THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE ON CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION

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Abstract

The topic of digital environmental, social, and governance (DESG) is playing a key role in attracting increasing interest among managers, which can be realized as a vital strategic movement for sustainable business practices in the contemporary digital era. As a result, this study investigates the impact of DESG factors on consumer purchase intention (PUIN), considering the mediating role of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), brand equity (BEU), and the moderating role of customer knowledge. This relationship was examined through a survey of 612 participants. Structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis indicated that the model fits well with the research data, confirming the significant influence of DESG on shaping PUINs. The study also verifies the mediating role of eWOM and the moderating role of customer knowledge within the Vietnamese context. Interestingly, the findings reveal that DESG affects PUIN both directly and indirectly through eWOM. These insights provide policymakers with suggestions to enhance consumer PUINs in the digital era and offer marketers strategies to increase the consumption of products and services.

Keywords: Brand Equity, Customer Knowledge, Digital ESG, eWOM, Vietnam

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1. INTRODUCTION

Due to ongoing transformation, businesses across various industries are increasingly adopting e-commerce to enhance purchasing processes and strengthen customer relationships (Bermoy et al., 2021). The food and beverage (F&B) sector is no exception. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers have become more aware of corporate responsibility in their digital purchasing behaviors (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000). As a result, transitioning from environmental, social, and governance (ESG) to digital ESG (DESG) has emerged as a critical strategy for sustainable development and influencing consumer behavior globally, especially in the F&B industry. This highlights the need for research on how DESG influences consumer purchase intentions (PUINs). While, previous studies have primarily focused on the relationship between ESG and a company's stock value and financial performance (Mervelskemper & Streit, 2017). Surprisingly, there is limited research

on the relationship between consumer intentions and DESG, particularly in the food industry.

Vietnam, with one of the highest Internet penetration rates in Asia, has experienced significant growth in its e-commerce market. The trend of purchasing food online and via social media is rapidly increasing in Vietnam. As a result, traditional word of mouth (WOM) has evolved into an electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Siddiqui et al., 2021), allowing consumers to easily share and access brand-related information, which accelerates the spread of eWOM. These discussions impact PUINs by frequently mentioning brands with reliable and trustworthy information (Chu & Choi, 2011). While numerous studies have investigated the impact of eWOM on consumer behavior, the direct effects of eWOM have not always been consistently demonstrated (Augusto & Torres, 2018). Some research shows a direct influence of eWOM on willingness to pay premium prices (Nieto-García et al., 2017), but other studies have not found empirical support for this direct impact.

Moreover, creating a prominent brand that attracts consumers is challenging as businesses must differentiate themselves and add value for consumers. Recent research emphasizing brand concerns supports this significant function (Murtiasih et al., 2014). According to Chatzipanagiotou et al. (2016), brand equity (BEU) is one of the most extensively studied subjects and is increasingly recognized as a valuable competitive advantage. High BEU levels lead to higher consumer preferences and PUINs (Pappu et al., 2005). While much research focuses on BEU in various fields, little empirical research has been conducted on its impact on Vietnam's F&B sector.

According to Wang and Hazen (2016), PUIN is certain when a customer knows the product. Therefore, customer knowledge is crucial when making a purchase decision (Jayachandran et al., 2004). Previous research suggests that product knowledge is a primary determinant of a consumer's purchase choice (Rao & Monroe, 1998). However, the moderating role of customer knowledge is still in its infancy. This research aims to examine both the direct and indirect impact of DESG on F&B consumers' PUINs in the context of Vietnam. It also examines the mediating role of eWOM and BEU on the relationship between DESG and PUINs and the moderating role of customer knowledge, which has not been widely studied in Vietnam. F&B firms implementing ESG practices achieved 3–5% higher financial performance compared to their competitors, gaining competitive advantages in market share, brand reputation, and customer loyalty. However, only 20% have developed a comprehensive ESG strategy (KPMG, 2020). This study aims to fill the research gap related to the effect of DESG on PUIN through eWOM and BEU and provides empirical data collected from various subjects.

