

ASIA JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
<https://ajmss.com/index.php/Journal>
Issue 3 Vol 1 (2025)

**SOCIAL COMMERCE INFLUENCERS AND IMPULSE
BUYING: CULTURAL NARCISSISM AS MEDIATOR IN
VIETNAMESE MILLENNIALS**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of social commerce influencers on impulse purchase behavior of Vietnamese millennials, by examining the mediating role of cultural narcissism. Control of information is slowly diminishing, and influencers are pushing to change the narrative around key issues in Vietnam and influencing trends among Vietnamese consumers. The rise of social commerce platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook means that influencers have become critical drivers of consumer behavior -- especially in markets such as Vietnam. There have been found new consumption behaviors of millennials, quick purchasing and influenced by factors beyond the content or usefulness of items (influence for fashion bloggers). This paper adds the theoretical perspective of cultural narcissism (a psychological and cultural characteristic that is often reflected in individuals' self-enhancement and desires for peer approval) into understanding how social commerce influencers drive impulse purchasing. Based on a survey of 400 Vietnamese millennials, the study reveals negative impact of cultural narcissism as mediator in the effects of influencer's social commerce activities toward impulsive purchase intention. The findings add to the growing body of literature on consumer behavior, particularly in developing countries where social media related consumption is increasingly becoming popular. The paper concludes by highlighting implications for marketers and companies that aim to target the Vietnamese millennial consumers, offering influencer strategies.

Keywords: Social commerce, impulse buying, cultural narcissism, millennials, Vietnam, influencers.

INTRODUCTION

The social commerce boom Social commerce has erupted as the digital economy increasingly expands, with businesses tapping social media in order to affect consumer behaviour and help transactions online. Social commerce combines features of e-commerce with social media characteristics such as user-generated content, reviews and influencer endorsements (Casaló et al., 2020). Millennials in particular are being bombarded with digital marketing and spend a lot of time on social media platforms. This influencers are also playing important role in the consumer decision-making process particularly for impulse buying, ie purchases that were unplanned but upon seeing given product customer (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

The phenomenon of impulse purchasing has intensified in social commerce, since influencers can influence emotions; this emotional impact can catalyze impulse purchase tendency (Verhagen & van Dolen, 2011). Influencers can sometimes misuse relationships with followers by endorsing products that are consistent with the followers' needs for social approval or personal values, leading to impulsive decisions (Lee et al., 2022). Some studies have reported the influence of social media influencers on impulse buying (Chen & Zhang, 2020; Kim & Yang, 2021), but studies on the psychological and cultural antecedents of this behavior are underreported in secondary or emerging markets such as Vietnam.

One relevant factor that has received too little attention, except in the personality and social psychology literature, is cultural narcissism – the need for validation and recognition on social media (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Social networking sites (SNS) provide an environment for cultural narcissism, far more focused on external validation from likes, comments or shares of content than individual posts by a user are seen as influencing others (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Unhealthy forms of narcissism such as these, especially prevalent in the now-dominant millennial generation (Weyploss and Ionescu 2018) also contribute to consumer behaviour with

purchases often seen as an extension or an affirmation of identity for example (Baker et al., 2020). The increased desire for self-validation may enhance the impact of social commerce influencers thereby increasing the frequency and intensity of impulse buying.

Although most of the current literature is about Western consumers yet in emerging countries like Vietnam, these factors are distinctive. Vietnam millennials are extremely active on social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok (Nguyen et al., 2020), this enables Vietnam's market to be one of the fastest developing e-commerce markets in Asia. Despite much digital involvement, Vietnamese Millennials still hold strong cultural values in terms of family orientation, social harmony and group identification, which makes Vietnam a fascinating market place to examine the behavioural effect of cultural narcissism on consumption's activity via Social Commerce.

