

Social Commerce and the Compliance Mechanism in the Food and Beverage Industry: Integrating TRA and TAM

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) shapes consumer behavior in Vietnam's urban Food and Beverage (F&B) sector through two complementary psychological mechanisms. Drawing on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this study moves beyond single-path adoption perspectives by distinguishing between an internalization mechanism driven by attitude towards the SNS and a compliance mechanism driven by normative influence. Data collected from 287 social media users in Ho Chi Minh City revealed two parallel behavioral routes. First, source credibility and platform tie strength contribute to the formation of positive attitudes toward social networking platforms, which in turn encourage engagement with and dissemination of food and beverage-related information. Second, normative influence exerts a direct effect on behavioral intention, indicating that users may engage with eWOM not only because of personal evaluation but also because of perceived social expectations and the desire to align with ongoing trends. These findings highlight the importance of social conformity in shaping digital consumption behavior in collectivist urban settings. In algorithm-driven social media environments, compliance with peer norms can operate alongside attitudinal processes and, in some cases, become an immediate driver of actions. This study contributes to the eWOM literature by clarifying the coexistence of internalization and compliance mechanisms and providing empirical evidence from an emerging market context where social commerce is rapidly evolving.

Keywords: eWOM Effectiveness, TRA, TAM, Normative Influence, Attitude towards the SNS, F&B Industry.

1 Introduction

The digital landscape in emerging economies has gradually shifted from traditional e-commerce models to social commerce, where social interaction plays a central role in shaping transactions and information exchange (Phuong, Tuan, & Khoa, 2026). In Vietnam, a collectivist and high-context culture, this transformation is especially visible in the Food and Beverage (F&B) sector. According to the Ministry of Industry and Trade (2025), Vietnam's e-commerce market reached approximately USD 25 billion, with food delivery and dining-related services accounting for a substantial share of user engagement on platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and Shopee Food. Social media platforms are no longer used solely for communication; they increasingly function as spaces where consumption ideas are formed, validated and acted upon. In this context, consumer decisions are often shaped not only by functional considerations but also by collective opinions and peer validation. Therefore, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) extends beyond its informational role and becomes part of a social exchange process that drives attention, engagement, and purchasing decisions within the highly competitive F&B market (iPos.vn, 2024; Khoa, 2021).

Despite the widespread growth of social commerce, the psychological mechanisms explaining why users engage with and share eWOM remain poorly integrated. Prior research has frequently relied on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to explain adoption behavior (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). However, these approaches tend to position social influence primarily as a precursor to attitude, implying that users first develop favorable evaluations before engaging with the platform. Unlike prior TAM-based social commerce studies that emphasize attitude as the primary driver of behavior, this study suggests that normative influence may also function as an independent and parallel mechanism in shaping eWOM engagement. By distinguishing compliance-driven behavior from internalization-driven behavior, this study provides a more nuanced explanation of how social media users respond to eWOM in collectivist digital environments. This assumption may not fully capture the behavioral dynamics in the Vietnamese context. Recent domestic studies (Nguyen, 2023; Tran et al., 2023) have emphasized the internalization process, in which users adopt technologies based on personal preference or perceived usefulness. Less attention has been paid to the possibility that behavior may also be directly driven by social expectations. In collectivist settings, individuals may participate in activities such as sharing restaurant reviews or engaging with viral content not necessarily because of strong personal attitudes, but because such actions align with prevailing social norms or reduce the feeling of being left out (Dam, 2023). By overlooking this direct pathway, existing models may not fully explain the socially driven and often immediate nature of eWOM engagement on contemporary platforms such as TikTok.

To address this limitation, the present study integrates the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), and Kelman's (1958) theory of social influence to examine two complementary behavioral mechanisms underlying eWOM effectiveness:

- Internalization mechanism: Behavioral intention shaped through attitude toward the social networking platform, influenced by source credibility and social ties.
- Compliance mechanism: Behavioral intention is driven directly by normative influence, reflecting the pressure to conform to social expectations and trends.

Rather than treating these mechanisms as sequential, this study considers them parallel processes that may operate simultaneously within algorithm-driven social media environments. To strengthen construct clarity, attitude toward the SNS is defined as the user's affective evaluation of using the platform as a channel for seeking F&B-related information and is distinguished from attitudes toward specific food content (Davis, 1989). eWOM effectiveness is conceptualized as a user's behavioral intention to adopt and share information obtained through social media. This study focuses on Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's most digitally active urban area. Although this focus limits generalization to rural populations, it allows for the examination of a segment that reflects the country's most advanced digital consumption patterns and plays a central role in shaping social commerce trends (DataReportal, 2024).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

To better understand what drives eWOM effectiveness, this study brings together insights from the Technology Acceptance Model and the Theory of Reasoned Action, viewed through the lens of Kelman (1958) social influence framework. TAM has been widely applied to explain user behavior in social commerce contexts (Hajli, 2014; Phu et al., 2026; Yahia et al., 2018), particularly in explaining how perceived usefulness and ease of use shape user attitudes. However, many applications treat social influence mainly as a factor that shapes attitudes rather than as a force that can directly prompt behavior (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Zhang et al., 2014).

