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THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING AND COUNTRY OF ORIGIN ON PURCHASE INTENTION OF TECHNOLOGY PRODUCTS ON E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>DOI: 10.52932/jfm.vi2.476</p> <p><i>Received:</i> January 01, 2024</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> March 12, 2024</p> <p><i>Published:</i> March 25, 2024</p> <p>Keywords: Attitude; Brand equity; Country of origin; Influencer marketing; Purchase intention.</p>	<p>This study examines factors affecting the intention to purchase technology products on e-commerce platforms of university students in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, including Brand equity, Country of Origin and Influencer Marketing. This study conducted a survey from August 2023 to September 2023 with 342 qualified questionnaires processed and analyzed using SMART-PLS software. The results indicate that country of origin, influence marketing, and brand equity are three important indicators related to consumers' intention to purchase technology products in the context of social commerce. Research has concluded that attitude and influence marketing are two powerful factors that influence purchasing intention today. This research will help businesses better understand customer behavior, thereby improving the effectiveness of future business plans and marketing communication strategies, helps attract more customers, increase sales and profits.</p>

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1. Introduction

In the context of rapid international integration and globalization, along with the strong development of science and technology coming from the 4.0 industrial revolution today, e-commerce has become popular around the world and the Vietnamese market is no exception. According to reports from Google, Temasek and Bain & Company, Vietnam continues to be the country with the fastest digital economic growth in Southeast Asia for two consecutive years (2022 and 2023) and is forecast to continue to hold the position (e-Conomy SEA report, 2023). In 2022, Vietnam's retail e-commerce revenue increased by 20% compared to 2021, reaching \$16.4 billion, accounting for 7.5% of the national retail revenue of consumer goods and services (Phan Anh, 2022). According to the data of VnEconomy (2022), 75% of people use the Internet and 74.8% of Internet users shop online. Technology products account for 51%, ranking third in terms of purchase volume on e-commerce platforms, only behind clothing, footwear, cosmetics (69%), and household appliances (64%). Statistical data shows that the proportion of technological products is high, but there is still great potential for growth. Currently, there are still many traditional customers who prefer to shop directly in the store, and they may need a long time to accept the use of e-commerce platforms. When shopping online, some customers often refer to information on e-commerce websites and then make purchases in stores due to attempts, contact, or other reasons. Therefore, the industry has a high number of existing and potential customers, and if sellers understand consumer purchasing behavior or intentions while attracting customers to choose products in their online stores, they can better utilize them.

Many studies have previously shown that country of origin and brand equity play an important role in purchase intention. With the development of technology products from

many manufacturers around the world, a rich and diverse market for technology products has been created. This diversity provides consumers with more choices without having to depend on the country of origin. In addition, consumers usually judge products based on their quality and brand, rather than just their country of origin. This change is due to the development of media and reviews from users online. In addition, according to Thilina (2021) research, influence marketing has a strong impact on consumer purchasing intentions in the fashion retail industry. However, in the electronics technology industry, although the growth rate and growth rate of this industry are high, previous research has rarely analyzed them. Instead of just focusing on traditional factors such as origin and brand equity as previously researched by Ashill and Sinha (2004), this study focuses on the impact of influence marketing on the e-commerce market. Different from previous studies in countries such as New Zealand (Ashill & Sinha, 2004), Lebanon (Abou Ali et al., 2021). Vietnam's unique context after the Covid 19 pandemic with the number of consumers using online marketplaces to shop has increased significantly, with technology products being a potential but not yet fully exploited field. Therefore, Vietnam has a policy of embracing technology, so the number of purchases of technology products increases rapidly. Studying how country of origin interacts with influencer marketing can provide valuable insights into consumer behavior. This reflects a new trend in consumer behavior due to the flourishing development of social networks and virtual advertising. Therefore, the key question is how influencer marketing, country of origin, and brand equity influence consumers' purchase intention in the context of social commerce for technology products sold on e-commerce platforms. This study aims to elucidate the roles of these three factors in driving purchase intention.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Purchase intention

Purchase intention is defined as a consumer's tendency to purchase a specific product or service (Dodds et al., 1991). Purchase intention is the process by which consumers plan to purchase products/services advertised through the media (Kamins & Marks 1987). Next, Spears and Singh (2004) defined purchase intention as an individual's planning to attempt to purchase a brand's product. Dabbous and Barakat (2020) the definition of purchase intention is the combination of consumers' interest in a brand or product and their ability to purchase these products. Purchase intention refers to a consumer's willingness or readiness to buy a specific technology product on an e-commerce platform.

