



Examining the Effect of User-Generated Content on Brand Trust and Booking Intention for Low-Cost Airlines among Young Vietnamese Consumers

Hoang Ngan Tien Tran¹, Panisara Khongthaworn² and Malee Kitipongpisal³

¹Graduate Student, Department of Global Communication, Faculty of Communication Arts, Bangkok University.

²Academic, Department of International Programs, Marketing, Bangkok University

³Academic, Department of Global Communication, Faculty of Communication Arts, Bangkok University.

*Corresponding author, E-mail: tran.tien1@bumail.net

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of user-generated content characteristics, including credibility, quality, valence, and volume, on brand trust and booking intention for low-cost airlines among young Vietnamese consumers. Utilizing a quantitative approach with a sample of 383 young Vietnamese passengers, the findings revealed that characteristics like credibility, valence, and volume had a significant impact on brand trust, which in turn acted as a partial mediator in their relationships with booking intention. On the other hand, while quality did not significantly impact brand trust within the multiple regression model, it maintained a strong direct effect on booking intention. This finding suggests that in a high-risk service environment, high-quality reviews act as immediate and effective risk-mitigation tools that drive customer behavior. Furthermore, credibility was identified as the most powerful driver of brand trust, followed by volume, reflecting a sophisticated combination of perceived truthfulness and social proof within the Vietnamese market. When considering the demographics of the survey participants, factors such as age groups or daily social media usage did not show a significant impact on booking intention. This study suggests that Vietnamese low-cost airlines could consider creating campaigns focused on user-generated content, emphasizing an increase in positive contributions to enhance brand credibility and accelerate conversion rates.

Keywords: UGC, Low-cost airlines, Brand Trust, Booking Intention

Introduction

In Vietnam, the low-cost airline model has become the preferred choice for a growing number of domestic and regional travelers. This market has been dominated by local airlines, with Vietjet Air holding 46% of market share and achieving the best-selling



airline in Vietnam from 2021 to 2024 (Vietjet Aviation Joint Stock Company, 2024). Despite positive commercial impacts, low-cost airlines in Vietnam have consistently faced mixed reviews from passengers, especially regarding service quality, flight delays, or inconsistent staff quality. In this context, reviews, comments, videos, social media posts, or shared experiences voluntarily created by consumers, also known as user-generated content (UGC), have become the main source of information because they are considered more authentic, objective, and trustworthy than traditional advertising (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

In the service industry, where the product customers pay for is intangible and difficult to evaluate before purchase, UGC from previous customers serves as an important reference point. Air travel is a service-based product that is intangible and difficult to assess prior to making a purchase, so passengers frequently consult online reviews to assess safety, punctuality, customer service, and operational reliability before making flight reservations (Fileri & McLeay, 2014). The airline industry represents a unique case where UGC plays a notably strong role in shaping customer expectations and brand evaluations. In high-risk service contexts such as air travel, trust helps passengers reduce perceived risk and plays an important role in shaping their airline choice and booking decisions (Polat et al., 2021). Furthermore, this type of content can either enhance or decrease the level of trust in the low-cost airlines, thereby influencing booking intention. Although previous research has examined these factors separately, there is still a significant gap: no study has applied a fully integrated model of three variables (UGC, Brand Trust, Booking Intention) to the low-cost airline industry, especially with regard to the Vietnamese market. By creating an integrated model of UGC, brand trust, and booking intention in the particular context of low-cost airlines, this study seeks to close this gap.

Objectives

1. To examine whether UGC credibility, UGC quality, UGC valence, and UGC volume affect young Vietnamese consumers' booking intention toward low-cost flights.
2. To identify which UGC characteristics (credibility, quality, valence, and volume) have the strongest influence on young Vietnamese consumers' booking intention toward low-cost flights
3. To investigate the mediating role of Brand Trust in the relationship between UGC characteristics and young Vietnamese consumers' booking intention toward low-cost flights.
4. To determine whether young Vietnamese consumers of different age groups and daily social media usage respond differently in their booking intention toward low-cost flights.