Importantly, in the context of social commerce platforms where interpersonal contact is limited, we adopt the Online Social Network (OSN) perspective (Brown et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2018), which conceptualizes

the platform itself as the primary relational actor. This framework shifts traditional social network constructs (platform tie strength, content homophily) from interpersonal to user-platform relationships, recognizing that users form affective bonds with digital platforms that function similarly to interpersonal relationships (Khoa & Huynh, 2023). Within this user-platform relationship context, we examine how both personal evaluations of the platform and social normative pressures shape behavioral intentions.

The conventional TAM-TRA sequence, in which social influence operates primarily through attitude formation, may not fully capture behavioral dynamics in collectivist social media environments such as Vietnam's (Hofstede, 2001; Uyen et al., 2025). In such contexts, behavioral responses are often embedded in social expectations and shared norms, which can directly trigger actions independent of personal attitudes. Building on this perspective, the present study conceptualizes eWOM engagement as emerging from two complementary psychological pathways.

The first is an internalization route, where individuals cognitively evaluate information and form affective responses toward the platform. This route aligns with the established attitude–intention linkage in the TAM and TRA (Davis, 1989; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). When users perceive a platform as useful and credible, they develop positive attitudes that motivate engagement through a deliberative evaluation process. The second is the compliance route, where behavior is influenced more directly by perceived social pressure and the desire to conform to collective expectations. This pathway reflects the direct Subjective Norm–intention relationship proposed in the TRA and is consistent with Kelman's notion of compliance as a form of social influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Kelman, 1958). In this mechanism, users may engage in eWOM activities to maintain social relevance or avoid exclusion without necessarily internalizing positive attitudes toward the platform (Linh et al., 2024). Rather than viewing these mechanisms as sequential, this study treats them as parallel processes that may operate simultaneously in contemporary social media. Both pathways can coexist, and their relative influence may vary across individuals and situations.

2.2 Hypothesis development

Source credibility is conceptualized as the extent to which an information source is perceived as possessing expertise and trustworthiness (Ohanian, 1990). In the context of Social Commerce, where users face information overload and asymmetry, the credibility of content creators (food reviewers and influencers) serves as a critical heuristic for quality evaluation (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Drawing on Trust Transfer Theory (Stewart, 2003), trust typically flows from a known entity (the source) to an unknown or associated entity (the platform). When users consistently encounter credible, expert-validated reviews on a specific Social Networking Site (SNS), they cognitively associate that platform with high-quality information utility (Cheung et al., 2009). This perceived utility reduces cognitive dissonance and fosters favorable affective evaluations of the platform. Recent empirical studies have reinforced this mechanism. For instance, Lou and Yuan (2019) found that influencer credibility significantly enhances platform engagement, whereas Teng et al. (2014) confirmed that persuasive arguments from credible sources directly strengthen users' attitudes toward the hosting website. Therefore, we posit that the aggregate credibility of reviewers on an SNS contributes to forming a positive attitude toward using that SNS.

H1: Source Credibility has a positive influence on attitude towards the SNS.

While traditional Tie Strength refers to interpersonal closeness (Granovetter, 1973), the Online Social Network (OSN) framework (Brown et al., 2007) posits that in digital environments with limited face-to-face interaction, users develop relationships with the platforms themselves rather than solely with other users. Following Kim et al. (2018), who empirically validated this conceptualization in consumer review website contexts, we operationalized this as 'Platform Tie Strength, defined as the intensity of the user's connection and dependence on the SNS as a primary relational actor.

H2: Platform Tie Strength has a positive influence on attitude towards the SNS.

Similarly, traditional homophily focuses on demographic similarities between individuals. However, as Brown et al. (2007) argue, in digital environments, users perceive similarities through content relevance. We term this Content Homophily—the degree of congruence between the user's interests and the information provided by the SNS. This represents functional homophily, where the platform mirrors user preferences. High Content Homophily reduces cognitive friction and enhances platform affinity.

It is important to note that Platform Tie Strength and Content Homophily are conceptually distinct: the former reflects attachment intensity and usage frequency, while the latter captures information relevance and interest congruence. This distinction has been validated empirically (Kim et al., 2018), with the two constructs showing adequate discriminant validity.

H3: Content Homophily has a positive influence on attitude towards the SNS.

