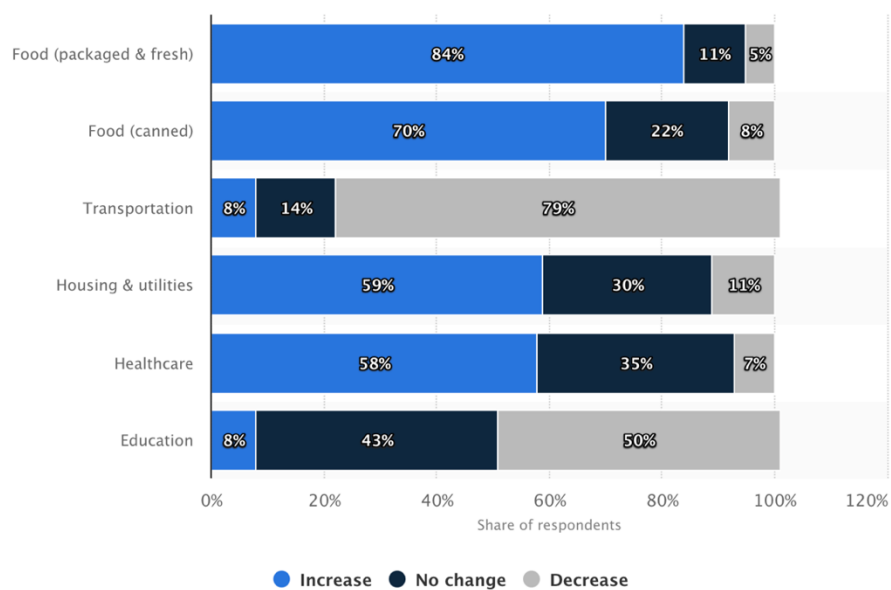


Figure 3. Vietnamese consumers planning expenditure by categories in the future.

Source: Statista 2021b

- Food category on online channels

In the digital era, online shopping is currently a modern trend and is more popular globally. However, online shopping behaviors in different aged groups were different (Eurostat, 2021). As figure 4, the line graph illustrated that the internet usage is highest for those aged 16 to 54 regarding digital shopping methods as the figures for both age groups significantly rose over the period. Therefore, the online channel is a noticeable way of shopping at present.

Internet users who bought or ordered goods or services for private use in the previous 12 months by age group, EU, 2010-2020

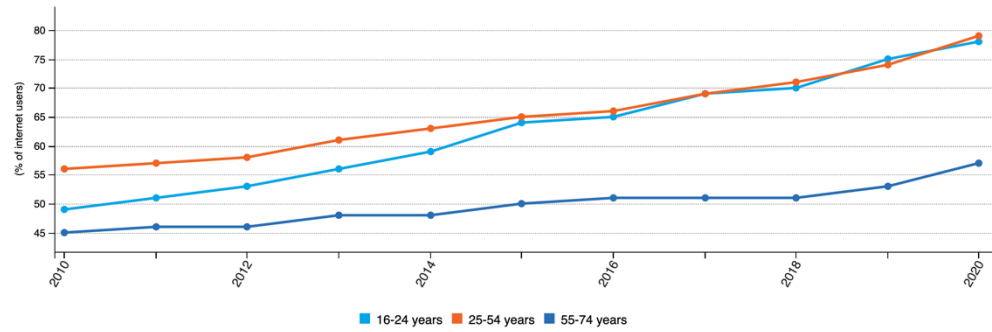


Figure 4. Data of online shopping buyers by aged in European in 2020
Source: Eurostat 2021

Then, in the online stores, the customers could purchase any products. However, again, the categories purchased are different between generations (see figure 5). Among the categories, fashion items (clothes, shoes, and accessories) were the first favourite goods for all generations selected on online. And more than 60% of a customer group aged below 54 chose fashion buying in the internet. For customer group aged above 54, this percentage was only 48% (Eurostat, 2021).

Online purchases of goods, EU⁽¹⁾, 2020

(% of individuals who bought or ordered goods or services over the internet for private use in the previous 3 months)

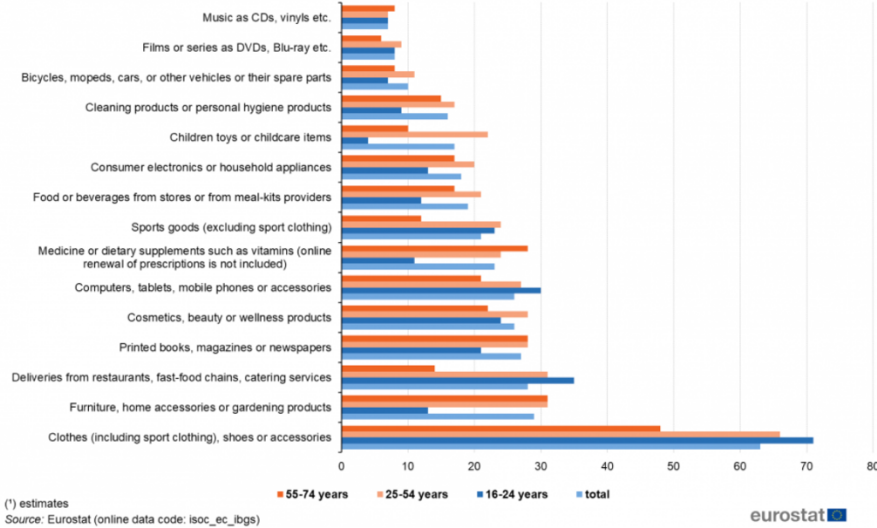


Figure 5. The different goods purchased on online channels by aged in EU
Source: Eurostat 2021

In contrast, purchasing food or beverages has not yet taken off on online channels; even though this category needs to be consumed daily. As figure 5, nearly 20% of all age groups chose to buy food items on digital channels from retail stores (Eurostat, 2021). In there, consumers aged 25 to 54 were highest with more than 20%. They

were favourable to order ready-to-eat food items online, with around 35% in total, especially customers aged 16 to 54 (Eurostat, 2021).

Besides, the young Vietnamese generation also caught this trend to make their lives more convenient. Around 40% of the population aged below 24 spent more time on digital channels for shopping (Deloitte, 2019). Among online purchased categories (fashion, electric devices, and others), around 19% of Vietnamese consumers chose digital platforms (eCommerce and social commerce) to purchase food and beverage products (Deloitte, 2019). This number was similar with above European customers.

Based on the above information, online shopping is notable with many benefits for both consumers and businesses. However, the ratio of online consumers for food buying over the internet is small compared to the number of internet consumers for other non-food products. That point is also fundamental to develop this study.

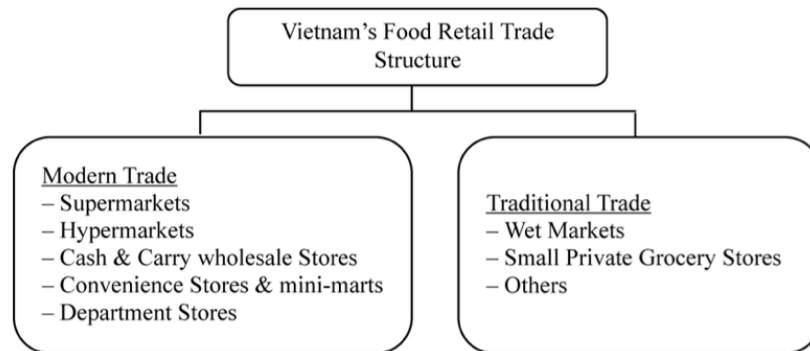
2.2. The popular channels for food buying in the Vietnamese market.

According to Nguyen *et al.* (2013), food products are the favourite goods that sell and purchase at retail stores (traditional and modern trade) in Vietnam. Among all South-East Asian countries, Vietnam is the most traditional retail landscape (Kantar World Panel, 2016). Around 75% of the population selected traditional markets instead of buying at modern and distribution channels as recorded by the Ministry of Industry and Trade in 2014 (cited in Evangelista *et al.*, 2019).

Compared with other Asian nations, this proportion was much higher. For instance, Singapore was only 10%, China was 49%, and Thailand was 66% (Amcham Vietnam, 2010, cited in Evangelista *et al.*, 2019). Although, in recent years, modern trade retail significantly developed with the efforts of international and local brands and huge investments (Deloitte, 2014), to change Vietnamese shopping behavior is more difficult.

Evangelista *et al.* (2019) state that shopping at supermarkets and traditional markets is an effective and simple way. Normally, the locations of traditional markets are often near the customers' houses to save time and budget for transportation is a concern. Then, the consumers get a good price at these markets rather than at modern retail outlets (Quoc Anh, 2008, cited in Vu *et al.*, 2010). Also, this activity is part of the social culture in Vietnam (Evangelista *et al.*, 2019). Besides,

the modern trade retail outlets (supermarket, convenience stores and others) are the fashion trends in Vietnam that customers are also interested in (Evangelista *et al.*, 2019). For consumers, shopping at modern trade is not only new behavior but also a stress-free method (Evangelista *et al.*, 2019).



Source: Amended from GAIN (2008, chart 1, p. 5)

Figure 6. Food retail structure in Vietnam

As figure 6, the traditional channels define traditional markets (wet markets), mom-and-pop stores, informal markets, and modern trades, including supermarkets, trade centers, and convenience stores (Tran and Hara, 2015; Nguyen *et al.*, 2013; Maruyama and Trung, 2007). Also, in recent years, the modern trade model grew and expanded quickly from urban to rural. Nonetheless, the total stores belonging to top modern retail organisations is an extremely small number in the whole retail industry (Nguyen *et al.*, 2013). In 2020, according to the statistics, total modern retail stores (small to big scale) had more than six thousand while traditional retail shops had around seven hundred thousand (Nguyen, 2021b).

In addition, Tran and Hara (2015) state that the sustainable maintenance of wet markets is created by the interpersonal relationships – suppliers and sellers, sellers and customers. On the other hand, the strength of wet markets is the freshness (like food quality products) (Quoc Anh, 2008, cited in Vu *et al.*, 2010), relationship (like close connections and beliefs between sellers and consumers), and context (Tran and Hara, 2015). The strength of modern trade is the facility, safety, and hygiene products that prove toward certificates (Tran and Hara, 2015).

Therefore, for Vietnamese consumers, convenience, a part of social culture, and an entertaining way are the words to describe the current food retail industry and this activity is *embedded in individuals' identity formation* (Evangelista *et al.*, 2019). Also,

the consumers feel satisfied with the service during good shopping experiences and maintain the habit (Martínez and Casielles, 2017).

2.3. The contemporary online channels in Vietnam.

Besides offline channels, the digital channels are additional options to purchase food products. The online channels determine a part of modern trade in the Vietnam market, which are two main sectors: eCommerce and social commerce (Deloitte, 2020). To review the general information of Vietnam's online market, Shopee, Lazada, Tiki, and Facebook are four leaders that consumers choose the most (see figure 7).