Conceptual theory framework

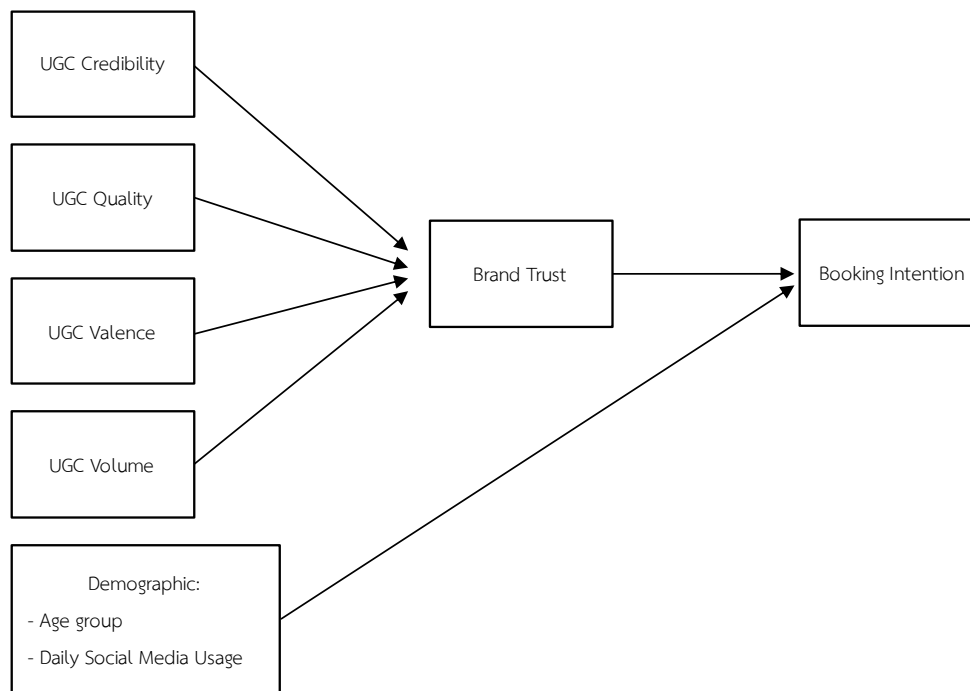


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The Information Adoption Model (IAM), developed by Sussman and Siegal (2003), it attempts to explain why individuals accept information from computer-based communication technologies. IAM is used to explain how characteristics of UGC influence the perceived usefulness of the information, increasing the likelihood of adopting and relying on information to evaluate budget airlines. Through this, UGC adoption subsequently cultivates customers' trust toward low-cost airlines.

This trust subsequently bridges the gap to The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1991), emphasizes that an individual's behavioral intention is shaped by three factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. Brand Trust, which emerges as a result of evaluating and adopting information from UGC, acts as a cognitive precursor that shapes a positive attitude and reduces perceived risk toward the airline. Consequently, this established trust fosters favorable brand-related preferences, which significantly increase purchase and booking intentions (Ajzen, 1991; Chouykaew et al., 2024).

Materials and Methods

This research adopts quantitative research design, which is the most appropriate approach to illustrate the relationship between existent variables and meet the research



objectives. Because the conceptual model incorporates several latent constructs that requiring factor analysis, many researchers recommend a minimum of 300 cases for factor analysis (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996, as cited in VanVoorhis & Morgan, 2007), and Comrey and Lee (2013) also classify 300 as a “good” sample size. Thus, the final sample of 383 participants provides statistical power for the analysis.

The participants consisted of 383 young Vietnamese passengers aged 18 to 35 who had searched for and purchased low-cost airline flight tickets in the past 12 months. Participants were recruited through popular social media platforms in Vietnam, such as Facebook, Zalo, Messenger, and Instagram. The sampling strategy was purposive sampling, which involves proactively selecting survey participants based on predetermined requirements to meet the research objectives (Ahmed, 2024), and convenience sampling, which involves selecting participants based on their accessibility and willingness to participate (Etikan et al., 2016).