Normative influence refers to perceived social expectations regarding whether a behavior should be performed (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). While TAM-based studies often interpret social norms as indirect drivers operating through attitudes or perceived usefulness (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), social influence theory suggests that behavior may also arise from a desire for social approval or belonging regardless of personal beliefs (Kelman, 1958).

In collectivist contexts, such as Vietnam (Hofstede, 2001), social expectations can play a particularly strong role in shaping online engagement. Studies of Asian social commerce environments have shown that peer endorsements and group trends can directly influence behavioral intentions (Kim & Park, 2013; Zhang et al., 2014). Within the F&B sector, this dynamic is often visible through Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), where users feel encouraged to engage with popular or trending content to remain socially connected (Gupta & Sharma, 2021; Phuong, Tuan, & Khoa, 2026; Phuong, Tuan, Thanh, et al., 2026; Przybylski et al., 2013). Recent evidence from Vietnam indicates that such pressures can prompt immediate engagement with online content, even in the absence of strong personal attitudes (Dam, 2023).

H4: Normative influence has a direct positive effect on eWOM effectiveness.

eWOM effectiveness reflects behavioral outcomes, such as the intention to adopt and share information encountered online (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). In both the TRA and TAM, attitude is considered a key internal driver of behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991). When users develop favorable feelings toward a social media platform, they are more likely to view it as a useful and engaging environment for information exchange and social interaction, which can lead to higher levels of participation and sharing (Alalwan et al., 2017). Studies in the Vietnamese context have similarly highlighted the importance of positive platform perceptions in sustaining digital engagement (Le et al., 2024; Nguyen, 2023).

H5: Attitudes towards SNS have a positive influence on eWOM effectiveness.

This hypothesis set examines the internalization mechanism, one of the two pathways in Kelman (1958) social influence framework. Unlike the compliance mechanism, where normative influence directly triggers behavior without attitudinal change, internalization requires that external cues (credibility, platform ties, content homophily) be cognitively processed and affectively evaluated. In this pathway, attitude towards the SNS functions as the mediating mechanism through which informational and relational factors are translated into behavioral intention. Users must first develop favorable feelings toward an SNS before external influences can motivate eWOM engagement. Prior research in social commerce has consistently demonstrated that attitudes mediate the relationship between social cues and behavioral responses (Chen & Shen, 2015; Hanafizadeh et al., 2014). Following this logic, we propose the following hypothesis:

H6a: Attitude toward the SNS mediates the relationship between source credibility and eWOM effectiveness.

H6b: Attitude toward the SNS mediates the relationship between platform tie strength and eWOM effectiveness.

H6c: Attitude toward the SNS mediates the relationship between content homophily and eWOM effectiveness.

From the hypotheses, this study proposed the research model as Figure 1.

