

The Impact of Digital Marketing on Customer Experience: Empirical Evidence from Generation Z in Vietnam's Food and Beverage Industry

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Abstract

In the context of Industry 4.0, digital marketing has increasingly become a strategic tool for enhancing competitive advantage in the Food and Beverage (F and B) sector. This study aims to examine the key determinants of digital marketing that influence the customer experience of Generation Z (Gen Z) in Vietnam, a segment characterized by high digital engagement and evolving consumption behaviors. Adopting Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the study evaluates five core dimensions, including digital interaction, experience personalization, electronic word-of-mouth, digital technology integration and brand awareness. The findings indicate that digital technology has the strongest positive effect on customer experience, followed by electronic word-of-mouth and digital interaction. In contrast, experience personalization and brand awareness do not demonstrate statistically significant direct effects on customer experience. These results suggest that Gen Z customers in the Vietnamese F and B context place greater emphasis on technological convenience, online information credibility and interactive digital engagement than on personalization features or brand recognition alone. The study contributes to digital marketing and customer experience literature by integrating multiple digital marketing dimensions into a unified framework for explaining Gen Z consumer behavior in an emerging market context. The findings provide practical implications for F and B businesses in prioritizing technology adoption, strengthening electronic word-of-mouth management and enhancing digital interaction strategies to improve customer experience and build long-term customer relationships.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior, Customer Experience, Digital Marketing, F and B Industry, Generation Z, Vietnam.

Introduction

In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, digital technology has fundamentally reshaped business-to-consumer interactions. Technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), big data and augmented reality have enabled organizations to optimize operational processes and enhance efficiency in the food and beverage (F and B) sector (1, 2). Within Vietnam, digitalization has accelerated across industries, with digital marketing becoming an important instrument for improving customer outreach and enhancing consumer experience (3, 4). Global digital advertising is projected to account for 72.9% of total advertising revenue by 2025, while the Vietnamese digital marketing sector is expected to achieve a compound annual growth rate of 5.8%, reaching approximately US\$3.53 billion by 2029 (5, 6). These developments indicate that digital marketing has become a strategic capability for F

and B enterprises seeking to improve customer satisfaction and strengthen long-term brand loyalty. Previous research indicates that digital technologies, including big data and cyber-physical systems, contribute positively to business performance and supply chain efficiency in the global F and B industry (7-11). Digital marketing activities and influencer engagement have also been shown to influence consumer purchasing behavior and brand trust, with customer satisfaction acting as an important mechanism in this relationship (12, 13). Recent studies have further demonstrated that technology acceptance and stimulus-organism-response perspectives can explain how information quality in food delivery applications influences electronic word-of-mouth and customer satisfaction in Vietnam (14-17). However, existing research has primarily focused on broad digital transformation processes, general

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consumer behavior, or operational improvements, while the specific customer experience journey of Gen Z within digitally enabled F and B environments remains insufficiently explored. To address this research gap, this study identifies and evaluates five dimensions of digital marketing: digital interaction, experience personalization, digital technology, electronic word-of-mouth and brand awareness. These constructs are selected to capture the major digital touchpoints influencing Gen Z consumers. Digital technology represents the technological foundation enabling seamless service delivery and data-driven interactions, while brand awareness functions as a cognitive mechanism influencing consumer recognition and evaluation. Experience personalization and digital interaction represent important mechanisms of value co-creation by enhancing relevance, engagement and emotional connection. Furthermore, electronic word-of-mouth serves as a social influence mechanism through which consumers obtain information, evaluate alternatives and reduce perceived risk in digital environments (18-20). By integrating these dimensions, this study develops a comprehensive understanding of how digital marketing stimuli influence cognitive and emotional responses and ultimately shape customer experience.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the determinants of digital marketing that influence Gen Z customer experience in Vietnam's F and B industry. Specifically, this research evaluates the structural relationships among digital interaction, experience personalization, digital technology, electronic word-of-mouth, brand awareness and customer experience. Based on the empirical findings, the study provides practical recommendations for F and B enterprises to optimize digital engagement strategies and strengthen customer loyalty.