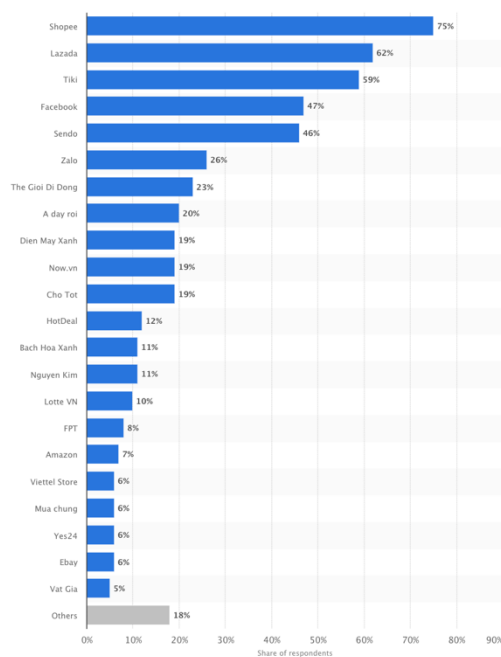


Figure 7. Most popular online shopping channels in Vietnam in 2019
Source: Statista 2019

2.3.1. eCommerce

In the Vietnam market, the top brands in the eCommerce area are Shopee, Lazada, and Tiki. Shopee and Lazada are international brands and popular in the Asian region; Tiki is the only national brand on this list. Three of them introduced and provided their services on websites and mobile applications (available at iOS and Android software).

They deliver nationwide with their shippers in big cities and third parties in suburban areas or provinces for their service. Moreover, to adapt to the widening needs of consumers, they updated and expanded their categories and sellers in many different industries, from groceries to technological devices. Also, promotion

programs organized as frequent, periodic, and annual are the most attractive and competitive marketing activities to gain more online customers.

- Shopee

Shopee is an eCommerce platform which belongs to Sea Group in Singapore, and a leader of the eCommerce market in the South East Asia region and Taiwan, China. Shopee officially joined the Vietnam online market in 2016. In 2019, 75% of Vietnamese online customers chose Shopee to be the most popular channel (Nguyen, 2021a). Shopee convinces customers (current and new) through three critical elements: various categories with ensuring quality and good price, attractive promotions like free delivery, and a good service (from pre-purchased to pro-buying).

- Lazada

Lazada is an another international brand, and managed by the Alibaba group (a Chinese multinational technology group). Like Shopee, Lazada also presents in many Asian countries such as the Philippines, Singapore and others. In Vietnam, Lazada was introduced to customers in 2012. Lazada also provides many promotions at a similar time with competitors such as Shopee.

- Tiki

Tiki is a national brand that was established in 2010 as an online book store. Until 2016, when Tiki expanded and developed as an eCommerce platform, and became one of the favourite eCommerce brands for Vietnamese consumers.

2.3.2. Social commerce

Besides eCommerce platforms, social commerces are other online channels that consumers can browse and purchase variety of goods through. In figure 7, Facebook ranked fourth place in online channels that Vietnamese consumers selected (Nguyen, 2019b).

Social commerce defines *a form of commerce mediated by social media involving convergence between the online and offline environments* (Wang and Zhang, 2012, cited in Zhou *et al.*, 2013). In other words, Wigand *et al.* (2008, cited in Huang and Benyoucef, 2013) state that social commerce is the transformation of eCommerce from a product-oriented environment to a social and customer-centered one based

on the speedy development of social media and Web 2.0. The types of social commerce comprise social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and social commerce websites.

For social commerce, websites are designed with all layers of the proposal models: individual, conversation, community, and commerce levels (Huang and Benyoucef, 2013). This design are the minimum features for sellers. Also, the benefits of using social commerce are *marketing, comparing, curating, selling, buying, and sharing products and services* (Zhou *et al.*, 2013). Based on these advantages, the businesses and individual retailers would have a potential market to expand their market share and growth of profits (Zhou *et al.*, 2013).

According to Nguyen and Nguyen (2017), they indicate three critical elements for the intention of using social commerce in Vietnam. Firstly, the website quality is straightforward for navigation and quality of service. Then the trust towards recommendations of members and community, and finally, social support like social information and community commitment. The last factor is indicated by the electronic Word-of-mouth (eWOM) effect on social platforms to enhance customers' trust, then encourage the consumers' purchase intentions (Sulthana and Vasantha, 2019).

2.4. The online customer attitude and behavior

Aliff *et al.* (2014, cited in Tang *et al.*, 2016) state that customer purchase intention is influenced by customer attitude and behavior. In online shopping, customer satisfaction created from the expectation of customer shopping experience plays a vital factor in impacting customer attitude and behavior (Li and Zhang, 2003). In other words, the customer accepting online channels as a grocery shop is also affected by the negative perceptions (risks or potential losses) during the shopping experience (Forsythe and Shi, 2003).

For the infancy stage, like the online Vietnam market, the online shopping experience is the first dimension to understand consumer satisfaction; that way, it can examine online customer attitudes. From this fundamental, the customer would consider barriers when they faced bad online shopping experiences and unsatisfied factors. Besides, brand awareness in online channels is an additional dimension to estimate the knowledge, coverage, and uppermost thoughts of customers about the

products and brands. Thus, to conclude how online shopping accommodates the Vietnamese consumers in the retail food industry.

2.4.1. The online shopping experience (OSE)

Originally, the primary and priority reason customers browse the internet was to find information (Horrigan, 2008, cited in Mosteller *et al.*, 2014). On there, the customers could find the information of products such as the shops selling them, feedback of previous consumers, price and promotion, and others. All of this news is a reference to support their purchasing decision-making.

Several definitions of OSE were based on in-depth customer research (Izogo and Jayawardhena, 2018). The online shopping experience describes the frequency of online purchases, and the customer would examine all activities from the pre-purchase, during, and post-purchase to gain clues influencing the buying process (Izogo and Jayawardhena, 2018). Besides, they called this action to co-create value for business through engaging customers towards various online channels such as company websites, online community sites, blogs, chat rooms, and others (Izogo and Jayawardhena, 2018).

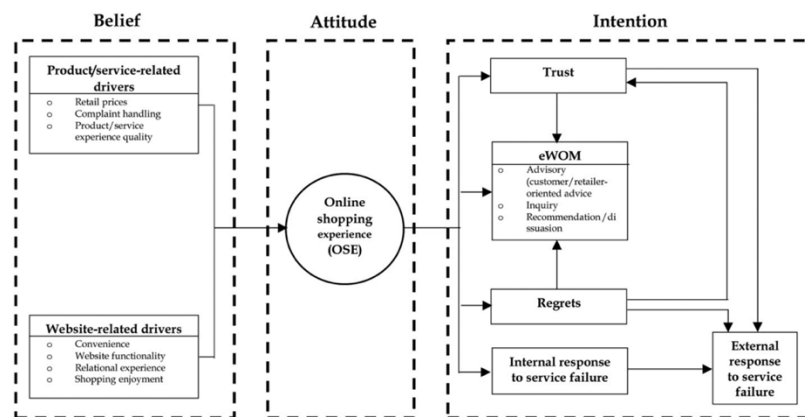


Figure 8. Belief-attitude-intention conceptual framework of drivers and outcomes of OSE (Izogo and Jayawardhena, 2018)

Then, Izogo and Jayawardhena (2018) figure out the drivers of OSE, as shown in Figure 6. First, the belief factor is the most important driver: product/service attributes and website attributes. Then, among service attributes, the delivery service of online shopping is indicated as the most important aspect (Izogo and Jayawardhena, 2018); this leads to customer satisfaction to be a positive or negative effect (Coşar, 2017). Besides, retail prices on online channels are often expected to be cheaper or have more promotion offers than offline channels (Izogo and

Jayawardhena, 2018). This point is the online consumers' perception, leading to the first impact on the purchasing process (Lo *et al.*, 2014).

2.4.2. Customer satisfaction

According to Fornell (1992), customer satisfaction is defined as an overview attitude formed that audits shopping experience from pre-purchase to post-purchase. This term describes customers' feelings about the quality of service or product, price, contextual and personal factors (like customer service staff or delivery man) (Zeithmal and Bitner, 2000, cited in Liu *et al.*, 2011). The feeling of satisfaction during the shopping experience conducts the trust of customers in the brand, leading to loyalty (Liu *et al.*, 2011).

Tran *et al.* (2016) state that several factors influence the young Vietnamese generation in online shopping decisions. 'Convenience perception,' 'product awareness,' and 'price expectations' are three critical factors among them to be fundamental dimensions for customer service. According to Masen (1974), 'price expectation' means the product quality adapting the consumers' desires at the price offer. Here, 'price expectation' in online channels is normally lower than in offline channels. All factors determine satisfaction (Zeithmal and Bitner, 2000, cited in Liu *et al.*, 2011). Also, all of them play important roles in a business' strategy to grow, especially a start-up company in the eCommerce industry or a business strategy in social commerce (Tran *et al.*, 2016).

Regarding 'convenience perception', Seiders *et al.* (2000) state that retailers' value would increase through the improvement of saving customers' time and energy. In other words, Duarte *et al.* (2018) cited that *retail convenience can be defined as consumers' time and effort costs associated with shopping in a retail environment*. Customers choose online shopping because they save time and effort when they have not enough time to wait at physical stores (Kumar and Kashyap, 2018). For online customers, 'the characteristics of speed and ease' (Seiders *et al.*, 2000) are the critical factors that support them in the online purchasing process (Jiang *et al.*, 2013). Also, delivery service is one of the convenience perceptions that customers are concerned about as the priority factor of decision-making in emerging markets (Coşar, 2017).

Then, product awareness defines *a set of interests, values, characteristics, distinction, and aesthesia which gives consumers emotion, feeling, and amusement and interests other people* (Ajen, 1985, cited in Tran *et al.*, 2016). From the definition, product quality belongs to product awareness to enhance customer satisfaction that meets the customers' requirements at different times (Suchánek *et al.*, 2015). However, according to Steenkamp (1990), the perceived quality of products would differ for each customer based on the clues. Thus, these clues are elicited during the checking of products' quality.

2.4.3. Barriers for online shopping

According to Lee and Tan (2003), the perceived risks in online shopping are higher in customers' minds compared to offline shopping. Besides similar risks, online customers in different cultures determine several specific barriers created from their society and cultures (Ko *et al.*, 2013). These factors influence their shopping attitudes to re-purchase or purchase intention (Chen *et al.*, 2010; Lobb *et al.*, 2007).

Forsythe and Shi (2003) mentioned several perceived risks cited from previous studies: financial, social, product performance, psychological, physical, and time/convenient loss. In the present research, product performance and time loss are two barriers related to most online Vietnamese customers' concerns (Deloitte, 2019).

Horton (1976) states that product performance risk is unsatisfied customers' expectations about a quality product or brand's performance. According to Masoud (2013), the lack of judgment of physical goods on the online channel is the cause of product risk, and the customers just decide to buy through passive information. That means their shopping experience is determined to be bad or good when they receive goods. Therefore, it would negatively affect customer purchase intention (Dai *et al.*, 2014; Cemberici, Civelek, and Sözer, 2013).

Then, Masoud (2013) determines time risk to be an inconvenient consequence. In other words, the customer has to wait, such as accepted orders of sellers, delivery period, and even delayed delivery. Furthermore, Claudia (2012) figures out that delivery time risk could harmfully affect product performance, especially quality. Thus, the online shopping barriers would use two perceived risks as a backbone to figure out in this study.

2.4.4 Brand awareness in online channels

According to Nartea *et al.* (2019), online shopping plays an important role in sales and marketing transactions. Based on the popularity of the internet and technology, consumers, especially Gen Z and Millennials, prefer to change the shopping channels from traditional trades to digital channels. Therefore, those businesses use social media and eCommerce platforms to introduce their products as the new strategy in the digital era to expand their market share (Nartea *et al.*, 2019). In other words, online channels are a powerful marketing tool to contribute the increasing brand awareness in customers' minds.