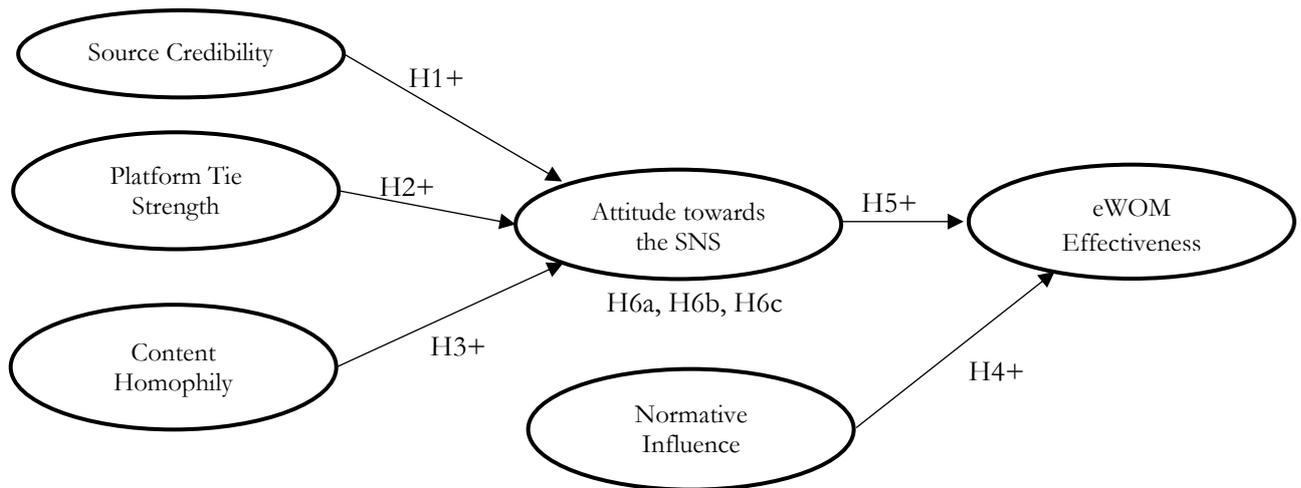


Figure 1. Research Model

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Data Collection

To empirically test the proposed dual-path framework, a quantitative research design utilizing a cross-sectional survey was used. The study was conducted in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, a vibrant emerging market characterized by high social media penetration and a dynamic F&B sector. The target population comprised adult social media users who had engaged with F&B-related content, such as viewing reviews, checking in, or searching for dining spots on Social Networking Sites (SNS) within the last three months. Given the unavailability of a sampling frame for SNS users, a purposive sampling technique was adopted to ensure that respondents possessed relevant experience to provide valid retrospective accounts of their eWOM behavior (Etikan et al., 2016). The data collection procedure followed a rigorous, two-stage process. First, a pilot study with 30 participants was conducted to assess content validity and refine the item wording. Subsequently, the main survey was distributed via major SNS platforms (Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram). To mitigate the Common Method Bias (CMB) inherent in self-reported data, procedural remedies were applied: respondent anonymity was guaranteed, and items for independent and dependent variables were proximal to each other in the survey layout (Podsakoff et al., 2003). After data cleaning—excluding responses with straight-lining patterns or short completion times—a final sample of 287 valid responses was obtained. This sample size exceeds the minimum requirement for PLS-SEM analysis based on the 10-times rule (Hair et al., 2011) and provides sufficient statistical power (power > 0.80) for detecting medium effect sizes.

3.2 Measurement Scales

The theoretical model was estimated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4 software. PLS-SEM was selected as the primary analytical tool for three reasons: (1) the study focuses on predicting a key target construct (eWOM effectiveness) and exploring theoretical extensions (dual-path mechanism); (2) the method demonstrates high robustness with non-normal data distributions common in social science research; and (3) it effectively handles complex models with multiple mediators (Hair et al., 2019). The final instrument used for the structural analysis consisted of 28 items as Table 1. The analysis followed the systematic two-step approach recommended by Hair et al. (2021):

- Measurement Model Assessment: Evaluating internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted - AVE), and discriminant validity (Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio - HTMT).

- Structural Model Assessment: Examining collinearity issues (VIF), the significance of path coefficients via bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples, bias-corrected and accelerated), the coefficient of determination (R^2), and the predictive relevance (Q^2).

Table 1. The measurement items and their sources.

Construct	Code	Items	Source
Platform Tie Strength	TS1	I frequently use SNS.	Kim et al. (2018); Mittendorf (2018)
	TS2	SNS is important to me.	
	TS3	I feel very close to SNS.	
	TS4	I frequently interact (reading, liking, commenting, and sharing) on SNS.	
	TS5	I access SNS every day.	
	TS6	I have a strong bonding relationship with SNS.	
Content Homophily	HO1	SNS provide many benefits to me.	Kim et al. (2018); Doan (2024)
	HO2	SNS provide information that fits my search goals.	
	HO3	SNS displays content that matches my interests.	
	HO4	I love the content provided by SNS.	
Source Credibility	SC1	Many reviews or information on SNS are highly honest.	Ohanian (1990); Sang and Binh (2024)
	SC2	Many reviews or information on SNS are very trustworthy.	
	SC3	Many reviews on SNS are created by experienced people.	
	SC4	Many reviews on SNS are recognized by many people.	
	SC5	Many reviews on SNS meet the standards for my reference.	
	SC6	I often consult reviews provided by influencers with specific expertise.	
Normative Influence	NI1	To be like someone on SNS, I choose the restaurants they selected.	Chu and Kim (2011); Dam (2023)
	NI2	I often empathize with others on SNS when choosing a similar dining experience.	
	NI3	To have interesting experiences, I choose restaurants selected by the majority on social networking services.	
	NI4	I choose restaurants that had many reviews or discussions on SNS.	
Attitude towards the SNS	ATTW1	Compared to other sites, I rate the SNS I use as one of the best.	Davis (1989); Kim et al. (2018)
	ATTW2	SNS is one of the top priorities in my choices.	
	ATTW3	I have a positive attitude toward using SNS.	
eWOM Effectiveness	EF1	I often consult eWOM on SNS when deciding on a restaurant.	Jalilvand and Samiei (2012); Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004)
	EF2	eWOM information greatly influences my decision to choose a restaurant.	
	EF3	I am willing to recommend and encourage others to consult eWOM on SNS.	
	EF4	Credible eWOM people greatly influence my restaurant choice decision.	
	EF5	I will spread positive information about the restaurant on SNS.	

4 Finding

4.1 Sample Characteristics

A total of 287 valid responses were collected for analysis. As presented in Table 2, the respondents' demographic profile indicates a diverse sample with a slight predominance of females (56.1%) compared to males (43.9%). Regarding age distribution, the sample was heavily skewed towards younger generations, with Gen Z (under 25 years old) accounting for 64.8% and Millennials (25–34 years old) comprising 20.9%.

