

A Research Model on the Influence of Tiktok Influencers on Gen Z's Purchasing Behavior in Ho Chi Minh City Through Affiliate Marketing

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Abstract: The rapid development of social media, especially TikTok, has driven the popularity of affiliate marketing through influencers. Generation Z—young, proactive, and tech-savvy consumers—has become a segment strongly influenced by these marketing strategies. This study proposes a research model to examine the influence of TikTok influencers on the purchasing behavior of Gen Z in Ho Chi Minh City via affiliate marketing as an intermediary mechanism. Based on the theoretical foundations of planned behavior and emotion, the proposed model connects factors such as influencer popularity, congruence (fit), and credibility with purchasing behavior. Simultaneously, the model incorporates mediating factors like Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and emotional responses to elucidate the mechanism by which influencer impact is converted into consumer purchase decisions.

Keywords: TikTok; influencer; Gen Z; affiliate marketing; purchasing behavior.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of a rapidly growing global e-commerce industry, revenue from affiliate marketing on online platforms has shown impressive growth. According to Statista (2022), global affiliate marketing revenue reached approximately 12 billion USD with an average annual growth rate of about 10%, opening significant opportunities for innovative marketing strategies. Consequently, this research is oriented toward exploring how messages from influencers on TikTok—a platform with superior interactivity and virality—impact the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers in Ho Chi Minh City. The research team recognizes that influencer-based marketing has established itself as a key communication force in the current era, as brands increasingly rely on influencers to reach target customers and drive sales. Statista (2024) reports that the market share of influencer marketing has

tripled since 2019, demonstrating the explosive growth of this form of promotion. In particular, with nearly 2 billion monthly active users globally (Statista, 2023), TikTok has created a dynamic platform where creative short-video content not only provides entertainment but also opens unique channels of engagement between influencers and audiences.

Given that TikTok currently dominates Gen Z's digital content consumption habits, studying the impact of affiliate marketing by TikTok influencers on the purchase decisions of Gen Z in Ho Chi Minh City is especially urgent. According to the Digital 2024 report by We Are Social and Meltwater (2024), up to 94% of Vietnamese internet users aged 18–24 access TikTok daily, and Gen Z accounts for about 40% of interactions with commercial content. This creates a huge opportunity for brands to leverage affiliate links

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to reach target audiences directly. In fact, Gen Z's participation in online shopping in Vietnam has grown dramatically, reaching 78% in 2023 (NielsenIQ Vietnam, 2023). Among these young consumers, 65% report deciding to purchase a product based on influencer recommendations, especially when those recommendations include affiliate promotional codes (Decision Lab, 2023). In addition, Statista (2024) notes that Gen Z in Vietnam spends on average 2.5 million VND per month on e-commerce, of which 30% is spent on flash sales and affiliate deals. This generation in Ho Chi Minh City faces significant academic and financial pressures, driving a need for quick and convenient shopping experiences. Affiliate marketing via TikTok provides a "one-touch" solution—watching a video, receiving a discount code, and making a purchase immediately within the platform—which fits their fast-paced lifestyle (Nguyễn Thị Mai Phương, 2023). Moreover, local authorities and educational institutions are promoting the digital economy and digital skills for Gen Z, making this research practically meaningful for developing effective marketing strategies that support businesses and contribute to the city's digital economy growth.

The presence and credibility of TikTok influencers not only shape consumer perceptions but also create a chain of tightly linked effects. Specifically, recommendations from influencers delivered through short videos can stimulate positive emotional responses such as excitement and trust (Richins, 1997). These emotions play a decisive role in driving electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)—the process of sharing and interacting on social networks—which in turn directly affects purchase decisions. Research by Erkan et al. (2016) indicated that influencer-initiated eWOM can create a ripple effect, increasing awareness and encouraging consumption behavior. The research team has chosen TikTok as the focal platform instead of YouTube or Facebook due to TikTok's unique ability to disseminate highly creative short-form videos. TikTok's smart algorithm and entertaining content have quickly won the favor of young users, especially Gen Z, by eliciting strong emotional reactions (Statista, 2023). In contrast, while YouTube and Facebook are also powerful platforms, their content formats and interaction methods have been extensively studied, leaving a research gap regarding the specific ways TikTok influencers impact purchase decisions.