Vietnamese consumers are eager to try new F&B services but tend to lose interest quickly (Duong et al., 2021). However, the scarcity of specific research in the F&B sector presents considerable challenges for strategic planners in grasping the distinct consumer buying behaviors unique to each country. To sustain and boost revenue, businesses must be agile in developing their products and services. In this context, ESG and digital transformation are pivotal tools that profoundly impact consumer purchasing behavior (Lim et al., 2023). Qian et al. (2020) highlighted that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) businesses, including those in Vietnam, are particularly susceptible to international pressures due to their heavy dependence on foreign direct investment and global supply chains. The study also emphasized that public trust in environmental and social factors is a significant driver for enhancing a company's image. As a member of ASEAN, Vietnam cannot afford to fall behind in this race. Therefore, investigating the impact of DESG on PUINs in the F&B sector within a developing and promising market like Vietnam is crucial.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature and develops the hypotheses. Section 3 discusses the research methodology. Sections 4 and 5 present the results from the structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis and the discussion, respectively. Section 6 proposes the conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Digital environmental, social, and governance and purchase intention

The world is moving towards a future focused on sustainability and climate change mitigation, posing significant challenges to industrial production. These challenges extend beyond environmental issues to encompass shifts in the global economic structure. In this context, digital technology is becoming a crucial force, reshaping the global economic landscape while promoting sustainable values and enhancing ESG performance (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2022). The economic sustainability of emerging countries increasingly relies on applying ESG principles in production and business operations (Kwilinski et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of effective management, prompting forward-thinking organizations to adapt their strategies to address social and environmental challenges and ensure future stability. ESG has thus become a vital component of business management strategies (Koh et al., 2022). ESG activities — ranging from emissions and pollution reduction projects to salary increases, bonuses, and community participation — generate not only non-financial benefits but also enhance business results and profitability (Yuen et al., 2022). Implementing ESG activities contributes to sustainable and social development, fostering good business outcomes and community growth.

Digital transformation offers a comprehensive solution, integrating various technologies to create new markets and businesses while addressing ESG issues and other economic and social challenges. Technologies like blockchain, robotics, and artificial intelligence (AI) are being deployed to achieve regulatory compliance, data protection, and increased labor productivity. Integrating ESG strategies with digital transformation is not just a trend but a strategic move to ensure competitive advantage, improve business performance, and enhance reputation. These strategies help reduce waste and improve overall stakeholder value and business sustainability. Investors increasingly focus on ESG criteria, considering risks and returns (dos Santos & Pereira, 2022). Therefore, DESG goes beyond merely

adding a "digital" label to ESG. It integrates the principles of ethical digital transformation with responsible and sustainable business practices, creating a more comprehensive approach while maintaining a similar overall framework (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2022).

Consumer awareness of environmental impact is growing, requiring businesses to prioritize social responsibility alongside profit maximization. Numerous studies have confirmed that social activities positively influence a company's image and performance. The F&B industry, which is closely tied to ESG aspects, faces significant environmental challenges in the context of sustainability (Notarnicola et al., 2017). High costs are associated with fuel and greenhouse gas emissions in importing and exporting food, especially in fast food chains (Nemecek et al., 2016). This issue extends beyond the F&B industry as consumers increasingly scrutinize product origins and production processes. Promoting environmentally and socially friendly production activities is essential to maintaining and increasing customer trust and meeting market demands, creating pressure and opportunities for businesses to build customer trust and loyalty (Iglesias et al., 2020). However, the relationship between eWOM and BEU in driving PUINs requires further exploration. In Vietnam, research on ESG and its impact on PUINs remains scarce in both empirical and academic studies. This highlights the limited attention and application of DESG in Vietnamese businesses. Previous research has predominantly described the ESG activities of enterprises, while the current focus on DESG, with its enhanced features, aims to help businesses improve performance. Therefore, studying the influence of DESG factors on Vietnamese consumers' PUINs is essential to better understand how these elements affect PUINs. Vietnam, with its rich and diverse culinary culture, presents a promising context for research in the F&B industry. There is a need to systematize the theoretical basis of DESG to apply it in this new field, providing valuable insights for businesses to leverage DESG effectively and improve consumer relationships.

ESG activities significantly impact a business's finances and brand image, especially influencing consumers' PUINs. Consumers are more likely to buy from brands committed to sustainability, indicating that a positive social reputation enhances customer appeal and trust (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2022). In the F&B industry, ensuring safe and healthy working conditions for employees can enhance food hygiene. Sustainable food production and processing methods minimize environmental impact, reducing pollution risks and ensuring food safety. A robust ESG system ensures compliance with food hygiene regulations and safety standards, positively influencing Vietnamese consumers' food purchasing decisions and contributing to business sustainability. Therefore, research hypothesizes that:

H1: Digital environmental, social, and governance have a positive impact on consumer purchase intention in food and beverage.