The originality of this study lies in integrating multiple behavioral perspectives into a unified framework for explaining digital customer experience among Gen Z consumers. Unlike previous studies that examine individual digital marketing activities separately, this research combines digital interaction, personalization, technology, electronic word-of-mouth and brand awareness within a structural model. Drawing upon customer engagement, customer touchpoint,

service quality and digital adoption perspectives, the study provides empirical evidence regarding the relative influence of multidimensional digital marketing stimuli on customer experience in an emerging market context (21-23).

Based on this theoretical framework, five hypotheses are developed. Digital interaction is conceptualized as a value co-creation mechanism in which consumers actively communicate, participate and engage with brands through digital platforms. Higher levels of interaction are expected to strengthen emotional and behavioral engagement, leading to improved customer experience (22, 23). Therefore, **H1:** Digital interaction has a positive impact on Gen Z customer experience in the F and B industry. Experience personalization reduces information overload by providing relevant content and services aligned with individual preferences. Personalized digital experiences are expected to enhance perceived value, emotional connection and engagement among consumers (24-28). Therefore, **H2:** Experience personalization has a positive impact on Gen Z customer experience in the F and B industry. Digital technology, including artificial intelligence, digital payment systems, big data analytics and online service platforms, improves convenience and service efficiency by enabling seamless customer interactions (29-31). Therefore, **H3:** Digital technology has a positive impact on Gen Z customer experience in the F and B industry. Electronic word-of-mouth functions as a social information mechanism that influences consumer trust, perceived credibility and purchase-related decisions. Online reviews and consumer-generated content provide important signals that shape customer expectations and experiences (32-35). Therefore, **H4:** Electronic word-of-mouth has a positive impact on Gen Z customer experience in the F and B industry. Brand awareness influences consumer recognition, memory structures and evaluation processes by shaping expectations before purchase decisions. Strong brand awareness is expected to contribute positively to customer experience and loyalty formation (36-40). Therefore, **H5:** Brand awareness has a positive impact on Gen Z customer experience in the F and B industry.

Proposed research model was shown in Figure 1.