A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions using five-point Likert-scale items. The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from Izogo et al. (2023), Park et al. (2007), Tardin and Pelissari (2021), Park et al. (2007), Castano and Escandon-Barbosa (2022), Munuera-Aleman et al. (2003), and Lu et al. (2014). The measurement scales' internal consistency was verified using Cronbach's Alpha, with all constructs ranging from .768 to .919, exceeding the recommended .70 threshold. Construct Validity was established through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), where the KMO value of .912 and a significant Bartlett's Test ($p = .000$) confirmed sampling adequacy and factorability.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage, to illustrate the demographic information. One-way ANOVA, Multiple Regression and Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4) were also used to test hypotheses.

Results

The study involved 383 respondents, aged from 18 to 35, who have searched for and purchased low-cost airline flight tickets in the past 12 months. The largest gender group was female (57.2%), with most respondents being in the 18–24 age bracket (70%). Regarding digital behavior, the largest daily social media usage category was from 4 hours or more (30.5%), followed by 2 hours - less than 4 hours (30%) and 1 hour - less than 2 hours (25.3%). However, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as the sample may not fully represent the broader Vietnamese population, particularly older generations.



Table 1: The Demographic Profile of 383 Research Participants

	Item	# of Respondents (383)	% Total Respondents
Gender	Male	108	28.2
	Female	219	57.2
	LGBTQ+	40	10.4
	Prefer not to say	18	4.2
Age Group	18–24 years old	268	70
	25–29 years old	74	19.3
	30–35 years old	41	10.7
Daily Social Media Usage	Less than 30 minutes	16	4.2
	30 minutes - less than 1 hour	38	9.9
	1 hour - less than 2 hours	97	25.3
	2 hours - less than 4 hours	115	30
	4 hours or more	117	30.5
Flight Frequency	1–2 times per year	203	53
	3–5 times per year	114	29.8
	6–10 times per year	38	9.9
	More than 10 times per year	28	7.3

As shown in Table 2, Regression analysis revealed that 4 characteristics of UGC can explain 46.6% of the Brand Trust ($R^2 = 0.466$, sig. < 0.05). When examining the power of each factor, the findings showed that Credibility (Beta = .356, $p < 0.05$), Volume (Beta = .304, $p < 0.05$), Valence (Beta = .198, $p < 0.05$) were significant predictors of respondents' brand trust towards low-cost airlines. However, Quality was the only UGC characteristic not a significant predictor of respondents' brand trust (Beta = 0.062, $p > 0.05$).

Table 2: Regression Analysis of UGC Characteristics on Brand Trust

Coefficients						
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig	VIF
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	.006	.210		.030	.973	
Credibility	.377	.053	.356	7.149	<.001	1.775
Quality	.072	.062	.061	1.175	.241	1.934



Coefficients						
Volume	.338	.053	.304	6.365	<.001	1.638
Valence	.157	.030	.198	5.190	<.001	1.042
Adjusted R ² : 0.466						
ANOVA ^a (sig.): <.001 ^b						
Dependent Variable: Brand Trust						

In Table 3, Regression analysis revealed that Brand Trust can explain 44% of the Booking Intention ($R^2 = 0.440$, sig. < 0.05). It also showed that Brand Trust (Beta = .665, $p < 0.05$) can significantly influence respondents' booking intention towards low-cost airlines.