The value of one product or service for customers' perception would be determined through the marketing activities (Holbrook, 1994, cited in Hwang and Griffiths, 2017). In detail, the price and the quality of that product or service are suggested by these activities to be values that customers want to perceive (Zeithaml, 1988, cited in Hwang and Griffiths, 2017).

Brand awareness is one of the key elements to create value for a brand, then help build consumers' knowledge about this brand (Ekhveh and Darvishi, 2015, cited in Chinomona and Maziriri, 2017). Also, Chinomona and Maziriri (2017) state that brand awareness and product quality directly influence brand loyalty in the positive perception, leading to higher purchase and re-purchase.

According to Aaker (2005, cited in Mai and Vu, 2015), brand awareness defines that the customers identify the brand and product/service through the marketing communication methods and unaltered competitive advantages in the market. Besides, marketing communication is the "voice" of one company that makes dialogue and creates relationships with consumers to inform, persuade and remind them directly and indirectly (Tritama and Tarigan, 2016).

Through the effect of the popular internet, online channels, including social media platforms, are the critical marketing communication ways for a company. Tritama and Tarigan (2016) figure out that brand awareness of one product has a significant impact on social media and the improvement of the product's attraction on there. In other words, the aim of increasing brand awareness, especially launching new

products or introducing new companies, towards online channels (typically social media) is the critical strategy.

In addition, during the world pandemic, more than 40% of the consumers globally spent more time being available on social media and messaging services (Watson, 2020). For instance, the market share of eCommerce in total retail in England rose significantly in 2020 as shown in figure 9 (OECD, 2020). In other words, to utilise the pandemic background, the online shopping model has a positive opportunity to reach and provide the service to more customers.

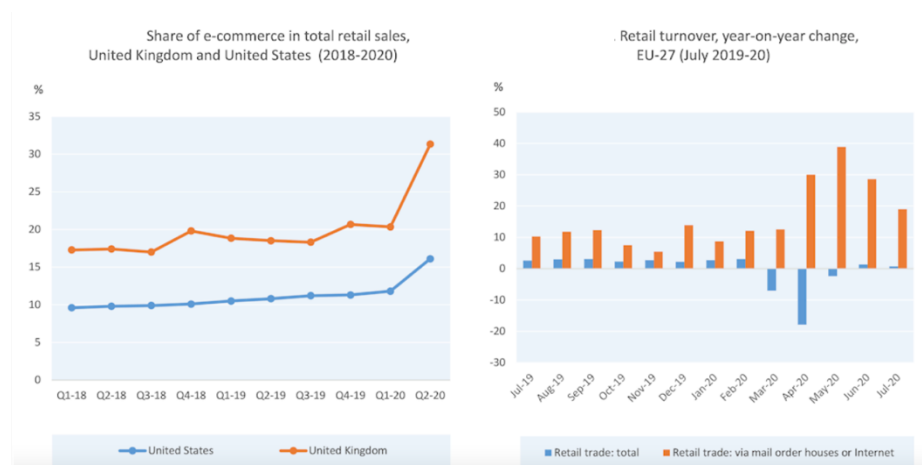


Figure 9. The situation of eCommerce during Covid 19 in UK and US
Source: OECD 2020

2.5. The buyer group: Gen Z and Millennials in Vietnam

The understanding of shopping behaviors and attitudes in different consumer groups is a vital point for organisations’ development. In this way, these companies would have competitive advantages in the market rather than opponents because they directly provide the customers’ demands (Leonard, 2018, cited in Nguyen, 2019).

Then, for different age groups, the customers would have a different lifestyle based on their formative experiences in society. The social researcher called that generational cohort as a tool of analysing the changes in perspectives over time (Dimock, 2019). For example, TV and newspapers were the main channels to update the news and entertainment in the past. However, with the development of technology and the internet, social media is a popular and favourite way for the young generation to get news updates and experience new entertainment like watching an online movie on the YouTube platform.

At present, the focus buyers are Millennials and Gen Z (Nielsen, 2017). In Deloitte (2021), Millennials are defined as people born from January 1983 to December 1994, and Gen Z who have a birthday from January 1995 to December 2005. As Dimock (2019) of the Pew Research Center states, people who were born between 1981 and 1996 are named Millennial, and the period from 1997 to 2012 are the birth years of Gen Z.

In addition, Gourani (2019) mentioned Millennials were born from 1981 to 1994, and Gen Z is implied by people born in the period from 1995 to 2000. Besides, Millennial and Gen Z are the leading workforces in the 21st century in the world (Gourani, 2019), and the main consumer groups in the market. Therefore, Millennials and Gen Z are the target group that are examined for this dissertation.

For each generation, the ways of consumption are different based on their current lives. According to a report of McKinsey & Company (2018), they indicated the context, behavior and consumption for each generation based on their characteristics and living environments. In general, both generations frequently use the internet in their daily lives. It significantly impacted their behaviors, perspectives, lifestyles. However, the level of influence of the internet on Gen Z's lives is higher than Millennials because they are seen as digital natives and all things surrounding them related to the internet. For example, they pay more attention on social communities and spend a lot of time on social media like Facebook and Instagram.

In fact, Millennials and Gen Z have similar characteristics in many aspects. Firstly, Dimock (2019) states that both of them are skillful in using websites and mobile media. Then, they have similar perspectives about social issues (Parker *et al.*, 2019). Lastly, they are aware of the environmental and political problems around them (McCrindle, 2014 cited in Kim and Austin, 2019). With these characteristics, corporate social responsibility impacts both generations in the evaluation of companies (Kim and Austin, 2019) to contribute to the customers' trust (Ha and Azmat, 2013) and increase brand awareness (Chirimubwe, 2015).

Regarding the population in Vietnam, more than 45% of total residents are 25 – 54 years old. At present, the workforce and consumer market are mainly Gen X and Millennials. However, Gen Z, who took around 30% of the population, combined

with Millennials, will be the main future workforce and consumer market (Nguyen, 2020). Like the rest of the world, Gen Z and Millennials in Vietnam are also influenced by the internet and social media (Nielsen, 2017).

According to Nielsen (2017), the Millennials in Vietnam had to face the problem named 'Cash-rich, Time-poor'; Gen Z will also face this problem in the future when they become active in the workforce. To differ from older generations like their parents, they are busier in working. On average, they work approximately nine hours per day, leading to more stress in offices and factories. Moreover, unlike in the past, the Vietnamese average household size slightly decreased yearly from 4.59 people in 2000 to an estimated 3.5 people in 2020. In contrast, the longer working time led to a higher income, combined with smaller household size. Thus, Vietnamese households' average wage per month was dramatically increased yearly, from less than 50 US dollars in 2000 to nearly 300 US dollars in 2020.

Based on this data, young adults in Vietnam are richer than the older generation, but the busier life generates a new lifestyle. Meanwhile, they need to find the 'convenient' solution to support their life more comfortably. Then, combined with the development of the internet, eCommerce is a potential option for them besides modern retail trade (convenience stores, mini supermarkets, or supermarkets).

Chapter 3. Methodology

As discussed in chapter 1, chapter 3 explains the method, technique, and procedure to collect and analyse data, then give the research question. The selected research method is vital in determining a good process to reach good findings and trusted conclusions.

Primary and secondary research methods are two main techniques that assist in creating a valuable study. The secondary research method is based on previous academic papers and reliable resources to provide essential knowledge and information. In addition, this method uses as an examination for the topic of study. That means the researcher could evaluate *the quality and appropriateness of information* before analysing (Steward and Kamins, 1993).

Then, to decide the type of primary research method, the research onion of Saunders *et al.* (2019) is an effective concept to explain the reasons and create the research design. The research onion layer has six main layers: *philosophy, approach to theory development, methodological choice, strategy, time horizon, techniques, and procedures.*

3.1. Philosophy

According to Saunders *et al.* (2019), research philosophy determines *a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge.* That means the researcher significantly defines which types of assumptions are in the study (Burrell and Morgan, 2016, cited in Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Three common assumptions mentioned are:

- *Ontological assumptions* (nature of reality).
- *Epistemological assumptions* (knowledge).
- *Axiological assumptions* (roles of values and ethics).

The author could deeply understand the study by defining these assumptions. This step is fundamental to define the *best* research philosophy that directly influences the research strategy and design to achieve the critical findings in the end (Crotty, 1998; Johnson and Clark, 2016, cited by Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Hence, the research outline would reach coherence and cohesion.

Then, Saunders *et al.* (2019) determine five philosophies based on the analysis of three assumptions. Firstly, *positivism* seeks and describes the principal collection characterised

by natural science. *Secondly, critical realism* attends to describe the structures of reality through human experiences and assume the observable events (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Besides, this philosophy expresses as a question or assuming instead of proving (Bhaskar *et al.*, 1998) and cannot suggest a *right answer* among other philosophies (Easton, 2010).

Then, the third philosophy is *interpretivism*, which indicates the meaningful nature of human character and participation in social and cultural life (Elster, 2007 and Walsham, 1995, cited in Chowdhury, 2014). In other words, *to create new, in-depth understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts* is the purpose of this research philosophy (Saunders *et al.*, 2019, p.149). This type is good for a study related to human perspectives in different groups.

Postmodernism is the fourth research philosophy. Saunders *et al.* (2019, p.149) define the role of *language and power relations*, find the issues obtained ways of thinking, and uses voice to *alternative marginalised views*. Lastly, *pragmatism* is identified by Kelemen and Rumens (2008, cited in Saunders *et al.*, 2019) that *concepts are only relevant where they support action*. That means seeking practical solutions to the beginning problems, then informing them for future practices (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Therefore, *interpretivism* is the best research philosophy because this study aimed to seek the human perspectives in customers and business sides. In addition, Saunders *et al.* (2019) suggest the common methods applied for this research philosophy: *inductive, small samples, and qualitative analysis methods*.

3.2. Approach to theory development

In the research onion, Saunders *et al.* (2019) determine three main approaches as (1) *Deductive approach*. This one suits any research that examines the theory; (2) *Inductive approach*. This tends to discover a phenomenon by collecting data initially and generating these data into valuable conclusions and findings; (3) *Abductive approach*. This approach is used for creating new theory or modifying existing theory by collecting data, determining themes, and explaining samples or models. Therefore, the inductive approach is selected to design a research strategy based on the chosen research philosophy – *interpretivism* and the project's purpose.

3.3. Methodological choice

This section is the third layer in the research onion of Saunders *et al.* (2019). They state three methodologies to achieve the data collection in research

design: qualitative research, quantitative, and mixed methods. According to Myer and Avison (2002), *quantitative research methods were originally developed in the natural sciences to study natural phenomena*. Furthermore, numeric data (numbers) plays a vital role in providing a reliable conclusion through data collection techniques (like questionnaires, experiments) or data analysis procedures such as graphs, statistics (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

In contrast, *qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena* (Myer and Avison, 2002). Moreover, Hussey (1997) states that *qualitative research is a subjective approach* to test and follow the concerns and then understand social and human activities. The technique of data collection, like an interview and or the data analysis procedure, is aimed at seeking the critical findings towards non-numerical data (words, images, and others) (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Then, mixed methods combine the two above research methods, which is good for pragmatism and critical realism (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). However, the interpretivism philosophy was selected in the last part. Moreover, Saunders *et al.* (2019,) and Greence (1994) state to use qualitative research method for this philosophy to explore the meaningful nature of human actors through contexts. Considering the research objectives of this study, the qualitative research method is the methodological choice.