2.2. Theory of Planned Behavior

Ajzen (1991) built the theory of planned behavior (TPB) based on the development and improvement of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). By adding the element "perceived behavioral control" to TRA, the limitations of the original model in dealing with behaviors that people cannot completely control have been overcome. The theory of planned behavior refers to three basic factors used to predict consumers' purchase intentions: consumer attitudes, subjective norms, and level of behavioral control. Bagozzi (1997) argued that attitudes play a role in motivating behavior, processing information, and regulating consumption. Consumer attitudes toward products can influence purchasing decisions. If consumers have a positive attitude toward the product, the likelihood of purchasing also increases. Within the framework of the TPB, attitude plays a critical role in influencing purchase intention. It represents an individual's overall evaluation of the benefits and drawbacks associated with purchasing the technology product.

2.3. The research model and hypothesis

Influencer marketing

According to Sudha and Sheena (2017), influence marketing is the process of using people who have influence over the community or social media, so that they can become part of brand activities, thereby increasing reach, sales, or engagement. Influencers can influence consumers' opinions towards products and services (More & Lingam, 2017). Celebrities in the digital world have become influential opinion leaders in the age of online social media power, their product reviews or product advertisements posted on social networks combined with their daily lifestyles arouse followers' desire to own similar products, thereby influencing followers' purchases (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). The informational value of influencer-generated content, as well as audiences' varying perceptions of the influencer (trustworthiness, attractiveness, similarity), influence trust in the message. In turn, this trust increases brand awareness and increases purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Research has shown that online influencers not only influence consumer perceptions and evaluations of products, but also positively influence their purchasing intentions. However, in the post-pandemic context, online shopping activities for general goods on e-commerce platforms have significantly increased. This study aims to investigate the impact of influencer marketing on the perception of technology products themselves, aiming to provide new perspectives or partially support existing theories explored in the H1 hypothesis.

Hypothesis H1: Influencer marketing has a positive impact on purchase intention.

Laroche et al. (2005) found that consumers use indirect information of knowledge about country of origin before making purchasing decisions. However, research on consumer

culture has shown that technological developments have created access to global mass media and online social interactions, which have subsequently led to the fact that many individuals become part of global consumer culture (Gupta, 2016). Consumers have gained more knowledge about the behavior, values and attitudes of cultures from around the world, which has led to a change in attitudes and associations (Catulli et al., 2017). Because influencers can influence consumers' opinions about products, using national and international representatives can create empathy with consumers' communities (Bartikowski & Cleveland, 2017).

Influencer marketing has great influence and receives a lot of trust, consumers can connect the quality they perceive with the country of origin, thereby contributing to reinforcing positive assessments of that country. Although extensive research has been conducted on the country of origin, existing research is limited to focusing on the impact of online influencers on the country of origin, especially on technological products. Therefore, we suggest verifying the H2 hypothesis:

Hypothesis H2: Influencer marketing has a positive impact on country of origin in online consumer perceptions.

Country of origin

Dewa (2015) defined, country of origin as an identifying characteristic in a product's attributes that affects consumer evaluation in determining the origin of the product. Information about the country of origin will form associations and images of that country in the consumer's mind when the consumer receives information about the product's country of origin, called country of origin image (Nagashima, 1970). Country of origin image is a consumer's general assessment of the country of origin and their perceived level of a specific product originating from that country (Lin & Chen, 2006).

Consumers tend to rely on country of origin information as a cue to facilitate the decision-making process when there is no product information, country of origin as an evaluation item being consumer consideration not only in developing countries but also in developed countries (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). A developed country will be considered innovative and producing technologically complex products, meanwhile, developing countries are considered to be countries with technology relatively underdeveloped and cannot be the place of origin for good quality products or products with high technology and complexity (Ahmed & d'Astous, 1996).

The country of origin theory suggests that a more positive perception of a product's origin country leads to a higher purchasing intention. While this theory has been verified previously, most studies were conducted before the Covid-19 pandemic. This is particularly relevant considering the significant increase in e-commerce shopping, especially in Ho Chi Minh City, before it became widespread across Vietnam. Therefore, we aim to re-evaluate this theory in the current context and determine whether the Country of Origin (COO) still significantly impacts consumer purchasing intentions, particularly within the rapidly evolving technological product industry. This research objective is reflected in the H3 hypothesis.

Hypothesis H3: Country of origin has a positive impact on purchase intention.