In terms of e-commerce integration, this study focuses on TikTok's in-app shopping feature (TikTok Shop) rather than traditional e-commerce marketplaces like Shopee or Lazada. The primary reason is that TikTok provides a seamless shopping experience embedded within the content stream,

allowing consumers to convert feelings of interest and excitement into purchase actions quickly and directly. This seamless experience differs from platforms like Shopee or Lazada, where users must switch to a separate application to purchase, interrupting the experience and reducing the immediate impact of the marketing message. By concentrating on TikTok, the research team aims to uncover the unique effects of influencer marketing on a short-video platform, thereby offering valuable insights into how factors such as influencer endorsements, emotional responses, and eWOM interconnect to influence Gen Z's purchasing decisions in Ho Chi Minh City. These insights will not only enrich academic knowledge but also provide practical value for marketing campaigns in today's increasingly competitive environment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Definitions

Affiliate Marketing and Influencer Marketing

Affiliate marketing is an efficient, commission-based marketing model in which influencers share product links and receive a commission when a transaction is completed (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020; Huang & Chen, 2022). On TikTok, influencers can integrate affiliate links directly into video descriptions or use link stickers within videos, making it convenient for viewers to make purchases with a single click. This mechanism allows brands to accurately measure campaign effectiveness while leveraging the trust and high engagement that Gen Z audiences often have with influencers. Influencer marketing, according to Freberg et al. (2011), is the strategic collaboration between brands and individuals who have influence, with the aim of disseminating messages and affecting consumer decisions. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) suggests that people tend to observe and imitate the behaviors of those they admire; thus, when an influencer uses and recommends a product via an affiliate link, they create a behavioral model for their followers. Research by De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) demonstrated that an influencer's level of popularity and relevance to the product determine the degree of their impact on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

The FOMO syndrome is described by Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, and Gladwell (2013) as a psychological state of anxiety about missing attractive experiences that others might be enjoying. On TikTok, content such as flash sales or time-limited promotions promoted by influencers through affiliate links can trigger intense FOMO, making viewers feel pressure to act quickly so as not to miss out (Bright & Logan, 2018; Sharma & Sharma, 2022). FOMO stems from the need for social connection and

the worry of being left behind (Przybylski *et al.*, 2013). Prior research confirms that high levels of FOMO can lead to rapid and impulsive purchasing behavior when consumers are exposed to enticing influencer content on social media.

Emotional Responses

Emotional response plays a crucial mediating role between influencer stimuli and eventual purchasing behavior. According to Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer (1999), positive emotional states such as excitement, curiosity, or empathy can drive consumption behaviors. Yoo and Gretzel (2016) also pointed out that positive emotions not only strengthen engagement with a brand but also heighten purchase intentions. In Vietnam, Nguyễn Hoàng Oanh and Lê Minh Khôi (2023) found that feelings of excitement when watching TikTok affiliate marketing videos increase click-through purchase rates. Emotional reactions thus serve as the bridge between an influencer's persuasive content and the consumer's behavioral response.

Purchase Intention and Consumer Behavior

Purchase intention is the degree of a consumer's planned or expected effort to buy a product or service. Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991) shows that purchase intention is influenced by one's attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Pavlou and Fygenson (2006) extended this theory to e-commerce, emphasizing the roles of trust and ease of use in online purchase intentions. On TikTok, when an influencer provides detailed, transparent information and a clear affiliate link, Gen Z consumers feel more ease and confidence in completing the transaction. This sense of trust and convenience can translate into higher purchase intentions and ultimately actual buying behavior.

Numerous studies worldwide have shown that affiliate marketing and influencer marketing on social media have significant effects on consumer behavior. De Veirman *et al.* (2017) found that an influencer's popularity (e.g., number of followers) and relevance to the product or brand not only directly impact consumers' brand attitudes but also influence purchase intentions by building trust and emotional connection (Building on this, Casaló *et al.*, (2020) developed a comprehensive conceptual framework for affiliate marketing, revealing that informational value and credibility are two key factors that enhance communication effectiveness and consumer behavior. In the Chinese market, where TikTok (Douyin) is extremely popular, Huang and Chen (2022) observed that integrating direct affiliate links into TikTok videos increased the conversion rate of viewers to buyers by 20%, demonstrating the effectiveness of such "shoppable videos" in a social

commerce environment. Psychological drivers related to social media content have also garnered research attention. FOMO is identified as one of the powerful motivators behind quick and unplanned purchasing actions. Przybylski *et al.*, (2013) were among the first to develop a scale for FOMO, showing that the syndrome originates from social connectivity needs and anxiety about exclusion. Bright and Logan (2018) confirmed that individuals with high FOMO are more likely to make impulsive purchases when confronted with highly engaging influencer content. Furthermore, emotional responses are crucial intermediaries between influencer stimuli and consumption behavior. Bagozzi *et al.*, (1999) emphasized that emotions act as a bridge between cognition and action, especially in highly interactive marketing contexts. More recently, Yoo and Gretzel (2016) suggested that positive emotions generated from influencer content can rapidly propel purchase behavior, particularly when the content is well-aligned with the viewer's psychological profile.