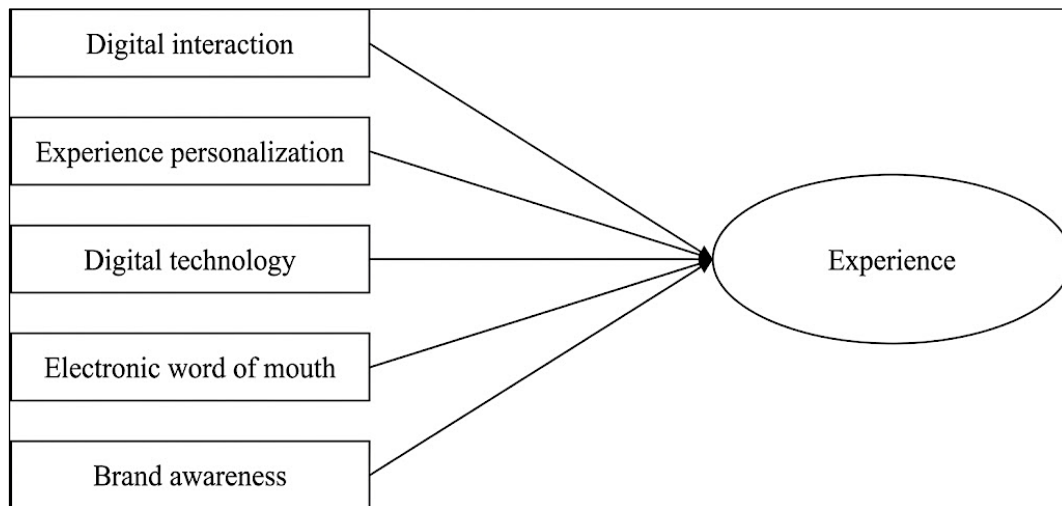


Figure 1: Proposed Research Model

Methodology

The target population of this study consisted of Gen Z individuals residing, studying, or working in Hanoi and participating in the consumption of F and B services. The research model included 23 observed variables and a target sample of more than 200 respondents was established to support the empirical analysis. The questionnaire also collected demographic and behavioral information, including age, gender, educational qualification, employment status, frequency of F and B service use and digital platform usage.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms from December 30, 2024, to March 3, 2025. The questionnaire was distributed through social media communities with a large number of Gen Z users interested in F and B services in Hanoi. Participants were included if they met the Gen Z definition adopted in this study and were residing, studying, or working in Hanoi. Responses were excluded when they were missing data. A total of 225 responses were collected. After the screening process, 25 responses were excluded, leaving 200 valid responses (88.89%) for the final analysis.

Secondary data from previous studies, academic publications, reports and relevant websites were used to develop the theoretical background and research model, whereas primary data were

obtained from the questionnaire for empirical analysis. After collection, the survey responses were screened and organized before statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize the demographic and behavioral characteristics of the respondents.

All valid responses were subsequently analyzed using SmartPLS 4. The measurement model was assessed through factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE) and discriminant validity. The structural model was then evaluated using variance inflation factors (VIF), path coefficients and bootstrapping results, the coefficient of determination (R^2), adjusted R^2 and effect size (f^2). These procedures were used to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model and to test the proposed relationships between digital interaction, experience personalization, digital technology, electronic word-of-mouth, brand awareness and customer experience.

Results and Discussion

Statistical Characteristics of the Research Sample

The study was conducted to collect information from residents of Hanoi, especially Gen Z, about the impact of digital marketing on customer experience in the F and B industry.

Table 1: Demographic and Behavioral Characteristics of Respondents (N = 200)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	12–17 years	16	8.0
	18–27 years	166	83.0
	Over 27 years	18	9.0
Gender	Male	82	41.0

Educational qualification	Female	116	58.0
	Other/Prefer not to say	2	1.0
	High school or below	22	11.0
	Undergraduate	148	74.0
	Postgraduate	20	10.0
Employment status	Other	10	5.0
	Student	136	68.0
	Employed	48	24.0
	Self-employed/Other	10	5.0
	Other	6	3.0
Frequency of F and B service use	No use during the month	26	13.0
	1–3 times/month	82	41.0
	4–6 times/month	46	23.0
	More than 6 times/month	46	23.0
Digital/information channels used	Social media	192	96.0
	Food delivery applications	115	57.5
	Friends and relatives	95	47.5
	Online advertising	87	43.5
	Brand websites	68	34.0
	Email/SMS marketing	5	2.5
	Other channels	6	3.0

Table 1 presents the demographic and behavioral characteristics of the 200 valid respondents. The sample was predominantly aged 18-27 (82.8%), while respondents aged 12-17 accounted for 8.0% and those aged over 27 accounted for 9.2%. Regarding F and B consumption, 40.9% reported using F and B services 1-3 times per month, followed by 23.1% for both 4-6 times and more than 6 times per month. Social media was the most frequently used digital channel (96.1%), followed by food delivery applications (57.3%) and online advertising (43.6%). The gender, educational qualification and employment distributions are also reported in Table 1 to provide a more complete profile of the study sample.

Scale Quality Assessment

The research results in Table 2 show that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients in all factors have results greater than 0.6, allowing the use of the measured variables in further analysis. At the same time, the composite reliability of the factors also has results above 0.6, allowing the use of the measured variables in further analysis. Based on the results in Table 2, AVE values ≥ 0.5 confirm convergent validity (41). The results show that the measured variables ensure reliability for further analysis.