2.2. Electronic word of mouth and purchase intention

With the rise of Web 2.0, WOM has evolved into eWOM, encompassing online product or service reviews and comments on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, which play a crucial role in alleviating consumer risk and uncertainty during purchase decisions (Indrawati et al., 2023). It is characterized by the dissemination of both negative and positive reviews about brands, products, or services on the Internet by past, present, and prospective consumers, making it accessible to a wide audience. The influence of eWOM is considered particularly strong due to its independence from corporate influence, as it conveys genuine personal experiences from consumers. Consequently, eWOM has emerged as a significant and trustworthy source of information about brands, products, and businesses, influencing PUINs positively (Tien et al., 2019). eWOM, characterized by its flexibility and cost-effectiveness, offers several benefits to marketers, who continually refine eWOM strategies to maximize business impact, fostering virtual communities where users actively engage in information exchange (Seo et al., 2020). This dynamic online environment enables consumers to easily share product experiences and feedback (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). The credibility of eWOM from reliable sources such as family and friends streamlines consumer information search efforts, facilitating purchasing decisions (Rodrigues & Brandão, 2021). Technological advancements in AI-driven platforms enhance visibility and interactivity, encouraging sustained consumer engagement and exploration of ESG aspects of businesses (Gvili & Levy, 2021). Positive evaluations of ESG factors, particularly in the F&B industry, significantly enhance eWOM and intention to continue using compliant products and services. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H2: Digital environmental, social, and governance have a positive impact on electronic word of mouth.

H3: Electronic word of mouth has a positive impact on consumer purchase intention in food and beverage.

2.3. Brand equity and purchase intention

In the contemporary era of globalized markets, brands are pivotal in shaping the economic and market value of business corporations. As the cornerstone of customer relationships, a brand not only builds credibility but also stands as the most valuable asset a company holds (Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Although BEU is intangible, it delivers substantial value to businesses by fostering customer loyalty, generating and expanding business opportunities, providing a competitive advantage, enhancing negotiating power, and boosting profit margins (Majeed et al., 2021). BEU encompasses more than just owning a brand name or logo. It represents a complex system of factors influencing the value of a product or service to both businesses and customers (Aaker, 1996). According to Keller (1993), BEU extends to include brand image, associations, and quality, emphasizing the significance of understanding how consumers assess and determine brand value in today's marketing environment. For businesses, BEU may focus on strategic factors, whereas for consumers, it relates to product recognition and perceived quality. In contemporary business contexts, BEU signifies the degree to which a brand can impact consumer perception and the value derived from a well-established and recognizable brand. Cultivating and

preserving strong BEU not only fosters trust but also enhances customer loyalty toward the product (Seo et al., 2020). Lili et al. (2022) argued that BEU significantly influenced consumer preferences and PUINs. Furthermore, BEU directly affects future profitability, long-term cash flow, and consumer willingness to pay, thus shaping consumer preferences and PUINs (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Consumers positively assess a company's social responsibility initiatives as they enhance brand value and foster customer loyalty. Therefore, initiatives related to ESG or social responsibility not only enhance corporate reputation but also play a crucial role in building BEU and influencing PUINs (Lai et al., 2010). Thus, research suggests that:

H4: Digital environmental, social, and governance have a positive impact on brand equity.

H5: Brand equity has a positive impact on consumer purchase intention in food and beverage.

2.4. The moderating role of customer knowledge

Research on consumer knowledge has expanded significantly across various fields, encompassing products and service offerings alike. Objective knowledge refers to information that is accurately verified and stored, whereas subjective knowledge reflects consumers' confidence and perceptions of their knowledge levels. Nurhayati and Hendar (2020) emphasized that knowledge serves as a critical tool for consumers to distinguish attributes among conventional products and develop favorable attitudes towards them. Chryssochoidis (2000) argued that low self-confidence in knowledge can lead consumers to avoid certain foods due to uncertainty about making informed choices.