Li et al. (2007) found that the country of origin effect has a significant impact on consumer attitudes and product purchase intentions. Attitudes can have a positive or negative effect depending on the product's country of origin. Consumers will consider where the product comes from. If the product comes from a country with a good reputation, most consumers will have a positive attitude towards the product. On the other hand, if the

product comes from an unreliable country, consumers will have a negative attitude towards the product. Therefore, country of origin is a factor in evaluating products and influencing consumer attitudes. Research results by Bhakar et al. (2013) show that country of origin has a significant relationship with consumers' attitudes toward purchasing imported products. From those analyses, hypothesis H5 is proposed with the purpose of testing these theories again but in more specific contexts, such as the technology products sold on e-commerce platforms.

Hypothesis H4: Country of origin has a significant impact on consumer attitudes.

Similar to the brand name, country of origin is considered as external information before the consumer decides to buy the product and it also influences consumer perception and leads them to establish perception (Hong & Wyer, 1989). In a study in Pakistan (Iqbal et al., 2015), the country of origin factor is highly appreciated in the consumer market such as “Chinese products are cheap and low quality”, “Japanese products are worth trustworthy” and “moderately priced Korean products”. Therefore, “made in” has a strong correlation and psychological influence on the repositioning of brand equity. This theoretical relationship is based on brand awareness by Atilgan et al. (2005). Paul and Dasgupta (2010) recently found that consumers' positive perception of country of origin in the mobile phone industry has a positive influence on aspects of brand equity including loyalty, association, awareness and perceived quality. From these analyses, it is proposed to verify these theories for technology products in general, especially in the context of strong e-commerce development through hypothesis H5:

Hypothesis H5: Country of origin has a positive impact on brand equity.

Brand equity

Aaker (1991) defined that “Brand equity is a set of values associated with a brand name or brand symbol that contribute to increasing or decreasing the value of a product or service provided to a business and its customers”. Keller (1993) defined that “Customer-oriented brand equity is defined as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer responses to the brand's marketing activities”. For sectors where new products and services are constantly being introduced to the market (such as technology products), they attract consumers through the application of convenient attributes of e-commerce. So shaping consumer attitudes through developing key components of brand equity that create the potential for positive purchase intentions can significantly increase sales as well as customer satisfaction creating conditions for suppliers to develop sustainably (Wang & Li, 2012). Through the above arguments, hypothesis H6 is proposed with the desire to strengthen this statement in the online shopping environment in Vietnam along with the purpose of comparing brand equity with other factors that affect the brand.

Hypothesis H6: Brand equity has a positive influence on consumer attitudes.

Attitude

Essentially, it can be divided into two categories: attitudes towards objects and attitudes towards behavior (Garrett, 2010). Attitude toward a behavior includes an individual's positive or negative evaluation of a related behavior and an individual's perception of performing a certain behavior (Al-Debei et al., 2013). There is much empirical evidence supporting the notion that consumer attitudes positively influence consumer behavioral intentions (Kolkailah et al., 2012; Yeung & Leung, 2007). Additionally, purchase intention is defined by Dabbous & Barakat (2020) as the

combination of a consumer's interest in a brand or a product and the likelihood of purchasing these items. Attitude and purchase intention demonstrate a parallel relationship in consumer research (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005). For e-commerce, customers' purchasing attitudes will be enhanced when e-commerce businesses provide consumer-friendly online interfaces, competitive prices, excellent logistics services and immediate and positive feedback from the real or virtual community, this attitude will influence their purchase intention (Lin &

Chuang, 2018). Therefore, this study suggests testing the H7 hypothesis to examine the impact of attitudes on specific purchasing intentions in the field of technology products:

Hypothesis H7: Consumer attitudes positively impact intention to purchase technology products in the e-commerce market.

Based on the literature in related fields and research hypotheses, the following research model was built (Figure 1).