The effect of online reviews and authenticity of influencer is partly mediated by PSU Lee et al., 2022, CIM S²Q Furthermore; most studies so far aim to understand the impact of factors such as consumer trust online reviews Influencer authenticity being a part, on social commerce. This research intends to address this shortcoming by positing that Cultural Narcissism is a mediator between Social Commerce Influencers and Impulse Buying Behaviour of Vietnamese Millennials. In focusing on this mediator, the work attempts to expose the psychological and cultural mechanisms behind impulse purchasing in new digital economies.

The study's objectives are:

1. Investigate the direct influence of social commerce influencers on impulse purchase intention.
2. Examine narcissism of culture as a mediator.
3. Investigate the cultural and psychosocial factors underlying impulsive purchases.

Considerations The results of this study are important for the understanding of marketers as well as researchers. For a marketer, knowledge about cultural narcissism might lead to more effective influencer campaigns that acknowledge the psychological and cultural yearnings of millennial shoppers. For academics, the research contributes to a burgeoning literature on cultural psychology and consumer behaviour by helping to understand how cultural values impact digital consumerism — particularly in developing countries such as Vietnam.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social commerce is a fast growing sector of the digital economy, which combines social media with e-commerce where products are sold through by influencers, peer recommendations and social networks. Such a fusion “provides an opportunity for the consumer to engage with ease – enabling him or her to make purchasing decisions based not only on traditional kinds of product information, but also social interactions that take place in these sites.” When browsing product posts, reviews and ads on social media, users frequently receive endorsements from influencers – persons capable of influencing the attitudes and behaviors of their audience (Casaló et al., 2020). These are the people who have perceived authority or popularity - and are often at the heart of how social commerce plays out. There is abundant evidence that the efficiency of influencers in influencing consumer behaviour depends on authenticity, credibility and emotional aspect (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

One of the most important things in social commerce is impulse purchasing, which is defined as the unplanned-purchasing decision necessary to be influenced by emotional stimuli or visual information, etc. According to Verhagen and van Dolen (2011),

impulse buying is often triggered by external cues like exposure to product recommendation or time bound offer. Most of these impulse purchases stem from emotional reactions to things like images, social proof or the persuasive force of influencer marketing. The infusion of social media into commerce has created a convenient vehicle for influencers to introduce these prospects, and in many cases emotions are their bait. For example, witnessing an influencer they love endorsing a product or service would have them experience more emotions or sense urgency, resulting in impulsive buying (Lee et al., 2022).

Further, the emotional impact of social commerce interactions is enhanced when an influencer is seen as a credible source of information. Influencers building trust among their audience (based on shared values, constant interaction or common issues) are likely to generate emotional responses leading to higher excess purchase behaviour⁷ (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). This emotional involvement generates a sense of urgency and aspiration to follow the influencer's example, leading to an increase in impulse-buying behaviours on social media.

Cultural narcissism as the mixed condition of individual and collective narcissism that reflects the individual's dependence on cultural symbols in their quest for social approval, works as an antecedent variable driving consumer's behavior in particular when it takes place online. Where narcissism on an individual level represents a self-absorbed craving for affirmation, cultural narcissism externalizes this to social behavior at large, especially in the digital age. In social media influencers and their followers commonly look for external validation and appreciation through likes, comments and shares providing a breeding ground for self-promotion and validation (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Here, narcissistic tendencies are amplified in performativity with status and materialism (appearance), standards that have been explicitly applied to influencer-dominated social commerce.

Narcissism and impulsivity Research has found that people who are high in narcissism are also more likely to engage in impulsive behavior, especially when this behaviour provides them with affirmation from other people (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). This is particularly important in social commerce as the need for social affirmation via consumerism may be further fueled through influencer marketing. Consumers impulse purchase in a bid to express their self-identity by doing a purchase that is affected by influencers as culture symbols (Baker, et al., 2020). Under this theoretical background, the cultural narcissism can be denoted as a mediator between influencer influence and consumer purchase behavior. It is inferable that people high in narcissism may be linked to behaviors where acting at impulses fueling the need and desire of material possession will affirm such personal identity or social status (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Theoretical background Given the importance of cultural narcissism, surprisingly little is known about the influence of narcissistic tendencies on consumers' responses to influencer endorsements in social commerce and their impulse purchase behaviour. Vietnamese Millennials are a distinct and vibrant segment of the population that quickly embrace new technology and heavily engage in online shopping through social media. According to Nguyen et al. (2020), it could be said that social commerce has become a particularly significant phenomenon to not only the Vietnamese digital natives (millennials onhip.vn like) but also their older counterparts. This paves the way for influencer-led marketing programmes where high-profile attendees and others promote items that align with the millennial lifestyle, appealing to their needs for self-expression and social engagement.