Table 2: Reliability Assessment of Variables in the Model

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Experience Personalization (PER)	0.786	0.862	0.609
Digital technology (DT)	0.790	0.864	0.614
Electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM)	0.770	0.853	0.593
Customer experience (CX)	0.790	0.864	0.614
Digital interaction (DI)	0.739	0.835	0.559
Brand awareness (BA)	0.708	0.836	0.630

Table 3: Factor Loadings Used in the Model

	Experience Personalization	Digital Technology	Electronic Word-of-mouth	Customer Experience	Digital Interaction	Brand Awareness
PER1	0.735					
PER2	0.794					
PER3	0.811					
PER4	0.780					
DT1		0.760				
DT2		0.824				

DT3	0.818			
DT4	0.728			
EWOM1		0.702		
EWOM2		0.761		
EWOM3		0.818		
EWOM4		0.794		
BA1				0.774
BA2				0.784
BA3				0.823
CX1		0.760		
CX2		0.845		
CX3		0.777		
CX4		0.748		
DI1			0.804	
DI2			0.728	
DI3			0.705	
DI4			0.749	

Note: PER = Experience Personalization, DT = Digital Technology, EWOM = Electronic Word-of-mouth, CX = Customer Experience, BA = Brand Awareness, DI = Digital interaction.

According to the analysis results represent in Table 3, the individual factor loading coefficients of all factors are greater than 0.7, indicating that the scales used in the study are suitable for the next steps (42).

The results of Table 4 of the model's discriminant validity test show that the variables in the model have good discriminant validity, with all discriminant validity values below the threshold of 0.9. The variable experience personalization has the strongest association with digital technology [0.859], but still maintains discriminant validity. Digital technology has the highest correlation with customer experience [0.891], indicating a strong link between these two variables. Electronic word-

of-mouth has the highest discriminant validity value with digital interaction [0.861], reflecting the connection between experience sharing and digital platforms. Brand awareness has a discriminant validity ranging from 0.671 to 0.775, showing a moderate level of association with other factors. Digital interaction also has a clear distinction, even though it is most closely related to electronic word-of-mouth.

Overall, the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results show no overlap between latent variables in the model. This ensures the model's validity in measuring the impact of digital marketing on customer experience in the F and B industry.

Table 4: Discriminant Value Analysis

	Experience Personalization	Digital Technology	Electronic Word-of-Mouth	Brand Awareness	Digital Interaction
Experience Personalization (PER)					
Digital Technology (DT)	0.859				
Electronic Word-of-mouth (EWOM)	0.69	0.732			
Brand Awareness (BA)	0.671	0.774	0.775		
Customer Experience (CE)	0.783	0.891	0.809	0.755	
Digital Interaction	0.795	0.704	0.861	0.705	0.798

Table 5: VIF Values of Variables in the Model

Independent Variables	VIF
Experience personalization → Customer experience	2.207
Digital technology → Customer experience	2.320
Electronic word-of-mouth → Customer experience	2.140
Digital interaction → Customer experience	2.155
Brand awareness → Customer experience	1.803

Note: VIF = Variance Inflation Factor.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Evaluation

According to the results in Table 5, all VIF values are less than 3, so we can conclude that the research model does not suffer from multicollinearity; the explanatory variables maintain relative independence and ensure reliability for the analysis of regression coefficients.

The data in Table 6 show that the three variables, digital interaction, digital technology and electronic word-of-mouth all have data supporting the hypothesis with a significance level of less than 1%. Conversely, the two variables, experience

personalization and brand awareness, do not have a solid basis to confirm the hypothesis. From the results, we accept hypotheses H1, H3 and H4 with statistical significance levels of 5% and 1%:

H1: Digital interaction has a positive influence on the level of participation and experience of Gen Z customers with F and B brands.

H3: Digital technology in the F and B industry has a positive influence on the experience of Gen Z customers in the F and B industry.

H4: Electronic word-of-mouth has a positive influence on the experience of Gen Z customers in the F and B industry.

Table 6: Bootstrapping Results Table for the Structural Model

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Test Results
Personalized Experience → Customer Experience	0.108	0.111	0.073	1.485	0.138	There is no solid basis to confirm the hypothesis.
Digital Technology → Customer Experience	0.378	0.375	0.085	4.449	0.000	The data shows a trend that supports the hypothesis.
Electronic Word- of-Mouth → Customer Experience	0.205	0.215	0.074	2.749	0.006	The data shows a trend that supports the hypothesis.
Brand Awareness → Customer Experience	0.089	0.08	0.079	1.125	0.261	There is no solid basis to confirm the hypothesis.
Digital Interaction → Customer Experience	0.167	0.168	0.061	2.744	0.006	The data shows a trend that supports the hypothesis.