This age structure is highly consistent with the study's focus on social media usage and digital consumption behaviors in Vietnam. In terms of education and occupation, most participants were students (61.7%) and held a university degree or higher (52.6%), reflecting an educated demographic familiar with digital platforms.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=287)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	126	43.9
	Female	161	56.1
Age	Under 25	186	64.8
	25 – 34	60	20.9
	35 – 44	18	6.3
	Above 45	23	8.0
Education	High School / Vocational	35	19.0
	College / Intermediate	52	29.0
	University	78	43.0
	Postgraduate	16	9.0
Occupation	Student	177	61.7
	Office Worker	78	27.2
	Freelancer / Business Owner	24	8.4
	Others	8	2.8
Income (VND)	Under 5 million	167	58.2
	5 – 10 million	51	17.8
	10 – 15 million	33	11.5
	Above 15 million	36	12.5
Primary Info Channel	SNS Reviews (Facebook/TikTok)	153	53.3
	Word-of-Mouth (Friends/Family)	90	31.4
	Advertising	22	7.7
	Google Search	22	7.7
Platform Usage	Both Facebook & TikTok	197	68.6
	Facebook only	66	23.0
	TikTok only	24	8.4

Beyond demographic traits, behavioral characteristics reveal significant engagement with social commerce in the F&B sector. Notably, Social Networking Sites (SNS) such as Facebook and TikTok serve as the primary information channels for dining decisions, with 53.3% of respondents relying on reviews and rankings on these platforms and 67.2% utilizing both platforms regularly. Furthermore, peer influence remains substantial, as 31.4% of respondents discovered new dining spots through recommendations from friends and family. The majority of respondents (75.3%) visit restaurants primarily for experiential purposes, with a spending range typically under 500,000 VND per visit (57.8%), which aligns with the income levels of the student and young professional segments.

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was assessed by examining indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. As presented in Table 2, all the criteria met the established thresholds recommended by Hair et al. (2019). First, indicator reliability was evaluated using outer loadings. All individual item loadings ranged from 0.700 to 0.857, meeting the critical threshold of 0.708, which implies that the construct explains more than 50% of the variance of the indicator. Second, internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (ρ_c). As shown in Table 3, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.729 (attitude towards the SNS) to 0.867 (eWOM effectiveness), while Composite Reliability (ρ_c) ranged from 0.847 to 0.904. All values exceeded the 0.70 threshold, confirming a robust internal consistency. Third, convergent validity was examined using the

Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The results indicate that the AVE values for all constructs ranged from 0.569 (Platform Tie Strength) to 0.656 (Normative Influence), surpassing the minimum required value of 0.50. This confirms that, on average, the constructs explain more than half of the variance in their indicators.

Table 3. Measurement Model Evaluation

Construct	Items	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rhoc)	AVE
Platform Tie Strength (TS)	TS1	0.720	0.849	0.887	0.569
	TS2	0.826			
	TS3	0.777			
	TS4	0.723			
	TS5	0.700			
	TS6	0.772			
Content Homophily (HO)	HO1	0.799	0.818	0.880	0.648
	HO2	0.857			
	HO3	0.816			
	HO4	0.745			
Source Credibility (SC)	SC1	0.762	0.866	0.900	0.600
	SC2	0.771			
	SC3	0.755			
	SC4	0.792			
	SC5	0.839			
	SC6	0.725			
Normative Influence (NI)	NI1	0.800	0.826	0.884	0.656
	NI2	0.811			
	NI3	0.836			
	NI4	0.792			
Attitude towards the SNS (ATTW)	ATTW1	0.810	0.729	0.847	0.648
	ATTW2	0.852			
	ATTW3	0.749			
eWOM Effectiveness (eWOMF)	EF1	0.810	0.867	0.904	0.653
	EF2	0.811			
	EF3	0.855			
	EF4	0.804			
	EF5	0.758			

Note: All loadings are significant at $p < 0.001$.