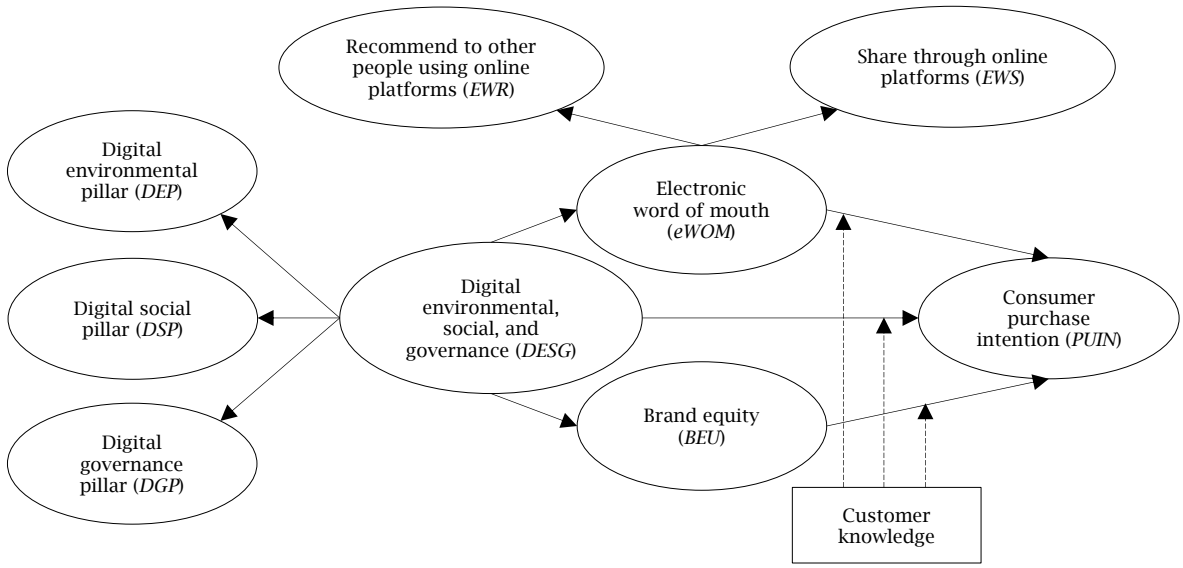
Studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between customer knowledge and WOM, underscoring the impact of knowledge on shopping decisions. For instance, Brucks (1985) highlighted that customer knowledge influences not only information search and processing but also significantly affects purchasing decisions. Objective knowledge is also shown to enhance the search and evaluation of product attributes, thereby facilitating the decision-making process. These findings underscore the pivotal role of customer knowledge in shaping shopping behaviors. Therefore, research suggests that:

H6a: Customer knowledge moderates the paths from digital, environmental, social, and governance.

H6b: Customer knowledge moderates the paths from electronic word of mouth.

H6c: Customer knowledge moderates the paths from brand equity to consumer purchase intention.

Figure 1. The study's conceptual framework



Source: Authors' elaboration.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data collection and sample size

This study employed a convenience sampling method to gather data examining the impact of *DESG* on consumers' *PUIN*s. The survey targeted individuals across all three regions of Vietnam. Electronic questionnaires were distributed via the Google Forms platform and sent to respondents nationwide through email invitations from November 2022 to January 2023. Additionally, handwritten paper questionnaires were administered offline at the same time. Additionally, paper questionnaires were completed directly by consumers at shopping centers in major cities across three regions of Vietnam: Hanoi in the North, Da Nang in the Central region, and Ho Chi Minh City in the South.

This study employed a quantitative design, aiming to test hypotheses through a systematic and scientific method of data quantification. The choice of a quantitative approach aligns with the research objectives and established precedents. To ensure the study's hypotheses were adequately tested and to assess the theoretical significance and positive correlations among variables as per Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a minimum sample size of 150 was deemed necessary, with 200 recommended for SEM analysis (Kline, 1998). Given the focus on SEM in this study, a total of 753 questionnaires were initially collected. After excluding cases that did not meet

the analysis criteria, the final valid sample consisted of 612 respondents, representing an 81.2% response rate. Participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, and participation was entirely voluntary.

3.2. Questionnaire development

The scales utilized in this study employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from one ("completely disagree") to five ("completely agree"). The DESG scale, adapted from Puriwat and Tripopsakul (2022), consisted of 12 observed variables, with each item assessing the digital environmental pillar (*DEP*), the digital social pillar (*DSP*), and the digital governance pillar (*DGP*) measured by four observed variables each. The eWOM scale, based on Yen and Tang (2015), included two observed variables evaluating online platform recommendations (*EWR*) and three observed variables assessing information dissemination via online platforms (*EWS*). The *BEU* scale, adapted from Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010), comprised four observed variables. The *PUIN* scale, taken from Cheung et al. (2009), incorporated four observed variables. These scales were adjusted to align with the research context following a rigorous two-way language back-translation process conducted by the researchers.