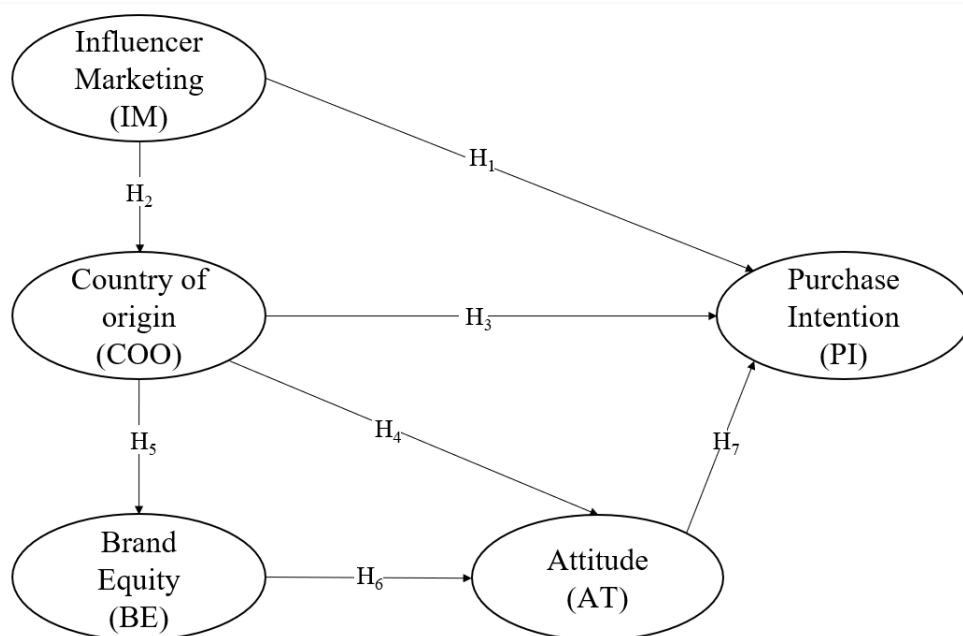


Figure 1. Proposed research model

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection and sampling

This study employed a convenience sampling method to recruit participants. The target population comprised university students (years 1-4) interested in purchasing technological equipment through e-commerce platforms. This non-probabilistic sampling technique is generally appropriate for descriptive and observational studies,

particularly when the primary objective is to explore relationships between variables. Selecting a convenience sample allowed for efficient data collection from a large pool of readily available participants who, to a certain extent, represented the target population. The analysis of such data was also facilitated due to its relative homogeneity. The rationale behind choosing university students stemmed from the evolving landscape of social commerce, where young individuals, particularly students, are

recognized as critical consumers of technology products within the realm of online shopping. This is largely attributed to their familiarity with technology and unimpeded access to e-commerce platforms. Therefore, the selection of students as survey subjects aligned with the study's target audience.

To test the study's hypotheses, an online survey was administered to university students residing and studying in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The survey was conducted between August and September 2023, targeting students who intend to purchase or have already purchased technology products through e-commerce platforms like Shopee, Lazada, Tiki, and similar platforms.

Hair et al. (2014) recommend a minimum sample size to participant ratio of 10:1 or 15:1 for regression analysis to achieve high statistical significance. This study adopted a more conservative 15:1 ratio, resulting in a minimum sample size of $n = 19 \text{ participants} * 15 = 285$. To ensure robust data collection, the study aimed to collect 400 survey responses. Notably, the actual response rate was 98.75%, yielding a final sample size of 395 participants.

3.2. Questionnaire

The questionnaire uses scales inherited from previous studies. A 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These include: 4 questions corresponding to 4 observed variables measuring the variable Purchase intention inherited from the research of Masukujjaman et al. (2021), 4 questions corresponding to 4 observed variables measuring the variable Brand equity inherited from the research of Mainardes et al. (2019), 4 questions correspond to 4 observed variables measuring the variable Country of origin inherited from the research of Nguyen et al. (2019), 4 questions corresponding to 4 observed variables measuring the variable Influencer marketing inherited from the

research of Hwang and Zhang (2018) and 3 questions corresponding to 3 observed variables measuring the variable Attitude inherited from the research of Sharma and Kaur (2018). The scales are carefully adjusted and supplemented to suit the objectives, research context and product type, ensuring semantic accuracy and ease for respondents.

4. Results

4.1. Respondents' information

The study will be conducted from August 2023 to September 2023. After the data was processed, only 342/395 questionnaires were valid for analysis. Of which, the number of men participating in the survey was 154 male students (45%) and 188 female students (55%). Survey subjects were first-year students (71 students, accounting for 20.8%), second-year students (113 students, accounting for 33%), third-year students (84 students, accounting for 24.6%) and the remaining were fourth-year students (74 students, accounting for 21.6%).

4.2. Research's result

The first stage is the validity testing constructed through the reliability testing steps of Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Total Reliability (CR), and the construct validity includes testing Internal consistency through external loadings, convergent validity through average variance extracted (AVE), discriminant validity through heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). The next stage is to test the research model using the Bootstrapping method.