Regarding the direction of impact, all statistically significant variables have a positive impact (as shown by the positive Original sample (O) path coefficient): When the independent variable increases, the dependent variable also increases. The value of the path coefficient is also the basis for evaluating the strength of the impact from strong to weak on the dependent variable, Gen Z customer experience, specifically in the following order from largest to smallest: Digital Technology → Customer Experience [0.378] > Electronic Word-of-Mouth → Customer Experience [0.205] > Digital Interaction → Customer Experience [0.167] > Experience Personalization → Customer Experience [0.108] > Brand Awareness → Customer Experience [0.089]. This result shows that in digital marketing, Digital Technology is the most important factor impacting

the customer experience of Gen Z, followed by electronic word-of-mouth; third is digital interaction, fourth is experience personalization; and finally brand awareness.

The analysis results from Table 7 show that the R^2 coefficient = 0.626 indicates that the explanatory power of the independent variables experience personalization, electronic word-of-mouth and digital interaction (independent variables) explains 62.6% of the Customer Experience variable (dependent variable), reaching the average level according to the standard (43). In addition, the adjusted R^2 coefficient of the Customer Experience variable is 0.619; This is slightly lower than the initial R^2 coefficient. This indicates that after adjusting for the influence of the number of independent variables, independent

variables such as experience personalization, electronic word-of-mouth and digital interaction still explain 61.9% of the variation in the customer experience variable. The small difference between R^2 and the adjusted R^2 demonstrates that the

independent variables in the model all contribute significantly to explaining the dependent variable, without too many redundant variables reducing the model's efficiency.

Table 7: Coefficient of Determination R^2 and the Corrected R^2 Coefficient

Dependent variable	R-square	R-square adjusted
Customer experience	0.626	0.619

Note: R-square = R^2 = Coefficient of Determination.

In summary, the R^2 and adjusted R^2 values indicate that the model has a fairly good explanatory power, demonstrating that the independent variables in the study have a significant impact on the customer experience of Gen Z. This underscores the importance of experience personalization, electronic word-of-mouth and digital interaction in enhancing customer experience quality in the F

and B industry. These results not only reinforce the hypothesis about the role of technological factors in improving experience quality but also highlight the importance of effectively applying them in the F and B industry to help businesses in this sector enhance their competitive advantage in the market.

Table 8: Effect Size

Influential Relationships	f-square
Personalized experience → Customer experience	0.014
Digital technology → Customer experience	0.165
Electronic word-of-mouth → Customer experience	0.052
Digital interaction → Customer experience	0.035
Brand awareness → Customer experience	0.012

Note: f-square = f^2 = Effect Size.

According to the results in Table 8, we can see the impact of each independent variable on the dependent variable, Customer Experience, as follows:

Brand Awareness → Customer Experience: $f^2 = 0.012$ (very small impact).

Experience Personalization → Customer Experience: $f^2 = 0.014$ (very small impact).

Digital Interaction → Customer Experience: $f^2 = 0.035$ (small impact).

Electronic Word-of-Mouth → Customer Experience: $f^2 = 0.052$ (small impact).

Digital Technology → Customer Experience: $f^2 = 0.165$ (medium impact).

Observing the above values, we see that digital technology has the greatest impact on customer experience with a coefficient $f^2 = 0.165$, followed by

electronic word-of-mouth with $f^2 = 0.052$, while brand awareness has the lowest impact with $f^2 = 0.012$. Although these variables all have a small impact on customer experience, these independent variables still play an important role in improving the quality of customer experience.