Table 3: Regression of Brand Trust on Booking Intention

Coefficients						
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig	VIF
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	1.740	.130		13.369	<.001	
Brand Trust	.606	.035	.665	17.360	<.001	1.000
Adjusted R ² : 0.448						
ANOVA ^a (sig.): <.001 ^b						
Dependent Variable: Booking Intention						

The mediation analysis revealed that Brand Trust significantly mediated the relationship between all four UGC characteristics and Booking Intention towards low-cost airlines. Partial mediation was observed for Credibility, Valence and Volume, as their direct effects were significant ($p < 0.05$) while their indirect effects were significant (95% CI excluded zero). Notably, although Quality did not significantly predict Brand Trust in the full regression model, its indirect effect remained significant, likely due to stronger predictors such as Credibility and Volume masking its influence.

Table 4: Mediation Effects of Brand Trust between UGC and Booking Intention

	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect				Conclusion
	p	Effect	Boot SE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	
CR-BT-BI	.000	.3113	.0363	.2411	.3830	Partial Mediation
QL-BT-BI	.000	.2989	.0360	.2295	.3707	Partial Mediation
VAL-BT-BI	.000	.1404	.0271	.0897	.1948	Partial Mediation
VOL-BT-BI	.000	.3072	.0384	.2340	.3827	Partial Mediation



As shown in Table 5, age group and daily social media usage are not significant factors ($p > 0.05$) influencing booking intention towards low-cost flights.

Table 5: One-way ANOVA Results for Differences in Booking Intention by Demographic Factors

Demographic Characteristics	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)	Conclusion
Age Group	3.535	2	1.767	2.455	.087	Not significant
Daily Social Media Usage	2.301	4	.575	.792	.531	Not significant

Conclusions and Discussion

The empirical results provide several critical insights into the low-cost airline market in Vietnam. First, UGC Quality significantly influences booking intention but fails to predict brand trust in the multiple regression model ($p = .241$). High-quality, detailed reviews with comprehensive evidence were overshadowed by other characteristics of UGCs. This is theoretically consistent with the IAM Theory, which suggests that consumers evaluate information as a whole, considering both argument quality and source credibility. In practice, UGC is rarely assessed in separation, when credibility and volume signals are strong, they naturally dominate the consumer's judgment. Consequently, quality serves primarily as a functional tool to mitigate operational risks in a high-involvement service rather than acting as an emotional anchor. Given the inherent negative societal biases often associated with low-cost services, even high-quality information acts only as a functional value exchange without necessarily enhancing long-term trust.

Another pivotal finding is that Credibility was identified as the most powerful factor influencing brand trust. Its strong indirect impact on booking intention (.3113) confirms that in the Vietnamese low-cost airline context, where passengers are frequently concerned about hidden costs or deceptive advertising, young consumers prioritize perceived truthfulness to reduce purchase risks. This was followed by Volume, demonstrating the power of social proof in a collectivist culture like Vietnam. For Vietnamese passengers, the sheer number of discussions and shared experiences validates the airline's market presence and reliability. In this environment, the combination of high credibility and high volume serves as an effective "safety signal." This suggests that in low-trust environments, the perceived honesty and quantity of cues are more persuasive than the technical quality of the arguments in establishing brand credibility.



Demographics are also one of the factors studied in this research. Since both Age Group and Daily Social Media Usage do not lead to significant differences in booking intention, this indicates that the reliance on UGC for decision-making has become a behavioral habit across the board and traditional demographic segmentation is becoming less relevant in predicting behavior.

Based on these findings, low-cost airlines in Vietnam can develop new marketing campaigns, changing from branding advertising to UGC-centric reputation strategy. To drive immediate bookings, airlines can incentivize high-quality, detailed reviews with visual evidence. Since Quality has a direct effect on intention, this is the fastest way to surpass negative perceptions and drive sales. To build sustainable relationship with passengers, instead of trying to control public opinion through polished messages, airlines should focus on transparency and authentic passenger storytelling, increasing organic volume, short-form content, encouraging passengers to share their experiences, and creating high-frequency engagement on social media. Marketing campaigns do not need to be heavily segmented by age or social media usage time, as UGC has become a universal protocol across young Vietnamese when it comes to buying airline tickets.