Reliability is evaluated by observing the external loading coefficient of variables, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and composite reliability through SMART-PLS software. The outer loading coefficient must be greater than or equal to 0.7 then the observed variable is of good quality (Hair et al., 2013). The observation related to Brand Equity, denoted as BE4, was eliminated based on the results of the scale's

reliability testing. Re-analyzing the model after removing the BE4 variable, the test results show that the scale has internal consistency: The outer loading coefficients of the observed variables are all greater than 0.7; The values of CA (from 0.843 to 0.911) and CR (from 0.902 to 0.938)

are both greater than 0.7, so the scale has very good reliability (Hair et al., 2013). AVE values range from 0.697 to 0.789, both greater than 0.5, so the scales achieve convergent validity (Hair et al., 2020).

Table 1. Results of checking the validity of the scale

Variables	No of items	CA	CR	AVE	Outer loading
Attitude	3	0.843	0.905	0.761	0.869-0.876
Brand equity	3	0.849	0.908	0.767	0.842-0.899
Country of origin	4	0.869	0.911	0.718	0.806-0.890
Influencer marketing	4	0.911	0.938	0.789	0.882-0.899
Purchase intention	4	0.855	0.902	0.697	0.802-0.875

According to Henseler et al. (2015) proposed that if the HTMT ratio is less than 0.85, the discriminant value is accepted and the results

show that the above conditions are met (Table 2). Therefore, the validity of the scale is satisfied and the model can be evaluated in the next stage.

Table 2. Results of checking the validity of the heterotrait ratio – monotrait (HTMT)

Variables	AT	BE	COO	IM	PI
AT					
BE	0.423				
COO	0.439	0.567			
IM	0.465	0.353	0.316		
PI	0.625	0.351	0.478	0.502	

Figure 2 shows that all path coefficients are positive. Therefore, the concepts in the proposed model have a positive relationship with each other. Not only that, the P values in Table 3 follow the general rule used in this

study $p \text{ value} < 0.05$, then these relationships are statistically significant. Thus, the research hypotheses proposed in the previous section are accepted.

Table 3. Results of testing the research hypotheses

Hypothesis		Original Sample	P- Values	Test Result
H1	Influencer Marketing -> Purchase intention	0.241	0.000	Accepted
H2	Influencer Marketing -> Country of origin	0.282	0.000	Accepted
H3	Country of origin -> Purchase intention	0.212	0.000	Accepted
H4	Country of origin -> Attitude	0.262	0.000	Accepted
H5	Country of origin -> Brand equity	0.497	0.000	Accepted
H6	Brand Equity -> Attitude	0.233	0.000	Accepted
H7	Attitude -> Purchase intention	0.335	0.000	Accepted

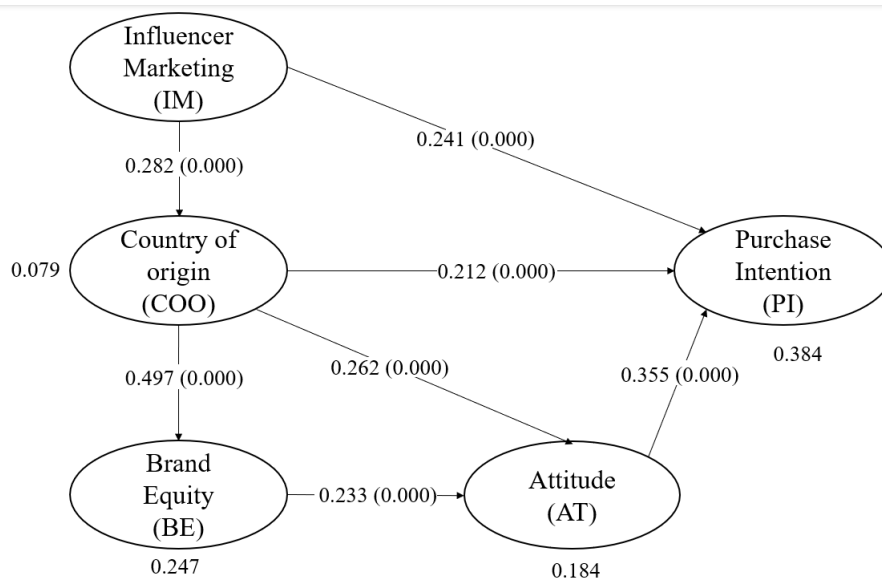


Figure 2. SEM analysis results

4.3. Discussions

While existing research has explored the individual influences of brand equity, country of origin, and influencer marketing on consumer purchase intention, a gap exists in the literature regarding the combined effect of these factors on technology product purchases on e-commerce platforms. To address this knowledge gap and contribute to a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, the present study undertakes an empirical investigation of online technology shopping behavior among university students in Ho Chi Minh City. This research aims to differentiate the relative impact of each factor on purchase intention within the context of e-commerce platforms.