To assess discriminant validity, this study employed the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), which is considered superior to the traditional Fornell-Larcker criterion for detecting collinearity issues in variance-based SEM. According to Henseler et al. (2015), the HTMT value should be lower than 0.85 (conservative threshold) or 0.90 (liberal threshold) to establish distinctiveness between the constructs. As illustrated in Table 4, all HTMT ratios in this study were below 0.85, with the highest value being 0.703 (between Normative Influence and eWOM effectiveness). These results unequivocally demonstrate that discriminant validity was established for the research model.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

	ATTW	HO	NI	SC	TS	eWOMF
ATTW						
HO	0.587					
NI	0.546	0.593				
SC	0.674	0.650	0.594			
TS	0.563	0.671	0.623	0.499		
eWOMF	0.679	0.597	0.703	0.591	0.632	

4.3 Structural Model Assessment

After validating the measurement model, the structural model was assessed to test the proposed hypotheses. The bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples was employed to determine the statistical significance of the path coefficients, while the model's explanatory power and predictive relevance were evaluated using R^2 , Q^2 -predict, and f^2 metrics. First, lateral collinearity among the independent variables was examined. The inner VIF values for all predictor constructs were consistently below the threshold of 3.0 (ranging from 1.391 to 2.420), indicating that collinearity was not a critical issue in the structural model. Second, the explanatory power of the model was assessed using the Coefficient of Determination (R^2). As shown in Table 5, the model explains 47.9% of the variance in eWOM effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.479$) and 35.9% of the variance in attitude towards the SNS ($R^2 = 0.359$). According to Hair et al. (2019), these R^2 values indicate moderate to substantial explanatory power, particularly given the complexity of consumer behavior in the F&B sector. Third, the predictive relevance was evaluated using the PLSpredict procedure, which is preferred over the traditional blindfolding approach in the recent literature. The Q^2 -predict values for the key endogenous constructs eWOM Effectiveness (0.432) and Attitude towards the SNS (0.336) are essentially above zero. This confirms that the model has high out-of-sample predictive relevance for the target constructs.

Table 5. Explanatory Power and Predictive Relevance

Endogenous Construct	R^2	R^2 Adjusted	Result	Q^2 -predict
Attitude towards the SNS (ATTW)	0.359	0.353	Moderate	0.336
eWOM Effectiveness (eWOMF)	0.479	0.473	Moderate-Substantial	0.432

The empirical analysis, as detailed in Table 6, validates the existence of two distinct psychological mechanisms driving eWOM behavior: the compliance and internalization routes. A pivotal finding of this study is the overriding dominance of the Compliance Route. Normative Influence exerts the most substantial direct impact on eWOM Effectiveness ($\beta = 0.395$, $p < 0.001$), accompanied by the largest effect size in the structural model ($f^2 = 0.213$). This result provides strong support for H4, suggesting that in the collectivist digital landscape of Vietnam, social drivers such as the Fear of Missing Out and the pressure to conform can trigger behavioral intentions directly, effectively bypassing the need for a deep affective evaluation of the platform.

Table 6. Structural Model Assessment and Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. B	T-Value	P-Value	f^2	Decision
H1	SC -> ATTW	0.368	4.892	0.000	0.143	Supported
H2	TS -> ATTW	0.229	3.638	0.000	0.055	Supported
H3	HO -> ATTW	0.126	1.691	0.091	0.014	Rejected
H4	NI -> eWOMF	0.395	7.102	0.000	0.213	Supported
H5	ATTW -> eWOMF	0.29	5.325	0.000	0.109	Supported

Operating in parallel, the Internalization Route remains a significant pathway, although its magnitude is secondary to that of social pressure. Attitude towards the SNS positively and significantly influenced eWOM effectiveness ($\beta = 0.290$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H5. Further dissection of the antecedents of attitude reveals divergent influences. Source Credibility emerged as the primary determinant ($\beta = 0.368$, $p < 0.001$; supporting H1), indicating that users heavily rely on the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of reviewers to form their platform affect. This is complemented by Platform Tie Strength, which positively reinforces attitudes ($\beta = 0.229$, $p < 0.001$; supporting H2), underscoring the value of relational bonding. However, contrary to theoretical expectations, Content Homophily failed to demonstrate a significant impact on attitude ($\beta = 0.126$, $p = 0.091$), leading to the rejection of H3. This finding implies a potential shift in user behavior within modern algorithmic environments (TikTok, Reels), where users may prioritize content novelty and expert authority over mere similarity to the content creator.

The assessment of specific indirect effects (Table 7) further corroborates the dual-path mechanism. Attitude towards the SNS significantly mediated the internalization of the influence of Source Credibility (β -indirect = 0.106, $p = 0.001$) and Platform Tie Strength (β -indirect = 0.066, $p = 0.006$) on behavioral effectiveness, supporting H6a and H6b. Conversely, given the insignificant direct effect of Content Homophily, the indirect path from Content Homophily to eWOM effectiveness via attitude was not established ($p = 0.097$), leading to the rejection of H6c. Collectively, these findings delineate a complex behavioral landscape in which eWOM effectiveness is driven simultaneously by calculated social compliance (direct pressure) and genuine internalized affection (mediated by trust and ties), with social pressure currently acting as the more potent force.