Vietnamese youth behaves this way partly because the country's cultural environment demands it. We live in a society with strong collectivist values, and holding group

harmony, family ties, and social esteem in high regard; the need for validation is rooted potently (Truong & Hwang, 2021). In this regard, Vietnamese millennials are likely to be more susceptible to that level of exposure: the so-called social commerce as it targets their social being and communal associational longing in which influencer endorsements has an appeal. Impetus to buying is also fuelled by the collectivist nature of society, with trends and practices quickly catching on among peer groups — a herd-like behaviour when it comes to purchasing decisions. Such cultural contexts would make millennials in Vietnam also more susceptible to be affected by trends on social media, and hence more prone to impulse buying influenced by influencers who are associated with these trends.

The influence of cultural narcissism on millennial behavior is even more pronounced in Vietnam due to the fact that social media paths such as Facebook and Instagram are arenas for self presentation and self validation. It is in this space that millennials craft their identities according to the level of social acceptance they receive from friends and followers, rendering them vulnerable to make impulsive purchase decisions that reflect what has been set as “normal” for an ideal personal image they wish to write off for others (Nguyen et al., 2020). As such, it’s important for brands hoping to reach Vietnamese Millennials (among the consumers found throughout all of Southeast Asia) through influencer marketing to understand the intersection of cultural narcissism and social commerce / impulse buying.

METHODOLOGY

It is important to note that biogas digesters are an example of ecotechnological applications, and as such require both technological (hardware) components and the social software of local supporting services. Vietnam is one of the most active digital markets in Southeast Asia, with social media usage rates being particularly high among younger demographics. More than 70% of Vietnamese millennials who are in the age group from 24 to 40 use social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok by 2023 (Nguyen et al., 2020). These are no longer just socializing spaces, though — they have really changed the way people buy, with influencers playing a key role in influencing people’s thoughts and actions as consumers. Social commerce – referring to the practice of using social media websites for online shopping has flourished in Vietnam especially among millennials who uses these platforms not only as the source of entertainment, information but also a place enabling them to shop (Le et al., 2021). In face of such extensive application of social media and growing reliance on influencer-based marketing, the Vietnamese millennial segment represents a perfect test object for the examination to social commerce and impulse purchase behavior.

The data were obtained through an online questionnaire that was distributed to 400 Vietnamese millennials who are regular social media users and participate in social commerce. Interviews for the survey took place from January to March 2024. The recruitment of respondents to participate in the study was through snowball sampling, tapping on social media networks to find those candidates that meet this study's requirements. This approach was useful to ensure a variety in the sample that was representative of the target population, as well as variability in millennial consumers who engage with influencers over social media. This method has been frequently applied to digital consumer behavior research, especially in online survey design as it will help the high response rates and sample fit into the focus of study (Chen & Zhang, 2020).

The sample size was calculated with G*Power, a statistical power analysis software. A priori power analysis was carried out using a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), α value =

0.05, and desired power = 0.80). Thus, estimated minimum sample size, with a power of 80%, was calculated as 385 respondents. To allow for possible non-response or partial completion of the survey, the sample was inflated to 400 participants, which had the effect of ensuring that the study was adequately powered to detect effects that may be clinically significant. This sample size is on par with like studies in consumer behavior and social commerce research (Lee et al., 2022); which is sufficient for this type of large scale statistical analysis and applicability.