Emerging evidence from Vietnam reflects similar trends. Nguyen Thi Mai Phuong (2023) and Lê Hoàng Minh & Trần Thị Hồng Nhung (2024) reported that 68% of Gen Z consumers in Ho Chi Minh City have made purchases through affiliate links when an influencer directly recommended the product on TikTok. Additionally, market surveys by Q&Me (2023) and Decision Lab (2023) indicate that 65% of Vietnamese Gen Z users tend to decide to buy immediately after viewing affiliate marketing content on TikTok, especially when that content is presented by celebrities or key opinion leaders (KOLs). These studies not only confirm the linkage between influencer marketing, FOMO, emotional responses, and consumer behavior, but also provide a foundation for developing and testing an appropriate theoretical model in the context of Vietnam's market—where Gen Z is rapidly emerging as a dominant consumer group on the TikTok platform.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) explains the persuasion process through two information-processing routes: a central route, where the audience carefully evaluates the message based on arguments and content quality, and a peripheral route, where cues such as the source's credibility, visuals, and emotional appeal play a decisive role. On TikTok, influencers often rely on peripheral cues—vibrant imagery, music, and personal style—to attract Gen Z viewers, who are easily drawn in by brief, impactful messages. This can lead to purchase decisions based on an overall affective impression of the product rather than detailed cognitive evaluation. The short-form, rapid-fire nature of TikTok content means that Gen Z

consumers may be more influenced by these peripheral cues (e.g., an influencer's charisma or the entertainment value of the video) in forming attitudes and purchase intentions, consistent with the ELM's peripheral route.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991) posits that an individual's behavioral intention is shaped by their attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the TikTok context, influencers not only introduce products but also help shape social norms and consumer attitudes by projecting confidence, success, and a modern lifestyle. This can create a form of social pressure or normative influence, encouraging Gen Z in Ho Chi Minh City to follow consumption trends that they perceive as aligning with their personal values and peer expectations. Additionally, when influencers demonstrate ease and convenience in purchasing via TikTok (for example, using in-app shopping links), they can enhance viewers' perceived behavioral control by making the purchasing process seem more accessible. TPB thus provides a framework for understanding how influencer content might influence Gen Z's purchase intentions: by affecting their attitudes (how favorable they feel about buying the product), subjective norms (perceived social approval of buying), and perceived control over the buying process.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) emphasizes learning through observing and imitating others' behaviors in a social context. On TikTok, Gen Z users frequently observe how influencers talk about and use products, which in turn shapes their own consumption behaviors. Influencers act as role models; their demonstrations and endorsements provide not only information about products but also social proof that can encourage purchasing. Through this observational learning process, Gen Z consumers may move from merely watching reviews or hauls to actually purchasing items, based on the trust and identification they have with the influencers. The presence of relatable influencers modeling the use of a product lowers the psychological barriers to purchase by making the behavior seem normative and desirable. In essence, TikTok influencers can facilitate a "learn by observing" effect, where viewers adopt consumption patterns and decisions mirroring those of the influencers they follow.

2.3 Proposed Research Model and Hypotheses

Drawing on the above theoretical foundations and literature review, this study develops a research model to clarify the relationships between the influence of TikTok influencers, FOMO, emotional responses, and Gen Z's purchasing behavior in the

context of affiliate marketing. The proposed model (Figure 1) links influencer-driven affiliate marketing to Gen Z's psychological factors and purchase outcomes. Testing the following hypotheses will not only validate the theoretical model but also shed light on the mediating roles of key psychological factors—particularly FOMO and emotions—in the process of translating influencer impact into consumer behavior:

H1: Affiliate marketing by TikTok influencers positively influences Gen Z's attitude toward purchasing behavior

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), attitude toward a behavior is formed by underlying beliefs about the behavior's outcomes. Prior research indicates that when influencers provide high informational value in marketing content, it enhances consumers' positive attitudes toward the advertised products (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Similarly, the credibility of an influencer has been shown to improve viewers' attitudes toward the product (Lim, Mohd Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2022). In the context of Vietnam, Nguyễn Thị Hồng Hạnh and Trần Minh Trí (2023) observed that Gen Z in Ho Chi Minh City develops a favorable purchasing attitude when an influencer provides a clear affiliate discount code. Furthermore, Jin and Phua (2014) confirmed that trust in an influencer leads to more positive attitudes and ultimately purchase decisions, underlining the connection between influencer-driven content and consumer mindset.