The country of origin affects purchase intention, but its importance has decreased in the current era. With the development of technology products from many manufacturers around the world, a rich and diverse market for public goods has been created. Modern technology has also reduced the differences in manufacturing processes among countries. Therefore, consumers will no longer focus on the country of origin when choosing products,

rather than considering brand assets and other factors. This has been proven in the study of Ashill & Sinha (2004).

Accordingly, the attitude factor is considered to have the strongest impact on consumer purchasing intention when choosing products in accordance with the research results of Ajzen (1985), Kolkailah et al., (2012). Especially when the attitude factor is influenced by brand equity and country of origin, it has a stronger impact on purchase intention. Because the research object of the project is technology products, when choosing high-quality and high durability, strong brands provide good after-sales service, making consumers feel safer when purchasing products from well-known brands. Therefore, products with strong brand equity will gain higher trust from consumers. Brand equity has a positive impact on attitudes, Khanta et al. (2019) also agrees with this view. Moreover, according to research findings, although the importance of the country of origin has decreased, it still has a significant impact on brand equity. The country of origin also has a strong positive impact on consumer brand equity, which is consistent with the research findings of Ko et al. (2009).

Therefore, combining a strong brand with a reputable origin will increase consumer trust.

In addition, influence marketing has a direct impact and is evaluated as an important factor that has a significant positive impact on purchase intention, consistent with the results of Djafarova & Rushworth (2017), but inconsistent with the results of Danniswara et al. (2020). However, the impact of influence marketing on purchase intention is lower than attitude. In many cases, celebrity influence can still influence purchasing decisions, but in the field of technology products, consumers often rely on technical reviews, rather than just influencer advertisements. Influence marketing is more influential than country of origin because most participants focus on country of origin factors when choosing products, but are dominated by online influencers. This is consistent with More & Lingam (2017), online influencers can manipulate social influence, therefore they target consumers.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of Influencer Marketing, Country of Origin, and Brand Equity on the intention to purchase technology products on e-commerce platforms, gathering data from university students in Ho Chi Minh City. According to the results, the study makes significant contributions by revealing that attitude strongly and positively influences purchase intention. Additionally, it indicates that brand equity positively affects attitude, and the country of origin has a positive impact on purchase, attitude, and brand equity. Furthermore, a potentially novel finding is that influencer marketing positively influences purchase intention and the perception of online consumers regarding the country of origin.

The research results reveal that among the factors influencing purchase intention,

attitude exerts the strongest impact, followed by influencer marketing and country of origin, respectively. To elucidate this, it's important to note that country of origin significantly influences brand equity, effectively making it a part of brand equity. Additionally, customer attitudes are shaped by both brand equity and country of origin. Therefore, to enhance consumer attitudes and, consequently, increase product purchase intention, businesses should prioritize the development of brand equity or country of origin.

However, it's worth noting that country of origin is a less malleable and regulated factor, making the development of brand equity a more viable option for businesses. Moreover, the research data indicates that the impact of country of origin on purchase intention is no longer as pronounced as in the past. Instead, attitude and influencer marketing have emerged as two factors with a more positive influence on consumers' intention to purchase technology products.

The study further highlights the importance of conducting and developing influencer marketing for businesses involved in the sale of technological products. Influencers have proven to easily sway consumers' perceptions of products and services (More & Lingam, 2017). Consequently, to effectively boost purchase intention, businesses with a country of origin advantage can leverage it to foster positive attitudes among customers. For enterprises from less highly rated countries, the focus should be on improving consumer attitudes and incorporating influencer marketing as a strategic factor aligned with contemporary trends.

5.2. Limitations and suggestions for future research

The research was conducted in Ho Chi Minh City and therefore the results may not be generalizable to other regions and markets. To

validate the effectiveness of the model proposed in the current study, future follow-up studies could consider scaling across different cultures with diverse survey ages experimenting on many other product categories or by combining other theoretical framework works, future studies can have more insight. In the future, we propose to study online shopping behavior in a social commerce environment with a different

product category or conduct a comparative study between the two countries. In addition, this study uses a 5-point Likert scale, future studies can use a 7-point Likert scale to get more accurate results or understand the observed variables as well as the factors more deeply. On the other hand, future studies also need to find moderating factors that can impact the correlation in the current research model.

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