However, while the sample size of $N = 383$ is statistically robust, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample is heavily concentrated on Gen Z (18–24 years old, accounting for 70%), which may not fully represent the behaviors of older generations. Second, this study was conducted within the collectivist cultural context of Vietnam, where community trust often outweighs official advertising. Therefore, applying these findings to individualist cultures should be done with caution and require further cultural adaptation. Future research could expand the scope by incorporating other variables such as price sensitivity or actual service quality to provide a more holistic view of the low-cost aviation industry.

References

- Ahmed, S. K. (2024). How to choose a sampling technique and determine sample size for research: A simplified guide for researchers. *Oral Oncology Reports*, 12, 100662. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oor.2024.100662>
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*, 50(2), 179–211.
- Castano, R., & Escandon-Barbosa, D. (2022). Measuring the credibility of consumer-generated media (CGM): a scale to test credibility in the field of tourism. *Tec Empresarial*, 16(2), 79–93.



- Cheung, C. M. K., & Thadani, D. R. (2012). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth communication: A literature analysis and integrative model. *Decision Support Systems*, 54(1), 461–470. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2012.06.008>
- Chouykaew, T., Kim, L., & Issayeva, G. (2024). HOW PERCEIVED EASE OF USE, TRUST, AND PERCEIVED USEFULNESS INFLUENCE TOURISTS'DECISION TO BOOK HOMESTAY SERVICES ONLINE. *Geo Journal of Tourism and Geosites*, 56(4), 1609–1616.
- Comrey, A. L., & Lee, H. B. (2013). *A first course in factor analysis*. Psychology press.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American journal of theoretical and applied statistics*, 5(1), 1–4.
- Filieri, R., & McLeay, F. (2014). E-WOM and accommodation: An analysis of the factors that influence travelers' adoption of information from online reviews. *Journal of travel research*, 53(1), 44–57.
- Izogo, E. E., Jayawardhena, C., & Karjaluoto, H. (2023). Negative eWOM and perceived credibility: a potent mix in consumer relationships. *International journal of retail & distribution management*, 51(2), 149–169.
- Lu, L.-C., Chang, W.-P., & Chang, H.-H. (2014). Consumer attitudes toward blogger's sponsored recommendations and purchase intention: The effect of sponsorship type, product type, and brand awareness. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 34, 258–266.
- Munuera-Aleman, J. L., Delgado-Ballester, E., & Yague-Guillen, M. J. (2003). Development and validation of a brand trust scale. *International journal of market research*, 45(1), 1–18.
- Park, D.-H., Lee, J., & Han, I. (2007). The effect of on-line consumer reviews on consumer purchasing intention: The moderating role of involvement. *International journal of electronic commerce*, 11(4), 125–148.
- Polat, İ., Erdoğan, D., & Sesliokuyucu, O. S. (2021). The impact of attitude and subjective norm on airline passengers' travel intention in the covid-19 era: mediating role of perceived risk. *Anais Brasileiros de Estudos Turísticos: ABET*, 11(1), 15.
- Sussman, S. W., & Siegal, W. S. (2003). Informational influence in organizations: An integrated approach to knowledge adoption. *Information systems research*, 14(1), 47–65.
- Tardin, M., & Pelissari, A. S. (2021). The influence of eWOM valence on brand equity dimensions and on purchase intention. *International Journal for Innovation Education and Research*, 9(8), 407–423.



VanVoorhis, C. W., & Morgan, B. L. (2007). Understanding power and rules of thumb for determining sample sizes. *Tutorials in quantitative methods for psychology*, 3(2), 43–50.

Vietjet Aviation Joint Stock Company. (2024). *Báo cáo thường niên 2024*.
https://ir.vietjetair.com/File_Upload/thong-tin-tai-chinh/bao-cao-thuong-nien-parent/bao-cao-thuong-nien/VJC%20BAO%20CAO%20THUONG%20NIEN%202024%20web.pdf