3.4. Strategy

For the strategy layer, because of the selected qualitative research method, Saunders *et al.* (2019, p.180) suggest several suitable strategies: *action research, case study research, ethnography, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry*. Besides, Greene (1994) states that for the *interpretivism* research philosophy, the purpose is to understand human and society's views. Therefore, a case study with the interview is crucial in qualitative research design (Greene, 1994).

According to Yin (2018, cited in Saunders *et al.*, 2019, p.196), *a case study is an in-depth inquiry into a topic or phenomenon within its real-life setting*. Besides, case study research aims to interpret the matters in social sciences with a small budget (Feagin *et al.*, 1991). Then, for a single social phenomenon lasting a long time, case

study research allows the researcher to analyse the action of society with the most completed views (Feagin *et al.*, 1991). For example, online shopping is a modern trend in the world. Customers had their online shopping experiences for a long time with eCommerce platforms, and they would have valuable reviews of their services in positive and negative views.

Then, Yin (2003) states that the author should define three main types of case study research before applying such as: (1) *Exploratory* case study is seeking the questions and hypotheses of the subsequent study, or identifying the feasibility in a desirable question; (2) *Descriptive* case study is a presentation by context for a full description of a phenomenon; (3) *Explanatory* case study aims to explain how the events occurred. The study's objectives would be useful in the determination of types, thus, to combine with the research's purpose, choosing which research technique would be good for data collection and analysis.

As mentioned above, this study aimed to explore the personal views of online markets for food purchased from both customers and business sides and the author intended to observe the answers based on the real online shopping experience through non-numeric data. Thus, the qualitative research method was selected as above, and the interview was the technique that supports to gain in-depth understanding. The interview technique has three basic kinds (structured, semi-structured, and unstructured forms), and each would shape each type of case study research.

According to Saunders *et al.* (2019), exploratory research figures out what is happening and understanding the context, in-depth and semi-structured interviews are the most useful techniques. The face-to-face interview model is a positive opportunity to build rapport between the interviewer and respondent to inspire the open discussion and conduct the data in rich and free bias (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

For a semi-structured interview, the interview would follow the questions prepared that determine the themes and discuss more widely and details on this topic (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). This interview develops to explore the existent phenomenon conducted by previous researchers (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). To contract, in-depth interview that belongs to unstructured form. It has no guidelines, themes, or questions that define the *preparation* stage (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Instead, it looks

like the conversation to freely share opinions about an interesting topic through behaviors, experience, and beliefs, applying for many different purposes (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

To sum up, the project's research strategy defined a case study strategy with a semi-structured interview as a technique that satisfied the research's purpose.

3.5. Time horizon

Saunders *et al.* (2019) state that this layer estimates the research's duration and is an important question to make a critical plan. It divides into two types: (1) *Cross-sectional study* is finding a description of an existent phenomenon or explaining the relevant factors in different organizations; this time horizon frequently applies to academic research; (2) *Longitudinal study* is known as a *diary perspective*. It focuses on studying change and development by comparing the repeated data collection for a long time (Melnikovas, 2018).

This project tended to be a dissertation for a master's degree and have a particular deadline. Also, the research's objectives were to examine the customer awareness and business concern about food products purchased on online channels through a face-to-face interview. Therefore, a *cross-sectional study* is a crucial selection.

3.6. Techniques and procedures

This part is the final layer that describes how to collect data and analyse them (Melnikovas, 2018). Based on the previous parts, the project's technique was *qualitative research* that used *semi-structured interviews* with open questions to collect data in a short period of time. These aimed to examine the customer attitudes and business perspectives, currently living in Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) as a *case study*, about food purchased through online channels.

Fossey *et al.* (2002) and Rabionet (2012) state that in research related to human experiences, qualitative research is a workable and useful tool to deeply understand the whole meanings of participants' answers. The core of qualitative research is *language, description, and interpretation, theory-building* that explores the findings of communication, interaction, the connection within the specific groups in one situation and action (Tesch, 1990 cited in Fossey *et al.* 2002). Or the adaptation of

this method explains the detail of human experiences and meanings of actions in their lives and society (Fossey *et al.* 2002).

Then, among the types of interview, a semi-structured interview is a satisfactory method to narrow down the specific topic (Rabionet, 2012). This tool aims to determine the information from interviewees and tries to avoid the risk of the non-eliciting form. This way would obtain the real experiences, feelings, and social words characterized by their views of lives in conversations (Rice and Ezzy, 1999, cited in Fossey *et al.* 2002). The author aimed to gain an exploratory study that reaches the surprised and interested information from participants by asking open questions with 'What' or 'How' (Saunders *et al.*, 2019, p.186). Thus, to obtain the answers, the open questions in the semi-structured interview are the best choice (Dohrenwend, 1965). However, to avoid the non-focused answers on the topic, the interviewers need to have the questions strategy or guide respondents (Hanneke, 1996).

In this way, the researcher can gain more in-depth and rich information from the participants in the survey (Friborg and Rosenvinge, 2013; Hanneke, 1996). Besides, Robionet (2012) and Fossey *et al.* (2002) state that the surprising information and promising findings are collected through *ensuring sensitivity to participants' language and privileging their knowledge*. Moreover, Barth and Schmitz (2021) state that social studies should apply this method to obtain data. In this way, the social research would explore the customers' insights and obtain valuable information to predict the attitudes and behaviours (Altingtzoglou *et al.* 2017; He *et al.*, 2013; Hamilton *et al.*, 2008; Millwood and Health, 2008).

In addition, when using quantitative research, the data obtained could represent the general opinions of many participants. However, the research organizations (Deloitte, Nielsen, or Statista) published their reports every year. In these papers, they contained numeric data, reviews, and predictions about the market. All of them supported the companies to identify the market trend and customer insight to build the strategy. Nonetheless, the author aimed to explore the actual perspectives and several unexpected reasons from the respondents' sharings for an individual study and qualitative research was a reasonable method to meet the author's expectations. Hence, the author hopefully figured out the concerns about the

potential opportunities on the online market for a specific industry like the food area.

In conclusion, the research procedure is described as figure 10 below:

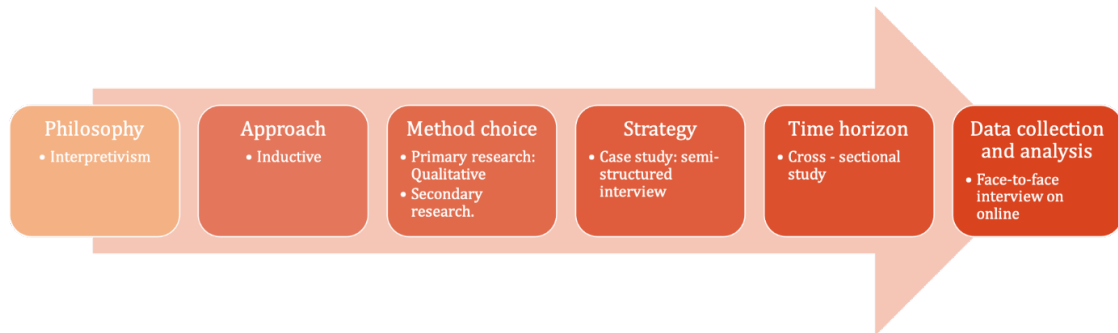


Figure 10. Research design path

3.7. Sample selection

The author chose all respondents (consumer and business sides) in Ho Chi Minh City. This city is the first metropolitan city that is equipped with full social infrastructures (Statista, 2019). As the advantages of a metropolitan city, this place provides a higher standard of living than other regions for the population. Thus, Ho Chi Minh City is a good destination for migration to develop and live within the nation. Furthermore, based on the benefits of infrastructures and rich labor resources, most companies or international groups would select this place to start their businesses. In other words, Ho Chi Minh City is the most competitive and attractive market for any company. Also, citizens have more chances to easily reach the modern trend like the rest of the world. These conditions are crucial reasons to select Ho Chi Minh City as the case study.

For the consumer side, respondents were selected from Millennials and Gen Z in the age range 18 – 35, and who lived in Ho Chi Minh City for at least two years. Therefore, the ideal group would be fifteen participants, both genders, and have shopped online at least three times within one recent year because those aged groups browsed the internet as their daily parts in working and personal reasons. In addition, the customers preferred to suffer information for promotions (at physical stores or online) and products on the internet as a part of the pre-purchased process (Deloitte, 2020). In other words, as shown in figure 11, online channels are good references for the customers to be a necessary activity in shopping behavior

(Deloitte, 2020). Therefore, from their real experiences, the participants would indicate the fact to support the conclusion of this project.

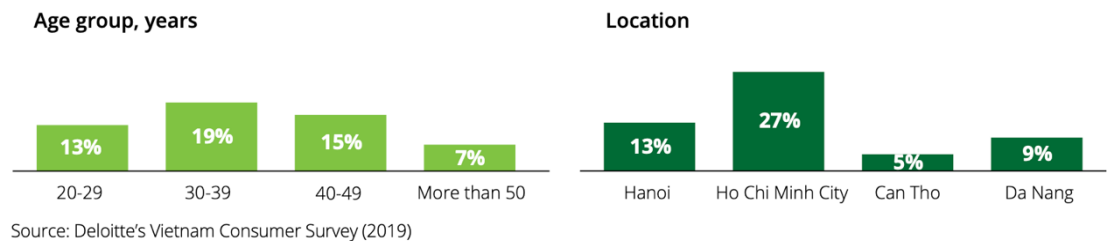


Figure 11. Consumers chose online and digital channels as references for purchasing products in Vietnam

The respondents are managers in sales and marketing departments from five different food companies for the business side. The author intended to ensure the richness of information. Among five businesses, two interviewees work in international groups, two others are in charge of local businesses, and one works for a local start-up company. As experienced people, their opinions were elicited that would be powerful and valuable sources to strongly support the conclusion (Kuhner *et al.*, 2009). In this way, the researcher aimed to obtain the important role of active online channels to support their growth and meet the consumers' needs.

Finally, *appropriateness and adequacy* are two priority concerns (Morse, 1995, cited in Fossey *et al.* 2002). Based on two considerations, the data collection would ensure the information richness (Kuzel, 1992, cited in Fossey *et al.* 2002) and contribute to this project's truthfulness.

3.8. Data collection

This study applied the semi-structured interview with open questions to obtain data. In this way, both the interview and the participants could discuss face-to-face and one-by-one. Irvine *et al.* (2012) state that a face-to-face interview enhances the truthfulness in participants' answers. The researcher should consider the absence of a visual encounter (Irvine *et al.*, 2012). Then, Novick (2008, cited in Irvine *et al.*, 2012) mentions three concerns in the absence of a visual encounter. The first concern is *the loss of nonverbal data like namely body language and facial expressions*. The second concern defines *the loss of contextual data including the participants' physical characteristics and the interview setting and the loss of verbal*

(spoken) data is the last one. Hence, these considerations imply the importance of visual signals from the researcher to inspire interviewees (Shuy, 2003, cited in Irvine *et al.*, 2012) to gain good answers.