H2: Affiliate marketing by TikTok influencers positively influences Gen Z's perceived behavioral control over purchasing.

Ajzen (1991) defines perceived behavioral control as one's belief in their ability to perform a behavior. When influencers share an easy, step-by-step process for buying through affiliate links, consumers' perceived control over the purchase increases (Faisal, Huda, & Mustapa, 2022). Empirical data support this effect: Statista (2024) found that 72% of Gen Z feel more confident about making a purchase after viewing detailed how-to-buy instructions from influencers. In Ho Chi Minh City, Nguyen Thi Mai Phuong (2023) and Lê Hoàng Minh & Trần Thị Hồng Nhung (2024) likewise reported that affiliate marketing content which clearly guides the purchasing steps makes Gen Z consumers feel that buying the product is straightforward and within their control.

H3: Affiliate marketing by TikTok influencers positively influences Gen Z's trust in the influencer.

Trust in the message source is a crucial outcome of effective influencer marketing. Bansal

and Voyer (2000) indicated that the credibility of an information source largely determines the trust that consumers place in it. Influencers who produce authentic content and engage regularly with their audience build higher trust (Munar & Jacobsen, 2021). Moreover, frequent and high-quality affiliate promotions by an influencer can enhance their perceived credibility (Lim et al., 2022). In Ho Chi Minh City, a study by Nguyễn Thị Hồng Hạnh and Trần Minh Trí (2023) confirmed that Gen Z consumers tend to trust influencers who provide transparent affiliate links and honest reviews. Jin and Phua (2014) also demonstrated that when consumers trust an influencer, this trust can carry over into their purchasing decisions. Therefore, effective affiliate marketing via influencers is expected to strengthen the followers' trust in those influencers.

H4: Gen Z's attitude toward purchasing behavior positively influences their Fear of Missing Out (FOMO).

FOMO is partly driven by an individual's outlook on experiences and consumption. Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, and Gladwell (2013) describe FOMO as the fear of missing attractive experiences that others might be enjoying. When Gen Z consumers hold a positive attitude toward a certain purchasing behavior or product (for instance, viewing it as highly desirable), they may be more prone to fearing that they'll miss out on it. Bright and Logan (2018) found that highly viral and engaging content can activate FOMO, especially among those already inclined to pursue the experience. In Ho Chi Minh City, Nguyễn Hồng Vân and Phạm Tuấn Đạt (2023) observed that Gen Z viewers felt FOMO when a TikTok influencer promoted a flash sale via an affiliate link. Additionally, Sharma and Sharma (2022) showed that FOMO intensifies when influencers emphasize the limited-time availability of an offer. This effect can be further magnified by social proof, where seeing others engage in a purchase combines with personal attitude to heighten the pressure to buy (Moreau & Puntoni, 2021).

H5: Gen Z's perceived behavioral control positively influences their FOMO.

While perceived control generally facilitates intentional action, a high sense of control can paradoxically enable FOMO to flourish if not exercised. Ajzen (1991) noted that when people believe they are capable of performing an action, they may experience tension if they haven't yet acted. In a purchasing context, if Gen Z consumers feel that buying a product via an affiliate link is easy and within reach, they might experience more anxiety about missing the opportunity. Huang and Wang

(2021) found that when consumers perceive purchasing through an affiliate link to be effortless, their FOMO about the deal increases. Similarly, research by Faisal et al. (2022) and Nguyen Thi Mai Phuong (2023) showed that Gen Z is prone to feeling FOMO if they know a purchase is easily attainable but have not made it yet. Trần Thị Thu Huyền and Đặng Quốc Hưng (2022) also reported a relationship between one's sense of control and the pressure of FOMO. Thus, higher perceived control in the context of an available promotion can intensify the urgency and fear of missing out on that promotion.

H6: Gen Z's trust in the influencer positively influences their purchase intention.