For the moderator variable, three items from the customer knowledge scale were adapted from Aertsens et al. (2011). To explore the moderating effect of customer knowledge in the proposed path model, the sample was divided into two subgroups using the median split approach with a median value (Md = 3.33). This division was coded as a dummy variable in the data analysis (0 = low customer knowledge, 1 = high customer knowledge).

3.3. Data analysis methods

To assess the relationship between *DESG*, *eWOM*, *BEU*, and *PUIN*, this study followed a systematic data analysis approach outlined as follows: 1) testing scale reliability using Cronbach's alpha (CA) coefficient, 2) evaluating convergent and discriminant validity through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and 3) testing research hypotheses using linear SEM, bootstrap method, and multigroup analysis.

To evaluate the measurement model, convergent validity is assessed through the average variance extracted (AVE): AVE values, reliability by using CA, and composite reliability (CR) values. Initially, CA coefficients were computed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 25) software to assess measurement reliability. Subsequently, the measurement model and discriminant validity analysis for all constructs were conducted using Excel, and the results are presented in Table 2.

CA values were employed to evaluate scale reliability before proceeding with hierarchical regression analysis. All values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2009).

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha

Variables	*Indicators*	*CA*
Digital environmental pillar (*DEP*)	*DE1*	0.899
	DE2	
	DE3	
	DE4	
Digital social pillar (*DSP*)	*DS1*	0.928
	DS2	
	DS3	
	DS4	
Digital governance pillar (*DGP*)	*DG1*	0.893
	DG2	
	DG3	
	DG4	
Recommend to other people using online platforms (*EWR*)	*EW1*	0.889
	EW2	
Share through online platforms (*EWS*)	*EW3*	0.929
	EW4	
	EW5	
Brand equity (*BEU*)	*BE1*	0.886
	BE2	
	BE3	
	BE4	
Consumer purchase intention (*PUIN*)	*PI1*	0.922
	PI2	
	PI3	
	PI4	

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Additionally, both AVE and CR reached satisfactory levels. Specifically, CR values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.6 for all constructs, and AVE values for variables surpassed 0.5, indicating robust convergent validity as suggested by Hair et al. (2009).

The results demonstrate that the AVE values are greater than 0.5 for all constructs: *DESG* (0.578), *eWOM* (0.944), *BEU* (0.661), and *PUIN* (0.748). These estimates confirm adequate convergent validity of the items (Hair et al., 2009).

Table 2. Model validity measures

Variables	*CR*	*AVE*	*MSV*	*MaxR(H)*	*BEU*	*DESG*	*EWOM*	*PUIN*
BEU	0.886	0.661	0.014	0.888	**0.813**			
DESG	0.801	0.578	0.506	0.831	0.066	**0.76**		
EWOM	0.971	0.944	0.242	1.276	0.029	0.418	**0.972**	
PUIN	0.922	0.748	0.506	0.923	0.118	0.711	0.492	**0.865**

Source: Authors' elaboration.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1. Descriptive statistics

The majority of participants in the full study cohort were women (58.5%), with men accounting for 41.5%. A significant portion of consumers fell into the age bracket of 18 years old to 29 years old (50.8%). Regarding marital status, a slight majority were single (50.3%). Additionally, a large proportion held bachelor's degrees (67.2%), and about a third reported a monthly salary between VND 7,500,000 and VND 15,000,000. Table 3 details the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