Furthermore, the hidden messages are that respondents provide more "thoughtful" answers in the communication (Shuy, 2003, cited in Irvine *et al.*, 2012), then influence the richness quality of generating data (Irvine *et al.*, 2012). Also, the controversy of body language influences rapport and the eye contact during face-to-face communication is the important factor in estimating trust from answers (Seitz, 2015 and Petralia, 2014, cited in Lo Iacono *et al.*, 2016).

However, the problem of this research is a method of data collection for individual interviews. The two external factors are geography between the author and interviewees, Dublin City and Ho Chi Minh Chi City, and the social distance because of the world pandemic. Then, the face-to-face interview could not directly occur at any offline places. To solve this problem, internet-based methods of communication such as Skype, Facetime, or professional online meeting applications (Zoom, Google meeting, and Microsoft Teams, and others) are the best option.

According to Lo Iacono *et al.* (2016), these tools designed from Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology allow the researcher to interview participants with their real voice and video on the internet. These activities are known as asynchronous connections and the interaction between the author and the respondent is similar to an offline, face-to-face interview to provide good and useful information (Lo Iacono *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, Kozinets (2009, cited in Lo Iacono *et al.*, 2016) states that in this way, the participants' identification is verified as in a face-to-face interview.

After researching, the author chose three online meeting applications: Zoom, Google meeting, and Microsoft Teams. These are the most popular online meeting applications in the world. Many businesses and schools in many nations use them to work-from-home or study online during the world pandemic. Besides, these applications provide effective functions, for example, video recording and saving automatically, automatic subtitles in Microsoft Teams. All of them supported the researcher well in the gathering of data.

Therefore, to collect data, the online interviews were conducted one-by-one for two months (April to June 2021). First, the authors contacted the respondents through relatives that met the requirements of this project. Then, before arranging and doing an interview, all information (objective of the study, consent form, procedure, time, and place) was clearly explained to respondents. Besides, to keep the report data, the author asked for their allowances to record video and audio by online meeting applications. Also, the interview committed to them that all records were kept on a personal laptop, and no one could access it unless having their agreement.

For the interview, because all respondents live in Ho Chi Minh City, the author arranged online meetings following their free time and the Vietnam time zone. Each interview would last around 15 to 20 mins as outlined in Appendix [number] for the consumer side and Appendix [number] for the business side. The interview strategy would generally follow five phases (Robson, 2011 cited in Alsaawi, 2014):

1. *Introduction*: to introduce between both sides and the interview's purpose.
2. *Warm-up*: to begin the general and easy questions to create a comfortable environment.
3. *Main body*: to ask questions focusing on the study.
4. *Cool-off*: to move the simple questions to conclude the interview.
5. *Closure*: to give the thankful and appropriate the respondents' contribution.

From that, the author would seek the hidden issues that affected the online market's customer awareness and business concerns.

In addition, as Vietnamese language is the mother tongue of participants, the main language used in the conversation was Vietnamese. In this language, the respondents felt confident to share all their thoughts and experiences. On the other hand, if the author requested to interview in English, this study would face difficulty recruiting respondents and gaining non-real answers because of language presentation. Then, the author would translate all scripts of the interview from Vietnamese to English. Also, to ensure the translated scripts were more objective and reliable, an English translator, a Vietnamese person who has experience for more than five years, would confirm again. In the end, after finishing all steps, the author would start to write a report.

3.9. Ethical consideration

The ethical consideration of this project would be designed based on the study of Gesa Kirsch (cited in Plummer, 2001), and Garcia *et al.* (2009), and Buchanan and Zimmer (2012, cited in Lo lacono *et al.*, 2016). All participants would inform and fill the consent form before arranging the interview time. All personal information of respondents would be confidential. In the case of the respondents' withdrawing, the author committed to allowing them without any negative repercussions and at any time as Appendix I.

Besides, all information, including data and personal details, was stored in the private laptop of the author with the password to avoid online hackers. Also, during invitation time, the participants would be explained to understand the purpose of this study deeply and use data collection to ensure the suitable interviewees and gain the entirely voluntary agreement.

Moreover, the method of data collection was designed based on online communication. All online meetings would be sent with a password. Then the participant would be allowed to access this meeting through the host's approval. This way could protect privacy and confidentiality for both sides.

3.10. Data analysis

The data analysis of this research were designed based on the model formulated by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). They describe five modalities to display and analyse qualitative research data: *exploring, describing, ordering, explaining, and predicting*. With these modalities, the author would generate raw data to findings and useful conclusions for one study, and translated from Vietnamese to English.

In-depth, the process of data analysis defines six critical steps: taking notes by handwriting and recording (audio and video); identification of themes; estimation category; creating a logic chain; building an analytical framework; presenting the data (Miles *et al.*, 2014). With this process, the author could understand the general meanings of respondents' answers like the qualitative analysis.

Besides, this research has only one method of data collection to be a face-to-face interview through the internet. The recording is the important step to transcribe the

data from voice to word. This one should proceed carefully with the high correction because it directly impacts the conclusion and valuation of the study.

Therefore, data analysis would be described as a short brief. All data collection was summarized and separated into two vital points: *business perspective* and *consumer awareness*. First, from the answers of respondents being consumers, the author figured out several common points and divided them into two smaller groups: *benefits* and *barriers*. Also, the most common opinion from the business group was *purpose - brand awareness*. Then, depending on participants' quotes, the author generated their shares into valuable statements that proved the key points to be meaningful. Lastly, the conclusion sought the current overviews of business and customers about online food purchased in the Vietnam market.

3.11. Research questions

For this project, there are two main questions designed based on the objective as below:

- As customer awareness, how does food buying on the internet support their life?
- To figure out the businesses' perspectives about Vietnam's online and digital channels and examine how they match customers' requirements.

Chapter 4. Data analysis and findings

Chapter 4 is an important section that summarizes all data collected from participants via online meeting applications (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google meeting). The author analysed the information, then combined it with other academic literature to gain critical connections. Lastly, the valuable findings of this topic are the final destination.

4.1. Overview

- Summary of consumers' interviews

All respondents live in Ho Chi Minh City for at least two years and are aged from 18 to 35 years old with the experience used online shopping service. And they also had to order food products through digital platforms at least twice. From that they could share their subjective opinions about online food purchased.

From the respondents' answers, the author summarized basic information (age and career) in Table 1. This table gives an overview of customers' attitudes and behaviors in purchasing online food products.

Table 1. Data summary of interviewees being consumers

No	Age	Career	Online shopping			Preferring channels for purchasing food products
			Order online non-food products (Yes/No)	Purchased food product (Yes/No)	Digital channels of food purchased and device	
1	33	Graphic designer	Yes, frequently	Yes, often	eCommerce Mobile application	Offline
2	27	Bussiness owner	Yes, often	Yes, rarely	Facebook Mobile application	Offline
3	28	Customer service coordinator	Yes, often	Yes, rarely	Facebook Mobile application	Offline
4	21	University student	Yes, frequently	Yes, often	Store website Mobile application	Offline
5	24	Japanese teacher	Yes but not prefer	No just using food delivery	None Mobile	Offline
6	27	Technical consultant	Yes, often	Yes, frequently	Official store website Laptop	Offline, and online

7	33	Engineering consultant	Yes, often	Yes, only once time	Official store website Mobile, and laptop (sometimes)	Offline
8	20	University student	Yes, frequently	Yes, often	eCommerce and Facebook Mobile	Offline
9	26	Officer	Yes, frequently	Yes, often for trying new ones as YouTuber's reviews	eCommerce Mobile	Offline
10	29	Senior marketing executives	Yes, frequently	Yes, rarely	eCommerce Laptop	Offline as a weekend entertainment
11	27	R&D executive of confectionary company	Yes, often	Yes but only once because that product can't find in offline channels	Facebook Mobile	Offline
12	28	IT consultant	Yes, often	Yes, often	Official store website, Facebook, Zalo Mobile	Offline
13	26	Officer	Yes, often	Yes, sometimes	Official store website Mobile	Offline, and online when busy
14	21	University student	Yes, frequently	Yes but only two times with bad experiences	eCommerce, Facebook Mobile and tablet	Offline
15	28	Researcher	Yes, frequently	Yes, often	Official store website Mobile	Offline, and online when busy
16	25	Senior R&D executive	Yes, sometimes	Yes, sometimes	eCommerce Mobile and laptop	Offline
17	25	Evaluation specialist	Yes, frequently	Yes, often	eCommerce Mobile and tablet	Offline

- Summary of businessmen' interview

All participants have worked in food companies for more than two years, and their head offices are in Ho Chi Minh City. To gain professional opinions, respondents are in management positions in the Sales or Marketing Department in the organization.

Like Table 1, the author created Table 2 to mention the general information that includes company type, food products, online channels, and duration entering online channels.

Table 2. Data summary of industry respondents

No	Position	Company name and type	Food category in online channels	Online channels	Duration of activation on online channels
A	Key account manager	Huong Thuy Manufacture Service Trading Corporation – Local distribution business	Baby milk formula powder, confectionary and cooking sauces	eCommerces: Shopee, Lazada, Tiki	6 years
B	Sales manager	Vietnam Vitadairy Milk Joint Stock Company – Local manufacture	Baby milk formula powder	eCommerces: Shopee, Lazada, Tiki	3 years
C	Sales manager	Glico Vietnam Co. Ltd – International group	Confectionary	eCommerces: Shopee, Lazada, Tiki	2 years
D	Brand manager	HiFarm – Start-up agriculture and service company	Fresh vegetable and fruit	Social commerce: website and Facebook	2 years
E	Sales manager	Aptamil Vietnam – International group	Baby milk formula powder	eCommerces: Shopee, Lazada, Tiki	4 years

4.2. Findings

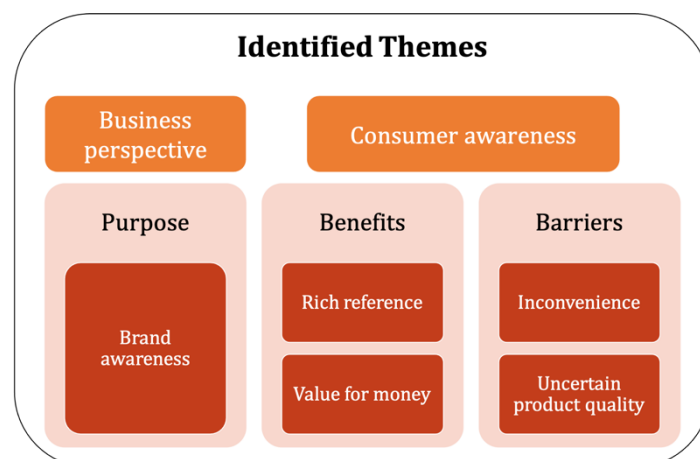


Figure 22. Identified themes

Figure 12 illustrates the overview of findings for this research. It is divided into two main parts: consumer awareness and business awareness about purchasing and

selling food products on online channels in the Vietnam market. For consumers' views, *benefits* and *barriers* were two key points in their awareness. The *purpose* was the main element that the author figured out from the participants' answers about the businesses side.

4.2.1. Consumer awareness

During interviews with consumer respondents, the author recognized that the online customer would examine the satisfaction based on the shopping experience. And it would compare with offline shopping (retail stores and wet markets). In other words, the offline shopping experiences were the ideal standards to evaluate the online shopping experiences. That attitudes came from the long-term shopping behaviors and the strong development of retail chains in the Vietnam market.