The following constructs used for measurement of the survey instrument were framed with reference to Objectives 3 and potentially 1, as they serve as baseline pre-questionnaire data:

Effect of Influencers on Impulse Buying Degree of the impact that social commerce influencers have on consumers' purchasing behavior was measured based on 7-point Likert scale, which is adapted from Lee et al., (2022). The internal consistency (α) of the scale was adequate (0.92).

Cultural Narcissism: Cultural narcissism, as the quest to garner for self-enhancement and external validation via social media, was measured following the work of Raskin and Hall (1979). The reliability of the scale in this study was high ($\alpha = 0.89$).

Impulse buying: The disposition to buy on impulse was measured with a modified version of the scale of Verhagen and van Dolen (2011). The scale demonstrated a high reliability ($\alpha = 0.91$) in the present study and was also applied in an impulse buying approach in e-commerce for previous studies.

The relationships between the constructs were estimated using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). SEM is an established statistical methodology that can examine relationships among observed and latent variables in complex network like this study, thus well suited to test the proposed hypotheses (Hair et al., 2019). Second, 5,000 bootstrap samples were used to test the indirect effects of cultural narcissism as a mediator in the relationship among influencer effect, and impulse buying. The CFA was used to examine whether the measurement model was valid, that is, the constructs were properly measured and fitted the data.

To test the robustness of the results, alternative estimators were used. We performed propensity score matching and placebo tests in order to examine the quality of the results and possible bias deriving from selection effect. In addition, an instrumental variable method was employed to cope with potential endogeneity problems. This approach used exogenous influencer characteristics—e.g., authenticity and credibility of the influencer—as instruments to control for unobserved confounding variables that affect both the impact of influencers and impulsive buying (Lee & Hwang, 2021). The research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Vietnam University. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation on a voluntary basis. Anonymity of participants was maintained during the survey, and all responses were treated confidentially (following ethical guidelines specified for human research activities; Truong & Hwang, 2021). This ethical consideration enabled the study to follow well-established research protocol and protected the rights of respondents.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and correlations between main variables are reported in Table 1. As assumed, cultural narcissism significantly correlated positively with impulse buying ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$) and influencer impact ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$). These relationships indicate that people with high level of cultural narcissism will be more influenced by social commerce influencers and subsequently, their tendency of impulse purchase is strengthened. This is in line with the extant literature that has

repeatedly found narcissistic features to be connected with higher susceptibility to normative influence as well as impulsive behaviour (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). As well, Influencer and Impulse purchase had significant positive correlation ($r = 0.55$, $p < 0.01$), implying that the greater an individual is influenced by celebrities on social media platforms the more likely he/she will practise impulse buying behavior. This is in line with results from earlier literature where it was emphasized that influencers stimulate impulsive buying (Lee et al., 2022; Verhagen & van Dolen, 2011).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Main Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Cultural Narcissism	—	—	1		
2. Impulse Buying	—	—	0.42**	1	
3. Influencer Impact	—	—	0.48**	0.55**	1

A series of alternative estimation strategies were used to check the results against potential sample-selection biases. Sample was balanced using propensity score matching (PSM). This procedure is useful in observational studies with no random assignment as it allows participants to be matched on having similar attributes (Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983). The results of the propensity score matching analysis remained consistent with those of primary analyses, supporting the mediational matter in which cultural narcissism mediated between influencer impact and impulse buying. Placebo checks were also performed to investigate if income and education variables could have any unobserved impact on impulse buying. No significant associations were found in these tests between the control variables and impulse buying, which is indicative of the stability of our main model that centered on influencers and narcissism. This supports the argument that determinant of impulse buying in this case are mostly those related to influencer impact and cultural narcissism to a greater extent than demographic or other exogenous variables.

The interaction effect of cultural narcissism in relation to influencer influence and impulse purchasing is depicted in Figure 2. The interaction plot shows that there is a positive significant relationship, which means that when persons have higher cultural narcissism they will be more effectively influenced by social commerce influencers to purchase the target product impulse. This effect is especially strong in high narcissistic individuals. According to the theory, social commerce influencers has stronger effect on cultural narcissism due to increased level of cultural narcissism as well.