Table 7. Specific Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis)

Path	Indirect Effect (B)	T-Value	P-Value	Conclusion
SC -> ATTW -> eWOMF	0.106	3.475	0.001	Significant (Mediation supported)
TS -> ATTW -> eWOMF	0.066	2.749	0.006	Significant (Mediation supported)
HO -> ATTW -> eWOMF	0.037	1.661	0.097	Insignificant (No Mediation)

5 Discussion

These findings provide empirical support for a dual-path behavioral mechanism in social commerce, wherein compliance and internalization operate concurrently rather than sequentially. Unlike traditional TAM perspectives, where social influence must first be internalized through attitude formation, our results demonstrate that Vietnamese F&B consumers engage with eWOM through both deliberative evaluation (internalization) and immediate social pressure (compliance) concurrently. The substantial variance explained ($R^2 = 0.479$) derives from both pathways contributing independently: normative influence directly ($\beta = 0.395$) and attitude indirectly through its antecedents. This parallel structure challenges the assumption of a universal "Think-Feel-Do" sequence and suggests that in collectivist, algorithm-driven environments, behavioral intention formation is more complex than linear models propose. Users can simultaneously hold positive platform attitudes while responding to social pressure, with the relative dominance of each pathway potentially varying across individuals, situations, and platform types.

This study was designed to decode the complex psychological mechanisms driving electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) effectiveness in the high-velocity food and beverage (F&B) sector of an emerging market. By juxtaposing the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the empirical results delineate a dual-path framework in which consumer behavior is shaped by the tension between social compliance and internalized affection. These findings offer a nuanced interpretation of how digital interactions translate into real-world dining decisions.

A paramount finding of this research is the overarching dominance of Normative Influence in predicting eWOM effectiveness. Challenging the traditional TAM perspective, which posits attitude as the central gateway to behavior, our results reveal that in the context of Vietnamese social commerce, normative pressure exerts a direct and potent impact on intention ($\beta = 0.395$), bypassing the attitudinal formation process. This suggests the existence of a compliance mechanism where users engage with and propagate eWOM primarily to align with social expectations rather than out of genuine platform affinity. This finding corroborates Phuong et al. (2025), who identified the Fear of Missing Out as a critical driver in Vietnam's digital economy, and extends the work of Chu and Kim (2011) by demonstrating that in collectivist cultures, the need for social validation can override individual affective evaluation. Consequently, sharing or following eWOM becomes a strategic signal of social belonging. The dominance of the compliance route may be particularly amplified by the algorithmic design of contemporary platforms such as TikTok. Unlike traditional social networks, TikTok and Instagram Reels algorithmically prioritize viral and trending content,

making social consensus highly visible through view counts, trending indicators, and "for you" recommendations. This algorithmic amplification of "what everyone is engaging with" creates a feedback loop that strengthens normative pressure beyond what occurs in organic social networks. Users are continuously exposed to signals of collective behavior—trending restaurants, viral food reviews, popular check-ins—making the compliance mechanism more immediate and powerful. In this sense, algorithms function as artificial amplifiers of social norms, explaining why normative influence can bypass attitude formation so effectively in the Vietnamese F&B social commerce context.

While social pressure acts as a powerful external force, this study confirms that the internalization route via attitude towards the SNS remains a significant, albeit secondary, driver of eWOM effectiveness. Consistent with Nguyen (2023) and Tran et al. (2023), positive affective evaluation of a platform fosters a sustainable pathway for information adoption. Crucially, the formation of this attitude is heavily contingent upon Source Credibility and Platform Tie Strength. The robust impact of Source Credibility ($\beta = 0.368$) implies that amidst information asymmetry in the F&B market, users rely on the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of reviewers to reduce cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, the significance of Platform Tie Strength ($\beta = 0.229$) reinforces the notion that strong bonds with platforms create a safety net for decision-making (Le et al., 2024). Beyond these behavioral mechanisms, this study makes an important methodological contribution through the successful application of the Online Social Network (OSN) framework (Kim et al., 2018) to the F&B social commerce context. By operationalizing Tie Strength and Homophily as user-platform rather than interpersonal constructs, we demonstrate that users form affective relationships with digital platforms. The significant effect of Platform Tie Strength ($\beta = 0.229$) confirms that in contemporary social commerce environments, where direct interpersonal interaction is limited, platforms function as primary relational actors. This finding extends the OSN framework beyond review websites to algorithm-driven social media platforms and validates its applicability in collectivist emerging markets, where platform-mediated relationships are rapidly replacing traditional word-of-mouth networks.

A notable divergence from the established literature is the non-significant impact of Content Homophily on attitude, which leads to the rejection of the hypothesis linking user similarity to platform affection. This contradicts the classic view of Gilly et al. (1998), who posited that similarity breeds connection. A plausible explanation for this anomaly lies in the structural shift of modern social networking sites (TikTok, Reels) towards algorithmic discovery. In these environments, users increasingly value novelty and aspirational expertise over similarity. As noted by Sang and Binh (2024), in the context of food reviewers, audiences are often more captivated by influencers who possess superior culinary knowledge or distinct experiences rather than those who mirror their own profiles. Thus, in the pursuit of high-quality dining recommendations, the functional value of credibility appears to eclipse homophily's emotional comfort.