4.2.1.1. Benefits

From Table 1, although the priority choice of buying food products was in retail stores and wet markets, the respondents identified two essentially positive effects when ordering on online channels. These *benefits* were *the rich references* and *the value for money* that helpfully influenced their decision-making.

- The rich references

The rich references defined two crucial roles: the various selections and the useful tools of comparison. These are resulted from online shopping experiences for other categories, such as electronics, fashions, cosmetics, and others. In addition, two of them developed from the basic benefit of the internet: saving time and convenience.

Several respondents stated that searching on the internet was the priority step. This activity especially applies to new or strange food products. They usually use digital devices (like a smartphone) connected Internet to serve their daily life such as working, communicating. Therefore, the customers would easily reach the stores that sell their necessary products with full information (prices, instruments of use, professional recommendation for use, and others) on the internet. Besides, online users could find the food products that they were unable to buy on offline channels. For example, respondent no. 6 said:

I order processed meat like ham and cheese at a local website named King Meat [a local supermarket] for an average of twice per month, depended on

my demand. These kinds of food products don't appear at supermarkets and have a good deal of price.

Then, based on the results on the Internet, the participants preferred to compare the stores, for example, the feedback and the gap of price for products. Unlike retails or wet markets, the customers could not check the physical products directly. The sight was the only sense that they could use when choosing products on online channels. However, for food products related directly to human health, one sense would not be strong enough to persuade customers to order it.

For the above reasons, the good tool that convinced new customers is reviews of previous consumers. In addition, the customers could consider the prices between many online shops simultaneously. Then, they decided which one had good deals (price and promotion). Thus, these comparisons held up the customers to get an overview of the food products that matched their needs. For example, respondent no. 1 commented that "*Online channels are a good reference for me that help me to find the stores to buy necessary food products.*"

Taking time of transportation between shops was the first problem if they had no idea about the place of purchasing. Furthermore, for new products, they had no experience of using before, they needed to spend the amount of money and a period to examine by themselves that food products were suitable or not. Hence, *the rich references* were the differential point to distinguish with offline shopping.

- Value for money

From the comparison of price in *the rich references* part, the respondents shared the second necessary effect when using online shopping is *the value for money*. The respondents stated that online shops always had lower prices and attractive promotions. However, delivery cost is sometimes an unexpected issue. For example, because of customers' location, the delivery cost is higher than total value of order. Therefore, the interviewees preferred to choose online platforms that offer more promotions related to shipping fees to solve this issue. Shopee, a famous eCommerce platform in Vietnam, was the first place in their mind about the free charge delivery fee or online discount coupon of shipping fee. These activities were competitive

strategies of eCommerce or online channels to encourage consumers to switch from buying at retails. For example, respondent no. 8 quoted as below:

Sometimes, I would find and add more snacks to the current order of non-food products to gain the standard free delivery on Shopee.

However, for food products, the quality of them was the priority influence to purchase. Thus, *the value for money* determined the combination of satisfying quality and price, not only discount promotion on price or free delivery.

Finally, the *benefits* illustrated that Vietnamese customers awarded the positive effects of online shopping in buying food products. They identified the competitive advantages between online and offline shopping models and used them to support their purchasing process actively and effectively in the digital era.

4.2.1.2. Barriers

Besides the benefits that supported daily lives to be more convenient, Vietnamese consumers faced several limitations when purchasing food products on online channels. For this research, the author figured out two common *barriers* that the respondents frequently consider to select between offline and online channels to buy food products. These *barriers* determined *inconveniences* and *uncertain product quality*.

- Inconveniences

Most customers choose online shopping to hold up their lives in more comfortable ways, especially saving time. The customers could order their basic necessities and receive the purchased products via delivery during working or busy periods. Besides several items that the consumers could not buy in offline markets or the near places, online shopping was an effective option as the above benefits. For instance, respondent no.13 quoted as below:

When I got deadlines and had no time to go to stores to buy necessary products like foods, I would use GrabMart (a delivery service that cooperated with retails). It's convenient and helps me to save time in a busy period.

However, most respondents shared that during online shopping, they faced several unwanted problems. The priority issue was the waiting time for delivery. For example, this is respondent no.2 quoted as below:

Delivery time is the important factor in never ordering fresh food and limiting buying food products in online channels. Because for fresh food like seafood or meat, I assume the seller would use preservative methods to avoid spoilage. These additives are not good for health. Besides, I can go to any physical store to buy them immediately instead of waiting many hours for shipping.

The feature Vietnamese market to be retail and wet markets [ref] were the critical reason for the above point. According to report of Statista in 2020, the total number of physical stores (modern trade channels and traditional channels) was more than seven hundred thousand nationwide (Nguyen, 2021).

The important point was these physical stores' locations could be reached within a short time. Some of them like convenience stores that opened 24/7 to serve the consumers' demands. It could support convenient features to retails in Vietnam (Maruyama and Le, 2009; Dam, 2020). In addition, to increase the competitive advantages, these shops provided various categories and food products such as instant noodles, canned foods, fresh food ingredients (vegetables, fruits), and others. As a result, the consumers bought their needs within a moment and at any time. And they were no extra cost like a delivery fee. These crucial points were powerful explanations for why most participants preferred offline channels in the food purchasing processes.

Moreover, the affect quality in products, especially fresh food ingredients like seafood, vegetables, and others, was a vital consideration during delivery time. As respondent no.2 mentioned, the sellers needed to use a specific method like adding preservatives to protect products from spoilage factors (harmful bacteria, sunlight, and others). Moreover, because food categories were the basic necessities daily, they directly influenced their health to lead their lives. Thus, the consumers desired to ensure the quality of food products when getting them. It is a vital factor that consumers frequently choose retails to buy food products (Vu *et al.*, 2010).

Vietnam has tropical weather with high humidity and hot temperature. And motorbikes are the major vehicles to transport nationwide, and these transportations apply for delivery service in online shopping. Besides, the delivery businesses did not equip the good tools of carrying for shippers. Normally, the delivery men used big plastic baskets and plastic bags to deliver many orders

simultaneously, and this period lasted many hours before the customers received their purchase. With these external factors, both sides minimized the easy spoilage of food products in orders as much as possible.

To sum up, online shops faced competitive disadvantages rather than offline channels. However, besides the benefits that supported daily lives to be more convenient, Vietnamese consumers faced several limitations when purchasing food products on online channels.

- The uncertain product quality

The uncertain product quality was another barrier that respondents were concerned about between online shopping and offline shopping. The quality determined several standards for food products: name of manufacture, appearances for package and products (fresh foods), expired date. For offline shopping, the customers would be checked and selected these standards by themselves in a playful way to make them feel safe when using these products. However, the customers could not do this activity when ordering on online channels. All information of products and feedback from previous consumers would passively inform them. In other words, these things were the risks that the customers needed to accept for online shopping.

Because of this limitation, several respondents stated that they would order food products on online channels if they had a good relationship with the sellers. That meant they got an acceptable level of trust in those online shops. In other cases, another interviewee shared to order online food products in a local brand because of having a good shopping experience and truthfulness on that service and quality of food product. In this way, the participants as consumers could protect their benefits (good service, high quality of product, safe feeling of consuming) when using online shopping service for buying food items. For instance, respondents quoted as below:

I bought food products on the King Meat website (a local brand), and the day after, I gained my order. For me, their service is good, and their shippers always preserve the food products in the cool bag during delivery. So, I strongly believe in their product quality and am happy with their service. – Respondent no.6

Normally, I would order food products as a snack from my relatives. Because I knew them, so I can believe their product quality. – Respondent no.7

In addition, the lack of an official law is an external factor that the Vietnamese consumers have no high trust about the quality of food products on digital channels. In reality, the Vietnamese government is processing to build up an official regulation for online shopping to all categories, not only food areas. However, the eCommerce platforms (Tiki, Lazada, Shopee) required their food suppliers to provide the declarations approved by ministrations before selling. This way would improve and increase the trust and satisfaction of customers at a sufficient level to deal with the risks and decide to try or buy.

To sum up, the *barriers* of respondents when ordering food products on online channels related to customer attitudes and behaviours. Two of them resulted from comparing online shopping and offline shopping experiences, then combined with other external elements (service and regulation). These limitations would be the most difficult for businesses aiming to expand market share on the online market in the future.

4.2.2. Business perspective

For this section, the author figured out the occurred target of businesses on the online market. Then examining how their purpose matched the online customers' needs in purchasing food products. After summarizing all answers, the author identified the main purpose of food companies on online channels: brand *awareness*. This objective consisted with the *rich references* in the *benefits of customer awareness*. That means companies introduce all information (products, sales channels, price) to purchase intention.

In general, all companies joined the Vietnam online market for at least two years. The first point obtained that the total sales performance of online was tiny in total profit. Then, the businesses agreed to invest more than the profit gained on online channels, such as investment, digital advertising (Facebook ads, Google ads), and promotion. Respondent B quoted as below:

Evenly we joined the online market to sell our products in 2017. But, unfortunately, the sales performance just presented only 5% in total of modern

trade. So, if comparing the total investment budget, the revenue could not cover, and of course, we have to take the revenue from offline distribution to pay.

Besides, they mentioned that Vietnam's online market was in the infant stage and had a potential market with significant growth in recent years. However, with the popularity of retail stores and wet markets, the offline channels emphasized an important role in the businesses' revenue. Therefore, at this time, gaining profits on online channels is very difficult.

Toward the internet, the business introduced and expressed their presents on the market. Then, they reached the target audiences toward digital tools like search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM). For instance, respondent C quoted:

For us, eCommerce is known as a marketing tool to increase brand awareness in the infancy stage. But the Vietnam eCommerce is growing quite fast, and we hope in the future, the market share of eCommerce will be large in total revenue like other Asian countries. The important note I want to mention is the famous of our products in other Asian countries. For example, the confectionery products of Glico were presented and were famous in Thailand or Singapore for almost ten years. Therefore, customers would readily order when we sold on eCommerce because they know our brand and believe our quality. In contrast, our products are new in Vietnam and not famous enough to convince them to select. That is the difference.

Besides, for consumers, reading feedback and buying through relatives prefer to choose but not the only choice. Several customers readily try the new shopping experience with new online shops that have good recommendations. In addition, social commerce (website for selling directly between company and consumers, and social media platforms like Facebook) were suitable for food businesses to examine the customer shopping experience by themselves.

HiFarm is the only business in this project that activates only on social commerce. The major reason is their products that are fresh fruit and vegetable. To ensure good product quality standards, this company operated an online business by itself. They

offered and introduced their products and services (information of products, prices, promotions, delivery, and post-purchase service) to customers toward social commerce. Providing a good online shopping experience is the key strategy to persuade and convince customers. However, the revenue of this channel is not as expected as modern retails. In this way, HiFarm would recruit more new consumers via the current customers' networks. That meant HiFarm utilized the eWOM of social commerce to improve customers' trust and increase brand awareness (Sulthana and Vasantha, 2019).

Therefore, brand awareness is the priority target in this infancy stage. Besides, the crucial reason chose eCommerce, or social commerce, was based on food products to sell. From that, the business could satisfy the customer shopping experience and increase their awareness about the products.