Figure 2 shows that the factors Digital technology, Electronic word-of-mouth and Digital interaction all have an impact on the experience of Gen Z customers in the F and B industry in Vietnam. Among them, the factor digital technology has the strongest influence and digital interaction has the least impact on customer experience. However, the research results also show that the factors of Personalization and Brand Recognition have not shown a significant impact on the experience of Gen Z customers when using F and B services.

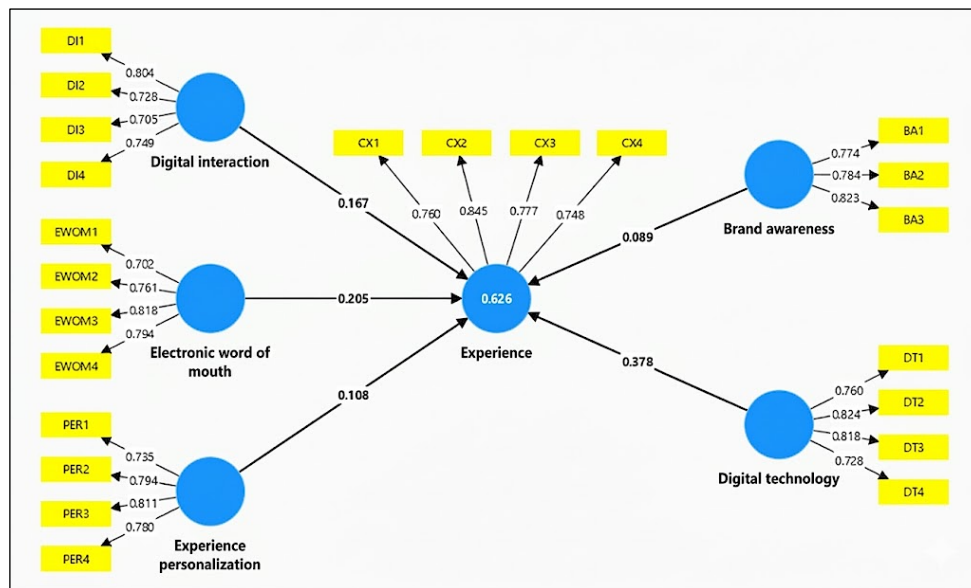


Figure 2: Factors in Digital Marketing that Influence Customer Experience

Note: PER = Experience Personalization, DT = Digital Technology, EWOM = Electronic Word-of-mouth, CX = Customer Experience, BA = Brand Awareness, DI = Digital interaction.

Regarding The Relationship between Digital Technology and Customer Experience

The research results show that the Digital Technology factor has the greatest impact on the experience of Gen Z customers in the digital marketing process, with a regression coefficient of 0.378. Previous studies have emphasized the role of digital technology in improving customer experience (44, 45).

This reflects the inevitable trend in the context of the ongoing digital transformation, as Gen Z - the generation born and raised with digital technology - demands speed and convenience in experiencing F and B services. To meet this need, F and B businesses in Vietnam need to focus on investing heavily in digital technology, not only to optimize operational processes but also to enhance customer experience. Specifically, applications such as AI, chatbots, digital payments and online ordering will help brands reach Gen Z more effectively.

At the same time, businesses also need to constantly update technological trends, improve technology and especially listen to feedback from Gen Z customers - a generation that prefers interaction and always expects brands to respond quickly. Only by continuously innovating and meeting the expectations of Gen Z can F and B businesses build a sustainable competitive advantage in this volatile market.

Regarding the Relationship between Electronic Word-of-Mouth and Customer Experience

The electronic word-of-mouth factor has the second largest impact on the experience of Gen Z customers, with a regression coefficient of 0.205. This is confirmed by research by (34, 35), which shows that electronic word-of-mouth plays a significant role in enhancing the experience of Gen Z customers.

Gen Z is a generation that places great trust in online reviews before making purchasing decisions. Positive feedback on social media, websites, or ordering apps not only gives consumers a clearer picture of service quality but also creates a sense of security and trust in the brand. In particular, detailed reviews from actual users act as a guide, directly influencing Gen Z's expectations and experiences when trying a new product or service.