6 Implications

6.1 Theoretical Implications

First, it advances the theoretical integration of the TRA and TAM by proposing and validating a Dual-Path Compliance Framework. While prior studies often view attitude as the sole mediator of behavior, this study empirically demonstrates that in an emerging, collectivist market like Vietnam, normative pressure can function as a direct, dominant driver of eWOM effectiveness, effectively bypassing the attitudinal route. This challenges the universality of the Think-Feel-Do hierarchy and suggests that Social Conformity should be treated as a parallel mechanism to Technology Acceptance.

Second, this study offers a nuanced explanation of the role of content homophily in the algorithmic era. By documenting the non-significant impact of content homophily on attitudes, this study delimits the boundary conditions of social identity theory. It posits that on modern, content-driven platforms (TikTok, Reels), the similarity-attraction paradigm is supplanted by an expertise-attraction model. Users no longer

seek peers who mirror their identity but aspire to follow authoritative figures (High Source Credibility) who offer novel experiences, thereby prioritizing informational value over social congruence.

Third, this study advances the measurement methodology by successfully integrating the Online Social Network (OSN) framework with established technology acceptance models. By operationalizing social network constructs (tie strength, homophily) as user-platform rather than interpersonal relationships, we demonstrate that TAM-TRA models can be adapted to contemporary social commerce environments in which platforms themselves serve as relational actors. This integration resolves a long-standing challenge in social commerce research: how to measure social influence when direct interpersonal contact is limited. The validation of Platform Tie Strength and Content Homophily as distinct constructs with adequate discriminant validity (Kim et al., 2018) provides future researchers with a framework for studying user behavior in algorithm-mediated social environments beyond F&B, including fashion, travel, and entertainment social commerce.

6.2 Practical Implications

Leveraging Fear of Missing Out (FOMO): Given the dominance of the compliance route, marketers should prioritize campaigns that trigger social urgency. Instead of focusing solely on the functional benefits of food, content strategies should emphasize the trending nature of the dining experience. Tactics such as check-in challenges, utilizing trending sounds on TikTok, or highlighting the crowd consensus can effectively activate the normative pressure that drives immediate purchase intention.

Strategic Selection of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs): The rejection of content homophily and strong support for source credibility suggest a pivot in influencer marketing. Brands should move away from micro-influencers who look like the customer towards expert reviewers or culinary authorities who demonstrate high competence and honesty. Investing in credibility yields a higher return on engagement than investing in credibility.

Strengthening User-Platform Relationships: Given the significant impact of Platform Tie Strength on attitude formation ($\beta = 0.229$, see Table 6), F&B businesses should prioritize building direct relationships between users and their platform presence rather than relying solely on viral reach or peer sharing. Strategic actions include: (1) developing platform-specific content series that encourage repeated visits (e.g., weekly TikTok food reviews, Instagram story takeovers), (2) actively responding to comments and mentions to foster platform loyalty, (3) creating exclusive platform-based incentives (followers-only promotions, early access to new menu items), and (4) using platform analytics to personalize content that increases the "closeness" users feel toward the brand's social media presence. As users develop stronger bonds with the platform, the internalization route strengthens, creating sustainable engagement independent of trending pressures.

7 Conclusion and limitations

7.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to decipher the antecedents of eWOM effectiveness in the F&B sector through the lens of a hybrid TRA-TAM framework. Empirical evidence confirms that eWOM behavior in Vietnam is driven by a complex interplay between social pressure and personal affection. Notably, the Compliance Mechanism (driven by Normative Influence) emerged as a more potent force than the Internalization Mechanism (driven by Attitude). Furthermore, the study highlights that while credibility and social bonds build platform affinity, mere similarity (content homophily) has lost its persuasive power in the current digital landscape. Ultimately, successful social commerce strategies must balance the creation of social hype with the delivery of credible and expert-validated content.

7.2 Limitations and Future Research

Despite its rigorous design, this study is not free from limitations, which open avenues for future studies. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data precludes the assessment of causal relationships over time; a longitudinal design could better capture how compliance evolves into internalization after repeated exposure. Second, the sample was purposively drawn from Ho Chi Minh City, a metropolitan hub with high digital literacy rates. Future studies should expand to rural areas or cross-cultural contexts to validate the generalizability of the dual-path model. Finally, given the rejection of content homophily, future scholars should explore alternative constructs, such as parasocial interaction or perceived novelty, to better explain user engagement on algorithm-driven platforms.

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