Chapter 5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Discussion

In general, Vietnamese consumers would purchase food products in offline channels to be the priority preference. Besides, this activity is a part of social culture in Vietnam (Evangelista *et al.*, 2019) and is a long-term shopping behavior. Moreover, the significant development of modern and traditional trade channels continuously supports this customer behavior in more convenient ways. For example, the locations of stores are in the residents' areas or nearby, and these shops are willing to serve customers 24/7 like convenience stores with various items.

According to Weisberg *et al.* (2011), they point out that the personal online purchase experience plays a vital factor in influenced buying attitudes and intentions. The online customer awareness determined two main sectors in their awareness: *benefits* and *barriers* based on the Internet shopping experience. Also, the respondents' online shopping experiences compared with offline shopping experiences conducted all of the issues in both sectors. This point meets the study's finding of Masoud (2013). In the end, they would select which options providing more advantages to adapt to their needs at that moment.

For *benefits*, the author obtained two main elements: *rich references* and the *value for money*. These findings are consistent with Leelayouthayotin's (2004) study that studied the influence factors on online channels for healthy food consumers in Thailand. According to Seiders *et al.* (2000), facing inconvenient terms, online shopping reaches the characteristics of ease for consumers. This point determined *rich reference* that is the first competitive advantage against offline channels. That means the customers in Gen Z and Millennials, easily find food products with full details (location of shops, products' information) on online channels. In some cases, these items even could not purchase in physical stores. The digital channels would assist the customers to save time and cost-efficiency to compare the product quality, price, promotion, and shop services between many stores towards the customers' feedback and recommendations.

Then, the *value for money* is identified as another positive effect. The online shops frequently offered good deals (prices and attractive promotions) with satisfied quality food products. Because as participants' answers, food product quality was

the priority consideration among others like prices, promotions. Fortunately, when comparing the quality product purchased at physical stores, the online quality products had similar reviews. Still, they often received reasonable prices with more attractive promotions (discounts directly on price, electric coupons, free delivery, and others) on online stores.

In addition, the comparison activity from the *rich reference* also improved the customers' recognition of this benefit. Most interviewees agreed that searching information and comparing price or promotion on online channels is an essential part of the pre-purchase process. Therefore, all of the *benefits* enhanced customers' trust in purchasing online food items. These findings would enhance and encourage the customers to switch from offline to online shopping behavior in the future.

On the other hand, to retain the current customers, online businesses need to focus on customers' satisfaction in the shopping experience, truthfulness, and switching barriers (Liu *et al.*, 2011). For the Vietnam market, the customers still prefer to go to offline channels as a part of social culture, especially buying food items. Besides, switching limitations for online shopping requires a period, and customers also need time to adapt to new shopping behavior. Thus, trying to satisfy customers towards shopping experiences and improving beliefs is the best way for the online market to maintain existent consumers.

For *barriers*, *inconvenience*, and *unsure product quality* are two key components that the participants focused on when ordering food products on online channels. Bhatti *et al.* (2018) state that convenience risk impacts significantly and negatively associate online shopping in Pakistan. For respondents, *inconvenience* is the waiting time of delivery, furthermore, its service affected food product quality. This point used to be mentioned in the research of Deloitte (2019) and study of Claudia (2012). Also, it is a disadvantage against offline channels.

This barrier is a result that compared with the offline shopping experience. As mentioned before, the consumers accessibly reached any physical stores at any time to gain the necessary food products. And they did not need to pay an extra fee as a delivery cost and take time of waiting delivery. In other words, the convenience and saving time determination in the non-food category in eCommerce and social

commerce certainly change to *inconvenience* including more time in the food category.

Then, *uncertain product quality* is the second limitation when purchasing food items on online channels. Deloitte (2019) also figures out this consider after surveying Vietnamese consumers nationwide. Differing from offline channels, the customers could choose products through passive information (recommendations, feedback, and sellers' descriptions) and sight sense to decide online channels. Then, the preservation during the delivery period is not good, affecting quality as another critical factor.

Besides, bad news surrounding the online food purchased is an external reason that influences customers' belief, then impacts their attitudes (Alagoz and Hekimoglu, 2012). For example, according to VTV.vn (an official media of the Vietnamese government), on July 18th, 2021, they showed news about the bad quality of food buying over the Internet. They recommended the consumers be more careful in finding and purchasing food items on online channels.

Also, the Vietnamese government already published an eCommerce law and basically adapted it to protect the benefits for both consumers and businesses (Le, 2016). However, to enhance the customers' trust, the organizations (food suppliers and sales vendors) have to ensure good product quality by themselves and based on the regulars. Hence, these *barriers* are the priority problems that the online businesses and delivery partners need to focus on and find effective solutions for the online market's growth.

From respondents being businessmen, Vietnam's online market for food category is described as being in the infancy stage and having grown rapidly in recent years. However, online channels (eCommerce and social commerce) are tiny to contribute to the total profits. The *barriers* in customer awareness could be one of the reasons. Also, preferring to go offline channels (traditional and modern retail) to buy food products as a social culture is another critical reason. Therefore, it would be hard to convince the customers from offline to online in a short time.

The companies intend *characteristics of ease* for online retail channels and the popularity of the Internet in the young Vietnamese generation (Gen Z and

Millennials). Meanwhile, the frequent appearances of food products on the favourite media enhance to aware the brand and information surrounding its (negative and positive feedback, price comparison, and others). Then, the consumers would remember the brands or products and priority select them when they need them. In other words, the successful building of brand awareness on the Internet positively influences online purchase in customers' intention (Hashemi and Hajihey, 2012). And this awareness closely meets the first *benefit (rich reference)* in customer awareness. Therefore, *brand awareness* is the primary purpose when food businesses join the online market, especially eCommerce platforms.

5.2. Conclusion

In the digital era, online channels provide new and attractive shopping methods for customers, especially young generations like Millennials and Gen Z. However, the online market is in its infancy in the Vietnam market. In contrast, the offline market has developed for a long time and has been a part of social culture. Thus, the companies have to compete against opponents in both online and offline channels to maintain and recruit consumers.

Especially for the food category, offline channels (traditional and modern trade retails) are always the preferred choice for consumers. However, in recent years, consumers like respondents who lived in Ho Chi Minh City often or sometimes ordered food items on online stores (eCommerce and social commerce platforms). Therefore, customer awareness defines based on the negative and positive online shopping experience and comparing with the offline shopping experience. It has two *benefits: rich references* and *value for money*; and two *barriers: inconvenience* and *uncertain product quality*. This awareness influences customer attitude and behavior about re-purchasing online food products in the future.

In addition, several external factors impact conducting the above findings. The first one is the numerous retail stores, including traditional and modern trade located in a good place (near the consumers' areas). Then, the negative news about online food quality products comes from media channels and relatives to reduce the customers' trust. Moreover, going to offline channels to choose and buy food products is a part of the social culture in Vietnam.

Besides the customer awareness conducted in this study, the business perspective in the infancy stage of the Vietnam online market is also defined. *Brand awareness* is the primary target at present for most companies. The products and brand names would appear to introduce and remind the consumers many times by selling on many eCommerce and social commerce platforms. That means the companies sending more options to assist customers in reference and selection. This activity matches with *rich references* in customer awareness and increases customer purchased intention in the future.

In addition, to encourage the change of shopping behavior and attitude for food products, the companies should focus on improving customers' beliefs in quality and convenience problems. For example, businesses should cautiously cooperate with delivery partners to provide effective service and satisfactory quality products. And the brand should try to minimise the bad news as possible, especially about quality, to maintain customers' trust.

In conclusion, this study aims to indicate several dimensions from customers and businesses sides for online food purchased in Vietnam, especially Ho Chi Minh City.

Chapter 6. Limitations and recommendations

6.1. Limitations

In this study, online interviews and the selection of sample are two limitations concerned. Regarding the samples, in Ho Chi Minh City, we could find different cultures from other regions of Vietnam. These features would present the different consumer behaviours. However, at the original place, customers would have several typical shopping behaviours.

Besides, regarding selected samples for businesses, that is lack of the opinion from eCommerce vendor. Because from the eCommerce side, they would have the different aspects and views to contribute the real overview of the online market. Unluckily, the author could not invite any respondents. Nevertheless, many market researchers from trusted brands published valid data and statements on social sources to review the big picture of the Vietnam online market.

Because of geographic distance, all interviews were scheduled and done through Zoom, an online meeting application. In some cases, the Internet connection quality in both places (Dublin City and Ho Chi Minh City) was not similar and interrupted the interviews. And the different time zone between the two places, the interview arrangement was the problem to match time for both. Then actually, the time of the interview in Vietnam was the rest time after working or studying, normally occurred in late afternoon or night, and weekend. So the participants would be tired after a long day of working or studying. Hence, these things could impact the quality of records and interviews.

Lastly, in Vietnam, papers about this topic are rare. Therefore, the literature from other countries is used to develop the theory-based. This point is a limitation of this study. By the way, the author hopefully contributes the findings to support the businesses to understand the customers' views, then to figure out the better solutions for the developments on the online market.

6.2. Recommendations

In Ho Chi Minh City, citizens recognize that buying food in retail is more convenient and saves time than online channels. However, this statement is in contrast with the basic benefits of online shopping. Besides, the customers' belief in online shopping is still generally quite low at present. To against these points and gain more market

share in the total market, the food businesses and partners (eCommerce, delivery, operation) need to focus on building customers' trust. That means the quality product ensures from manufacture and during the delivery process, and delivery time also tries to minimize as much as possible.

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Appendix I. Participant consent form

Template

An examination of attitudes towards buying food online in Ho Chi Minh City

Consent to take part in

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves to provide information to seek the study's conclusion.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in dissertation.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in private laptop of Ms. Thi Huong Giang Tran until end of 2021.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for next two years.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Names: Thi Huong Giang Tran

Degrees: Student of MSc in Marketing, National College of Ireland

Academic supervisor:

Signature of research participant

Signature of participant Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Signature of researcher Date

Appendix II. Contextual data interview

First of all, I am appreciately thankful all interviewees to be willing to help me. They are extremely nice and kind when asking them to join. To be comfortable, I made the interview as a normal conversation between friends. That way would help us to be easily share information. So, during the interview time, they always gave the useful answers and good explanations if I did not understand well to their meanings. In some cases, they evenly delivered unexpected and helpful information that I did not consider before. These things supported to gain the valuable findings in this projects from the consumers' sides.

For the storage of data, I asked their permissions for video and audio records because I want to listen carefully during writing reports and figuring out the priceless findings. And because the geographic distances between researcher and participants – Dublin City, Ireland and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, all interviews occurred towards online meeting applications – Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google meetings. These tools are popular and professional ways for audio recording and meeting face-to-face. Besides, to avoid the risk of losing audios-recorded, Notability application is the second ways for audio recording and hand-writing answers of interviewees.