Therefore, to maximize the power of online word-of-mouth, F and B businesses in Vietnam need to proactively manage online feedback and regularly interact with customers on social media and digital platforms. Encouraging customers to leave reviews, organizing promotions, discounts, or rewards for those sharing real-life experiences will help boost word-of-mouth content more effectively. When customers feel their voice is valued, they will be more willing to spread positive brand messages to the community.

Regarding the relationship between digital interaction and customer experience

Digital interaction is the third most important factor, with a regression coefficient of 0.167. Several studies confirmed that digital interaction has a positive impact on enhancing the experience of Gen Z customers in digital marketing (22, 23). F and B businesses in Vietnam need to leverage social media platforms to create dialogues between individual customers and businesses. Through social media, companies can interact individually with each customer in their own way, addressing personal and personalized issues, as social media platforms allow for direct listening and dialogue with customers. Leveraging social media platforms helps businesses understand customer needs, deliver superior value, increase competitiveness and improve long-term customer relationships.

Regarding the relationship between personalized experience and customer experience

Fourthly, the personalized experience factor has a regression coefficient of 0.108 and no significant impact. This indicates that for Gen Z customers, personalization has not yet truly made a significant difference. This finding echoes recent conceptual syntheses indicating that poorly executed personalized touchpoints can fail to enhance customer experience (27). Part of the reason may be that many F and B businesses in Vietnam are still in the early stages of digital transformation, so personalization solutions lack consistency, are not sufficiently refined and do not truly meet the needs of Gen Z (30).

However, in the context of widespread digital transformation in the F and B industry, personalized experience remains an important factor in the future, as Gen Z loves differentiation and wants to experience services in their own way. Experiences tailored to individual preferences, behaviors and needs not only create satisfaction but also increase the likelihood of Gen Z remaining loyal to a brand in the long term.

Therefore, instead of simply displaying the customer's name on a cup of water or suggesting popular dishes, F and B brands need to leverage AI, Big Data and behavioral analytics to better personalize the experience. Simultaneously, they need to proactively listen to feedback from Gen Z,

experiment with new strategies and continuously improve to create personalized services that are attractive and distinctive enough to truly capture this generation's attention, especially in the challenging and volatile post-COVID-19 period.

Regarding the relationship between Brand Awareness and Customer Experience

Finally, the Brand Awareness factor, with a regression coefficient of 0.089, also shows an insignificant impact on Gen Z's experience in the F and B industry. While seminal brand equity models emphasize the importance of awareness in building strong brands (39, 40), our results suggest that in a digitally saturated ecosystem, mere brand recognition is insufficient. Modern customer experience is comprehensively driven by interactive journeys and tangible service encounters across multiple touchpoints (18, 21), implying that brand familiarity alone cannot compensate for a lack of digital convenience or service quality among Gen Z.

In the context of the F and B industry's accelerated digital transformation, while brand recognition helps businesses reach customers more easily, it doesn't necessarily guarantee satisfaction or loyalty. This is especially true as consumers increasingly focus on tangible value, such as product quality, speed, accuracy in service and the ability to meet their individual needs. Furthermore, Gen Z doesn't just choose restaurants based on brand name; they care more about service quality, speed, convenience and personalized experiences. In this era of strong digital transformation, a well-known brand may not necessarily retain Gen Z if the service doesn't meet their expectations. They are willing to try new restaurants and smaller brands as long as the experience is enjoyable, fast and aligns with their lifestyle.

However, it cannot be denied that brand recognition remains a crucial element in the development strategy of F and B businesses. A strong, well-positioned brand in the market will create a competitive advantage while attracting and retaining potential customers. To play this role, businesses need to closely combine building a consistent brand image with implementing creative communication campaigns, while effectively utilizing digital platforms such as social

media, mobile applications and official websites to enhance presence and interaction with customers.