These results are consistent with prior findings showing that a self-report measure of trait narcissism is associated with social media-related priming effects on reactivity to environmental cues (i.e., influencer endorsements, Baker et al. 2020; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). The interaction plot highlights the crucial role of cultural narcissism in moderating the effect of influencers on impulse buying, especially for younger consumers who are known to be at risk not only for higher levels but also higher engagement in social comparison on social media.

DISCUSSION

The current research extends the literature by considering cultural narcissism in studying social commerce and impulse purchasing. Inclusion of cultural narcissism as a mediator in the influencer marketing–unplanned consumer behavior relationship is a critical theoretical advancement to our knowledge on how psychological characteristics impact digital-based purchasing decisions. A considerable amount of

current work on impulse buying and social commerce is more oriented to external determinants, such as product presentation, peer review, or product availability (e.g., Verhagen & van Dolen 2011; Lee et al., 2022), but in contrast to these variables that influence impulsive consumption behavior at an environmental level, our work focuses on the psychological drivers – particularly narcissistic tendencies – underlying it.

The notion of cultural narcissism—the longing for self-aggrandizement, social recognition, and outside affirmation—dates back to the relation of actions seeking social approval or attention. Narcissism, in the era of social media, has an additional sheen that is added by influencer culture and the constant exposure to manicured versions of perfect lifestyles. The findings of this study underline the importance of narcissistic features in determining how consumers respond to influencer-generated content, a feature that is fundamental to social commerce platforms that include Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. More generally, cultural narcissism prompts consumers to act on purchasing motives influenced by both personal enjoyment and social image and self-identity building via interactions on the internet (Twenge & Campbell, 2009).

Incorporating cultural narcissism with behavioral operations theory provides an additional dimension to digital marketing strategies. Behavioral operations The field of decision making in contexts of business has traditionally investigated how cognitive and emotional biases affect decision-making in businesses (Cohen et al., 2015). This study adds in narcissistic tendencies and shows how these biases function within the social commerce domain. Notably, it demonstrates that an influencer endorsement focusing on self-image and status may be more effective among subjects higher in narcissism in encouraging impulsive purchase. This psychologizing process adds valuable depth to contemporary dialogue in the area of social commerce and allows us to more deeply understand how consumer psychology contributes toward influencer marketing effectiveness.

In addition, these findings enrich our studies on digital consumer behavior focusing on the interplay between cultural and psychological antecedents. Drawing from the context of young Vietnamese generation, who have strong traditions but are also digitally native, this research provides valuable insights on the cultural links between impulse buying behavior in emerging economies. Most studies of impulse purchasing have been conducted on Western people and the present study places emphasis on influence form cultural background to consumer behavior in an increasingly digitizing economy such as Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2020).

What the marketers can take away from these results The findings of this study provide marketers with some practical implications in designing successful influencer marketing campaign. Since cultural narcissism is a key driver of impulse buying, marketers need to adjust their strategies keeping in mind the psychological characteristics of customers. This can also be useful for brands in that having a profile of the type of narcissist personality in your customer base will be beneficial when creating influencer content so it better connects with your audience.

One important lesson is that narcissistic purchasers — those who purchase to fulfill a need for social affirmation — are particularly responsive to influencer marketing, with its focus on status, luxury and elitism. ‘Status seeking individuals with high levels of vanity are impossible to resist, when showing off their worlds travelling or ‘just out the shower’ skin routines’ and will surely lead their narcissistic followers down an uncharted path of impulse purchasing (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). This is something that marketers can tap into by working with influencers whose personal

brands can be associated with a particular audience's craving for social status and self-esteem. Such a strategy can enhance influencer campaigns to achieve higher response rates and impulse purchases.