Trust is a critical factor in converting exposure to influencer content into a decision to buy. Bansal and Voyer (2000) demonstrated that confidence in an information source tends to encourage following the source's recommendations, effectively promoting purchase behavior. In social media contexts, authenticity and credibility of influencers build consumer trust, which in turn elevates purchase intention (Munar & Jacobsen, 2021). Jin and Phua (2014) likewise found that when consumers perceive an influencer as credible, their intention to purchase the endorsed product increases. Vietnamese consumers reflect this pattern: Nguyễn Hồng Hạnh and Trần Minh Trí (2023) confirmed that Gen Z users are significantly more likely to click "buy" when they trust the TikTok influencer's recommendation. Consistent with this, Lim et al. (2022) asserted that trustworthy influencers achieve higher conversion rates. Therefore, greater trust in an influencer – fostered by transparent and genuine affiliate marketing practices – is expected to lead to stronger purchase intentions among Gen Z followers.

H7: Gen Z's FOMO positively influences their purchasing behavior.

Fear of Missing Out is a powerful driver of immediate action, particularly in consumer contexts. Hodgkinson (2019) noted that FOMO can prompt individuals to act quickly in order not to miss out on an opportunity or experience. In retail and e-commerce, this often translates to impulse purchases when a deal or trend is perceived as fleeting. Gupta and Sharma (2021) provided evidence that FOMO is a primary catalyst for impulse buying during flash sale events. Correspondingly, Nguyễn Hồng Vân and Phạm Tuấn Đạt (2023) found that Gen Z consumers in HCMC often make immediate purchases when experiencing FOMO triggered by an influencer's affiliate link promotion. Sharma and Sharma (2022) also identified a strong relationship between FOMO and impulsive buying behavior. Moreover, Moreau and Puntoni (2021) emphasized that FOMO,

especially when coupled with social proof (seeing others buy or endorse the product), significantly increases purchase intentions. Thus, heightened FOMO is expected to directly lead Gen Z individuals to engage in the purchasing behavior, often bypassing lengthy deliberation.

H8: Gen Z's FOMO positively influences their emotional response.

FOMO has psychological and emotional consequences in addition to behavioral ones. Among youth, especially Gen Z who are highly connected on social media, FOMO can induce a variety of emotional reactions. Blackwell, Leaman, Trampusch, Osborne, and Liss (2017) found that FOMO triggers emotional states such as anxiety, excitement, or restlessness when individuals fear missing out on trending activities or products. On TikTok, content that is time-sensitive or exclusive tends to amplify FOMO, which can in turn create immediate surges of emotion (Hayran & Anik, 2021). For instance, the anticipation of missing a limited offer might cause anxiety, whereas the thrill of a potential reward might cause excitement. Dhira, Yossatorn, Kaur, and Chen (2021) confirmed that FOMO is positively associated with both negative emotions (like anxiety) and impulsive tendencies among young social media users. Therefore, FOMO in this context plays a critical role in stimulating emotional responses. Understanding this link helps explain the motivational drive behind Gen Z's purchase behavior on TikTok: the fear of missing out not only creates urgency but also heightens emotional arousal, which can push consumers toward action.

H9: Gen Z's emotional response positively influences their purchasing behavior. Emotions have long been recognized as a key driver in consumer decision-making. When Gen Z consumers experience positive emotions (such as excitement, joy, or inspiration) in response to influencer content, these emotions can increase their propensity to purchase. Ramkissoon and Mavondo (2015) indicated that positive emotional states intensify the desire to take action, aligning with the idea that feeling good can spur one to buy as a way to sustain or capitalize on that feeling. Pine and Gilmore (1999) argued that in the modern experience economy, the emotional experience is often the primary driver of decisions—consumers seek products that provide or enhance desirable feelings. Empirical evidence supports this: Nguyễn Thị Mai Hương and Trần Anh Vũ (2023) found that feelings of excitement while watching a TikTok affiliate marketing video directly encouraged Gen Z viewers to click and make a purchase. Furthermore, Yoo and Gretzel (2016) demonstrated that positive emotions serve as a mediator between cognitive appraisals and purchasing actions in digital contexts; that is, even if an influencer's content provides information (cognition), it's the excitement or emotional appeal that actually propels the viewer to buy. Similarly, Bagozzi et al. (1999) emphasized that emotions significantly affect consumer decisions, often bridging the gap between initial interest and final action. Therefore, strong positive emotional responses elicited by influencer content are expected to lead to a higher likelihood of purchasing behavior among Gen Z consumers.