Conclusion

The study has systematized the theoretical basis of digital marketing, customer experience, characteristics of Gen Z and the F and B industry, thereby analyzing the impact of digital marketing on the customer experience of Gen Z in Hanoi. The research results indicate that digital technology, electronic word-of-mouth and digital interaction significantly influence Generation Z customer experience in Vietnam's F&B industry, whereas experience personalization and brand awareness do not demonstrate statistically significant direct effects. Among the significant determinants, digital technology has the strongest influence, followed by electronic word-of-mouth and digital interaction. Theoretically, the study contributes to existing knowledge by integrating five digital marketing factors within a unified framework for explaining Gen Z customer experience in the F and B context. The findings further differentiate the relative roles of these factors, demonstrating significant effects of digital technology, electronic word-of-mouth and digital interaction, while experience personalization and brand awareness show no significant direct effects. These results provide empirical evidence that complements the AIDA, SERVQUAL and customer touchpoint perspectives in explaining digitally mediated customer experience. Practically, the research results provide concrete evidence to help F and B businesses better understand the behavior and experience expectations of Gen Z customers - a dynamic group strongly influenced by the digital environment. Based on this, the study proposes directions for businesses to optimize their digital marketing strategies, enhance personalization and apply technology to improve customer experience, strengthen brand loyalty and create a sustainable competitive advantage in the F and B industry. From the research results on the impact of digital marketing on the customer experience of Gen Z in the F and B industry, several recommendations can be drawn for businesses as follows:

First, promoting the application of digital technology is a key factor in improving customer experience. Businesses need to invest in online ordering and payment systems, mobile applications and digital platforms to optimize

processes, save time and provide a smooth experience. Simultaneously, it is necessary to ensure data security and personal information privacy, comply with legal regulations such as the Cybersecurity Law and use encryption and secure authentication to strengthen customer trust.

Secondly, enhance electronic word-of-mouth and digital interaction to create a natural connection with Gen Z - a customer group that trusts real-life reviews more than traditional advertising. Businesses should encourage customers to share their experiences through videos, images and online reviews; collaborate with KOLs, KOCs and food bloggers to spread brand awareness. Hashtag campaigns, minigames, or viral challenges on TikTok, Instagram and Facebook also help increase brand recognition and engagement.

Third, building a personalized experience is key to customer retention. Businesses can suggest dishes based on preferences, send birthday offers, offer loyalty points, or use AI to recommend suitable products.

Finally, F and B brands need to express their identity and emotions in digital communication. Gen Z prefers brands with a unique style, creative content and authentic interaction. Therefore, businesses should tell a vivid brand story, maintain a consistent image and focus on emotional experiences to create a lasting impression in the minds of young customers.

Although this study provides insights into the effects of digital marketing on Gen Z customer experience in the F and B industry, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted with 200 valid respondents in Hanoi, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to Gen Z consumers in other regions of Vietnam. Future studies should employ larger and more geographically diverse samples to examine whether the identified relationships remain consistent across different market contexts. Second, the proposed model focuses on five digital marketing factors: digital interaction, experience personalization, digital technology, electronic word-of-mouth and brand awareness. Future research could extend the model by considering additional factors related to digital customer experience and by examining demographic characteristics that may influence the relationships among these constructs. Finally, the non-significant effects of experience personalization

and brand awareness on customer experience suggest that these relationships may be more complex than initially hypothesized. Future studies could examine whether their effects operate indirectly or differ across consumer groups, F and B consumption frequency, or patterns of digital-platform usage. Such extensions may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms shaping Gen Z customer experience in the F and B industry.

Abbreviations

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Author Contributions

Hoang Ngoc Quang: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Writing - Original Draft, Dang Thi Trang: Questionnaire Development, Manuscript Revision, Hoang Trieu Hoa: Literature Review, Manuscript Revision, Pham Ngoc Huong Quynh: Research Methodology, Supervision, Critical Review, Editing, Final Approval of the Manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

During the preparation of this work, the authors used AI-assisted tools to improve the quality of English writing. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the publication and confirm that all analyses, interpretations and conclusions are their own.

Ethics Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. Participation in the survey was voluntary and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. All data were collected anonymously, ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of participants.

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