Then, based on the schedules of researcher and participants, the timetable of interviews lasted from end of April 2021 to the third week of June 2021 for sixteen interviews. Here is the interview schedule:

Table 3. Interview schedule for respondents being consumers

No.	Time of interview (dublin time zone)	Meeting application	No.	Time of interview (dublin time zone)	Meeting application
1	April 21 st 2021 – 8:34 am	Zoom	10	May 22 nd 2021 – 02:20 pm	Zoom
2	May 1 st 2021 – 9:22 am	Zoom	11	May 22 nd 2021 – 04:03 pm	Zoom
3	May 1 st 2021 – 12:33 pm	Zoom	12	May 23 rd 2021 – 12:32 pm	Zoom
4	May 2 nd 2021 – 01:03 pm	Zoom	13	May 23 rd 2021 – 01:17 pm	Zoom
5	May 2 nd 2021 – 04:24 pm	Zoom	14	May 25 th 2021 – 04:13 pm	Google meeting
6	May 4 th 2021 – 01:56 pm	Zoom	15	May 28 th 2021 – 11:38 am	Zoom
7	May 15 th 2021 – 02:02 pm	Zoom	16	May 28 th 2021 – 04:55 pm	Microsoft Teams
8	May 20 th 2021 – 08:57 am	Zoom	17	May 28 th 2021 – 05:55 pm	Microsoft Teams
9	May 22 nd 2021 – 08:35 am	Zoom			

Table 4. Interview schedule for respondents being businesses

No.	Time of interview (Dublin time zone)	Meeting application
A	June 08 th 2021 - 01:43 pm	Zoom
B	June 08 th 2021 - 09:59 am	Zoom
C	June 13 th 2021 - 10:15 am	Zoom
D	June 13 th 2021 - 03:38 pm	Google meeting
E	June 26 th 2021 - 11:09 am	Zoom

Appendix III. Example of conversation in consumer interview

Respondent no.13: May 23rd 2021 – 01:17 pm

(Authour: Au.; Respondent no.13: Re.13)

Thank you for your time.

Au: Firstly, I wanna introduce again the research's objective. As shared before, I aim to study the online customer attitudes in Ho Chi Minh City for purchasing food products like fresh food, snack, etc., and to discover which factors affected the decisions instead of buying in physical stores. Today, I would ask you several questions, and please feel free to answer based on your real experience.

Re.13: Ok.

Au.: So the first question: how many times do you go online shopping? And which items do you often buy?

Re.13: Actually, rarely buying on online channels, around once per two months. Normally, I bought cosmetics on official website of stores. Because store frequently run many promotions on online, and I also don't have enough time to go to the store.

Au.: So how about food products? Have you ever bought them on online channels?

Re.13: I often use GrabMart (a delivery service that cooperated with retails) to purchase fresh food instead of going to the market.

Au.: How much do you spend for one order?

Re.13: When I got deadlines and had no time to go to stores to buy necessary products like foods, I would use it. It's convenient and helps me to save time in a busy period. Or I often use it once per two weeks. And not too much, less than one hundred VND. In cases, I have an intention to buy expensive goods, such as meat, fish or rice, I would go to store.

Au.: Could you evaluate the quality products between using GrabMart and physical stores?

Re.13: Because this service is just a third party of delivery for retail. And I usually choose my favourite supermarket to order, and I believe the quality at there. Ah, I just buy fresh vegetables, fruits and milk towards it. For me, the quality is the same.

Au.: During online shopping experience, which limitations do you want to share?

Re.13: On GrabMart platform, it would not show the expired date. But it's ok. I would choose it for necessary products when I am busy to go to supermarket.

Au.: So that means you still prefer to go to retail if you have free time, right?

Re.13: That's correct.

Au.: One question about promotion. At present, many online stores often publish more and attractive promotions than retailers, how do these promotions influence on your shopping behavior?

Re.13: I would purchase products when the online stores run promotions. But if they don't have any promotions, I would not buy on there.

Au.: So to rank the conditions of buying on the internet, which one do you concern most?

Re.13: 1st is promotion, 2nd is the popularity of eCommerce platform, and 3rd is the quality product.

Au.: Which device does you prefer to use when ordering online? Why?

Re.13: Smartphone is my priority selection because it always logs in my account on application, and links to my online bank account for payment, and easily follow order status. And mobile application would usually send notifications about promotion. That's more convenient.

Au.: Have you ever try to find new food product purchase it on online channels?

Re.13: It depends on that product having advertising or promotion. And it also meets my demand. I would search it. But unless having promotion or advertising, I just buy food items as my needs on online. Actually, if I watch one advertisement, I would pay attention more when going to stores.

Au.: One more question, if the new product meets your demand, launches and has promotion on both offline and online channels, which one do you prefer to buy for try?

Re.13: I choose offline. Because I need to check physical product to ensure the quality before purchasing.

Au.: For you, online channels are the good references before buying something? And how does online feedback affect to your decision?

Re.13: I usually search price, product information on the internet before going to the shops. And I would compare the price and check reality goods at there. I mean

online information provides basic product knowledge before deciding. It's really helpful.

Au.: So how about online recommendations?

Re.13: They are just useful and reliable when I buy non-food categories, such as cosmetics, clothes, shoes. For food products, I have no trust in this. I just believe in my own experience with that shops or products.

Au.: Perfect. That finished our interview. Again, thank you for your time to help me to complete my project.

Appendix IV. Example of conversation in business interview

Respondent E: June 26th 2021 - 11:09 am

(Author: Au.; Respondent E: Re.E)

Thank you for your time and I am appreciate when you accepted my invitation.

Au.: Firstly, I want to explain again the study's objectives. I aimed to explore the current online market about food category in Vietnam. Before asking, could you introduce briefly your company, products and position?

Re.E: Ok, at present, I work at Aptamil Vietnam with Sales Manager. Our product is milk powder for baby from 0 to 36 months.

Au.: What is your business model? B2B or B2C?

Re.E: B2B, actually, we are a global brand from Netherland, and we cooperate with three distributions in Vietnam. One is for medical nutrition, and two are for baby milk powders. For two distributions selling baby milk powders, one manages mom and baby chains, and another responds GT, MT and eCommerce.

Au.: I got that. Thanks for your explanation. As I shared before, my study focus on food buying on the internet. Please let me know how long does your business enter Vietnam eCommerce?

Re.E: We really entered in 2018 with a little bit of Lazada and Tiki and then in 2019 we started to accelerate.

Au.: I assume, your business have around 4 years in eCommerce market. During this period, could you examine the value in marketing and sales that you are brought back from eCommerce to your business' growth?

Re.E: We present on three big eCommerce platforms in Vietnam: Shopee, Tiki, Lazada. And we also joined online channels of mom and baby chains. I mean, five mom and baby chains currently active and operate their own online channels. But we calculate this profits for mom and baby accounts, and eCommerce profits only calculate from Shopee, Tiki, Lazada.

Au.: I think moms could see your brand on any channels, right? How about the contribution for total sales performance?

Re. E: It's very small right now, so I was looking at the for the pure players the year to date was around €40,000. This is quite a small amount. It's less than 1% of our sales. But it's still starting now and we don't look at the E commerce as a

pure selling channel because it's also the channel that helps us to build brand awareness.

Au.: Oh I see.

Re.B: Right, yeah, so for now it's still below 1% and we plan that it will grow up to three to 4% by the end of the year. And we run many promotions, many activities mean many brand days with other platforms. Basically we started the last three months.

Au.: Besides, as I researched, your brand just changed products that manufactured from UK to New Zealand, and everything like packaging, prices, image completely change, right? Not sure, but it happened in the end of 2020?

Re. E: That's right. And the brand awareness of old product also helps us to build for new one. Besides, we have the other ways of communication so we do massive online investments. We don't do the classical TVC or anything, so all their investments we put in the in the media. And eCommerce is also one part of it. Then because we do some live performances, we invite doctors the kills and then we do it together with platforms Shopee or Lazada to generate more buzz and more interaction with the consumer. And through measurement rate, our brand awareness increased, like conversation online.

Au.: I got it. So you told that your brand is a global brand, right? So besides Vietnam eCommerce, do any other online markets that your brand joins? If have, could you compare between these markets? Do you think that is the challenge for attribute brain when enter the eCommerce or last opportunity for you to grow the brand?

Re.E: Of course, it's an opportunity because, well, eCommerce in Vietnam is the fastest growing among among Southeast Asian countries. So definitely not being there is not an option. It's not an easy channel, yeah, just like Vietnam in general is not an easy market, but being in eCommerce channel in Vietnam will bring a massive contribution to our overall sales.

Au.: I know.

Re.E: It's just it needs more time. Higher investments versus the sales than the offline channel. Yeah, and patients because it will take some time.

Au.: From my view, this is a challenge and opportunity market at the same time.

Re.E: Yeah, but it's a huge opportunity, so we look at it as the non we look at it as a pure opportunity and the the expectations are high so we get every month we get millions of questions from our headquarters on E commerce. We have one person only managing a commercial.

Au.: So you invest human resource to eCommerce as well, right?

Re.E: Yeah, with working on ecommerce because it's a well. So once there is a campaign, it's not like the offline that you see you measure in a month and then you adjust you adjust every single hour and when there is a you know when there is this 11.11 or 12.12.

Au.: Oh wow, I think that a huge workload.

Re.E: The people need to stay online the whole 24 hours then so they don't switch off. Not not in the early morning, not in the midnight because they need to see where the traffic is coming from, which adds the people like the most and react the most. Reinvesting the investments in in these you know banners or whatever kind of kind of communication. So it's quite a challenging work.

Au.: Ya, I agree with you. How do you think about the challenge of Vietnam eCommerce?

Re.E: Well, that's I think that's what I said, so it's very cluttered. All the players are there.

Au.: Yeah. Seemly all brands present on online channels.

Re.E: It actually takes more time to stand out, and because there's a lot of information now so it's quite difficult to become special one more challenge that I think we didn't talk in the price so people come to eCommerce before they close for the convenience. But most importantly, because they want the cheap price. And for us it is very difficult because it jeopardizes our offline press and it generates conflicts with the offline channels. So that's quite a big, you know was one of the examples that we had a very good offer for. I know the twenty sets in Lazada and then can spotted it and then there was a big drama of they actually made us stop it. Because it's helped conflicts because their offer is lower. So here I think the aligning online and offline is also quite a.

Au.: I have to say. It's really difficult.

Re.E: Also the challenge, but it requires a lot of attention and constant work between offline and online, not to generate this conflict.

Au.: And actually I have done with the same consumer and I see one more one important thing that they mostly they told us that. The eCommerce is now is not the channel they want to buy the food product. Because surrounding them, there are many physical stores and some open 24/7 like convenience store. How do you think about this behavior, and it could be change in the future?

Re.E: I think it's I understand why and I think it also depends on the you know the level of the customer. But now with the COVID and you know they're closing the local markets. I think there is no other way. So I understand yes, most likely it will takes a long time for them to adjust, but on the other hand you see a lot of trends towards still doing because if you look at what do you have the market Saigon you have grab market or you have you know the big C and gourmet.

Re.E: Yes, it's hard for me to judge on the Vietnamese consumer behavior. The consumers who buy offline will probably not go online and the other way around. The ones who are buying online, they're buying it for a specific reason. They buy it online because they want the cheaper price.

Au.: I can understand your concern, and yes, to examine and change human attitudes and behaviours are very difficult and taking long times. And the last question, based on your own opinion, does online channel really contribute to your business' growth?

Re.E: They will have the effect on the company performance. Of course. It's like a combination of many things, so you need to build the right eCommerce strategy and you need to work with the online platforms. Actually, our brand is still a small player in baby food market. So it's overall the increasing brand awareness of optimal will automatically bring the increase of e-commerce sales for us.

Au.: Noted that. Again, thank you for your agreement to join my study. Your information is helpful me to conclude the business's perspective about Vietnam eCommerce in this stage. Thank you so much.