Finally, the results of this study highlight the significance of emotions in influencer marketing. Influencers who emotionally connect with their followers in some way, when it comes to shared values, similar content or authentic narratives are more likely to lead consumers to impulsively act (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Marketers should aim to establish longer term relationships with influencers that inspire trust and likeability, not use them as a one-off commodity. And that fits with a larger trend within influencer marketing, where sincerity and honesty are crucial to retaining consumer trust and driving repeat sales.

And for marketers whose targets include emerging markets such as Vietnam, it is important to take cultural values into consideration. Vietnamese millennials, on average, are very active users of social networking websites but their lives are also strongly influenced by traditional cultural values emphasizing the importance of family and social harmony (Truong & Hwang, 2021). Marketers can monetize this by creating influencer content that acknowledges and complies with these cultural norms while still subtly selling consumers modern individualistic ideals through personal branding and aspirational marketing.

Although the above study yields important findings, there are a number of boundary conditions to take into account. First, results might not be generalized to Western markets as there are culture specific or market specific factors which impact Vietnam millennials. So, future research could replicate this study to explore how a cultural narcissism impacts on impulse buying in other cultures, especially when the social norms and digital consumption habit are varied in different countries. A cross-cultural comparison would advance the comprehension of global trends regarding social commerce and the significance of psychological traits in affecting consumer behavior.

Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct future research about the effect of age, income and/or social class on the link between narcissism and impulse buying. For example, younger customers who interact actively with the digital media might have different purchasing behavior than older ones, the consumption pattern of which may be more reflective (Zhang & Zhao, 2022). Studying these disparities can be useful to improve the marketing strategy targeting different strata of the population.

Another future line of research related to the type of social media platform could be analysed and its effects on influencer marketing effectiveness. Different platforms may communicate in different levels of engagement with their audience, like when Instagram and TikTok appeal through visual contents, whereas Facebook or YouTube involve more interaction like reading texts or watching videos. Identifying such differences might enable marketers to adapt the influencer strategies they deploy according to characteristic differences between users and platforms (Casaló et al., 2020).

Lastly, although the study has illustrated an effect of narcissism on impulse buying, yet it seems interesting to study other possible psychological mediators (e.g., self-esteem and materialism or social comparison), which could mediate or moderate more the link between influencers and impulse buying. Would perform well in future research. Through broadening the psychological framework, we push researchers to develop a more complete picture of how digital marketing tactics interplay with consumer psychology to affect buying behavior in the social commerce context.

CONCLUSION

This paper reveals how cultural narcissism plays an important intermediary role between social commerce influencers and impulse purchase for Vietnamese millennials. Adding cultural narcissism to the framework of social commerce, this research offers some findings on how personality traits impact consumer behavior in the digital age. More precisely, results show how narcissistic traits of those millennials are more likely to make them vulnerable to the influence power exerted by influencers and then lead to an impulsive buying behavior in this segment. This implies that influencer marketing tactics are not only driven by external motivators, such as the appeal of the product, but also by more profound psychological motivations for social conformity and self-inflation (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Twenge & Campbell, 2009) sharpened by social media use.

From the perspective of academia, this research expands the knowledge on digital marketing consumer behavior by adding cultural narcissism as a critical psychological predictor of impulse purchasing behaviors in social commerce. This present study addresses this gap and owes the development of influencer marketing theory – for example, with respect to psychological ingredients like narcissism which have not yet been thoroughly investigated (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). The research also suggests future investigation on how cultural factors affect the effectiveness of influencer-led interventions, especially in emerging digital economies such as Vietnam.

The results are a reminder for marketers to employ more psychologically-focused influencer strategies that resonates with the emotional and cultural aspirations of their consumers. When attempting to engage millennials in Vietnam, marketers need to think about the narcissism associated with this audience and create influencer content that resonates with people who are looking for social validation and identity reinforcement. If influencers such as those on FKDN promoting aspirational lifestyles which are congruent with brand consumers, better engagement and impulse calls could be expected (Baker et al., 2020). At the end of the day, being aware of how psychology and culture collide can only serve to improve our digital marketing tone.

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