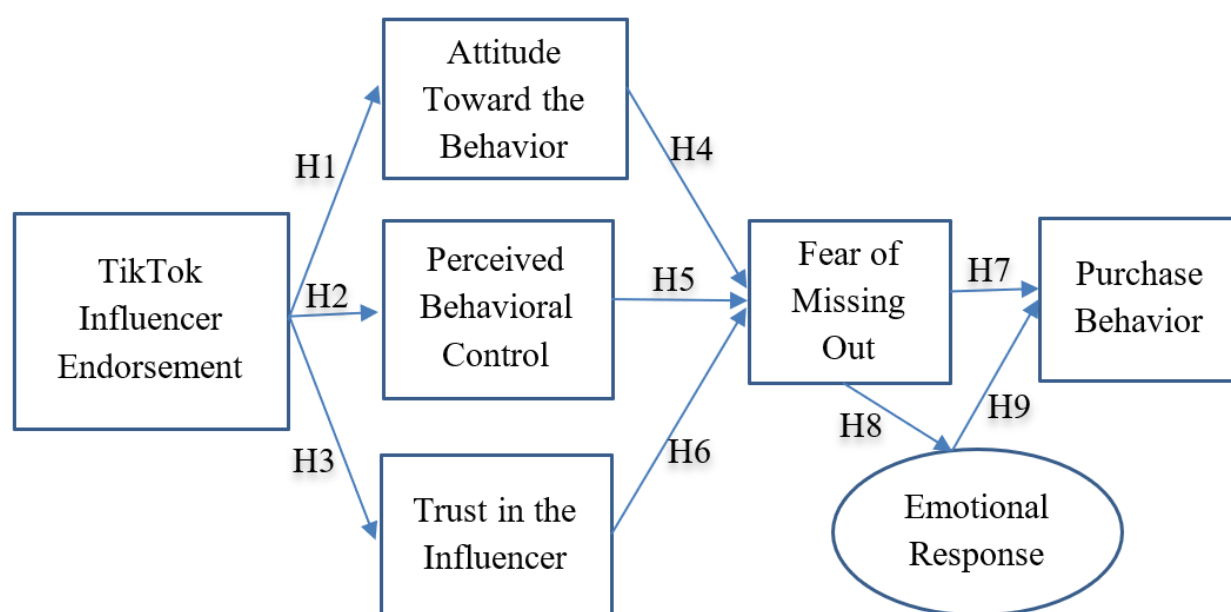


Figure 1: Proposed research model

4. Expected Research Outcomes

4.1 Expected Outcomes

To empirically validate the proposed model, the study will employ a quantitative approach with the following steps:

Research Instrument Design: A survey questionnaire will be developed based on the constructs and observed variables in the proposed model, drawing on measurement scales from prior studies and adjusting them to the Vietnamese context to ensure reliability and validity.

Data Collection: The questionnaire will be administered to Gen Z respondents in Ho Chi Minh City, focusing on individuals who have experience interacting with affiliate marketing content from TikTok influencers. This target group ensures relevant exposure to the phenomena under study. A sufficient sample size will be obtained to allow for robust statistical analysis.

Data Analysis: The collected data will be analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Software tools such as SPSS and AMOS (or SmartPLS) will be utilized to assess the measurement model and test the structural model. This analysis will evaluate overall model fit, estimate path coefficients for the hypothesized relationships, and examine the mediating roles of FOMO and emotional response in the influence of TikTok affiliate marketing on purchase behavior.

4.2 Subsequent Analytical Approach

This study is expected to yield several key outcomes:

Influencer Impact: Clarification of the influential role that TikTok influencers (through affiliate marketing) have on Gen Z's purchasing behavior, thereby empirically affirming the power of short-form video platforms in modern marketing strategies.

Role of FOMO: Identification of the mediating role of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in driving purchase behavior, especially given that young consumers are frequently exposed to highly viral, limited-time content from influencers.

Emotional Influence: Insights into how emotional factors—such as excitement or a sense of engagement—affect the consumer behavior of Gen Z, a cohort whose psychological makeup makes them particularly susceptible to the impact of digital experiences.

Psychosocial Mechanisms: Empirical evidence illuminating the psycho-social mechanisms by which affiliate marketing content from TikTok influencers is internalized by Gen Z and transformed into purchase decisions. This includes understanding how trust, social norms, and perceived ease of purchase contribute to the conversion process.

Strategic Implications: Practical recommendations for developing marketing strategies tailored to Gen Z,

a dynamic generation of consumers that constitutes an increasingly large segment of the Vietnamese market. The findings can guide brands in leveraging influencer partnerships and affiliate marketing more effectively to engage Gen Z and stimulate purchasing in a way that aligns with their digital behaviors and psychological drivers.

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