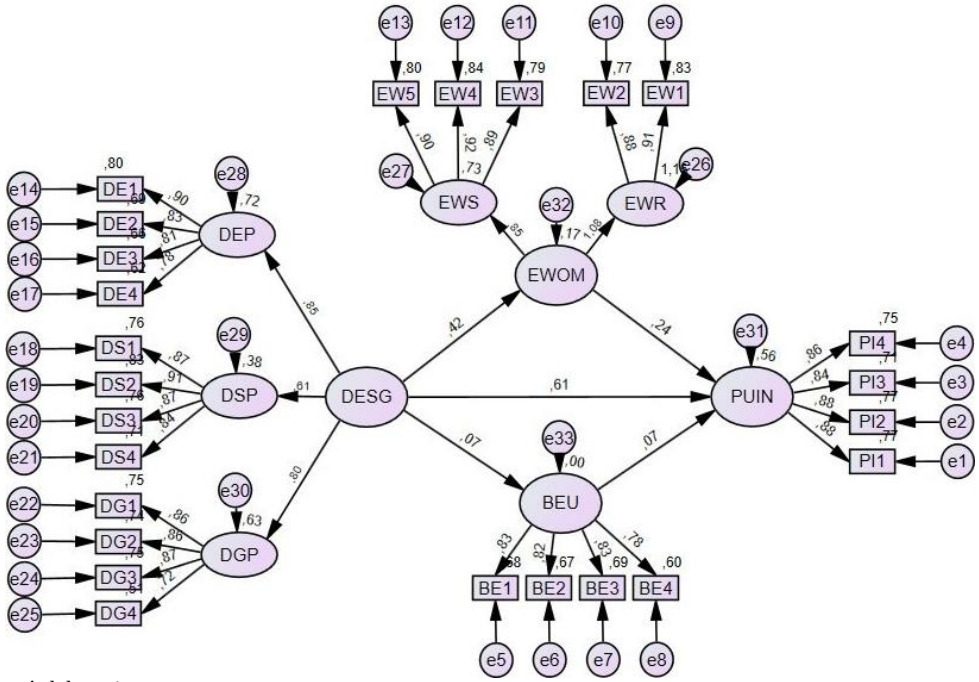
Items	*Description*	*Sample*	*Percentage (%)*
Gender	Male	254	41.5
	Female	358	58.5
Age	18–29 years old (Gen Z)	311	50.8
	30–44 years old (Gen Y)	217	35.5
	45–59 years old (Gen X)	84	13.7
Education	Below bachelor's degree	201	32.8
	Bachelor's degree	411	67.2
Marital status	Single	308	50.3
	Married (no children)	68	11.1
	Married (have children)	225	36.8
Income (VND)	Below 5,000,000	119	19.4
	5,000,000–7,500,000	178	29.1
	7,500,000–15,000,000	203	33.2
	15,000,000–30,000,000	86	14.1
	Above 30,000,000	26	4.2
Area	Countryside	256	41.8
	City	356	58.2
Region	North region	444	72.5
	Central region	112	18.3
	Southern region	56	9.2

Source: Authors' elaboration.

4.2. Structural model and hypotheses testing

The AMOS and SmartPLS are powerful statistical software that has been widely used by researchers to analyze SEM. However, through AMOS software, mathematics researchers can evaluate the validity and reliability of a construct measurement model through the CFA procedure. Once the CFA report is completed, researchers can integrate these constructs into a structural model for further analysis. Consequently, AMOS is considered the most effective and user-friendly tool for analyzing and testing theories (Sakaria et al., 2023). Therefore, CFA was calculated through AMOS v. 24 software. The measurement model demonstrated a satisfactory fit, as evidenced by the following indicators:| Chi-square / df (CMIN / df) = 1.835 < 3, the goodness of fit index (GFI) = 0.941 > 0.9, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.982 > 0.95, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.979 > 0.95, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.037 < 0.06 (Hair et al., 2009).

Figure 2. Structural equation modeling: Standardized estimates



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Research results show that *H4* and *H5* are accepted. The PUIN of consumers in the F&B industry is strongly influenced by *DESG* ($\beta = 0.623$; $p < 0.001$). Next, *eWOM* and *BEU* also have a positive influence on consumers' purchasing intentions ($\beta = 0.203$; $p < 0.0$; $\beta = 0.079$; p-value = 0.037). Furthermore, *DESG* also positively affects *eWOM* ($\beta = 0.497$; $p < 0.001$). In addition, there is an unacceptable hypothesis about the impact of *DESG* on *BEU* ($\beta = 0.061$; p-value = 0.166) (Hu & Bentler, 1998).

Table 4. Hypothesis test results (standardized)

Hypothesis		Estimate	Std. error	CR	p-value	Description
H1	*PUIN ← DESG*	0.623	0.051	12.293	***	Supported
H2	*eWOM ← DESG*	0.497	0.053	9.301	***	Supported
H3	*PUIN ← eWOM*	0.203	0.034	6.008	***	Supported
H4	*BEU ← DESG*	0.061	0.044	1.385	0.166	Non supported
H5	*PUIN ← BEU*	0.079	0.038	2.081	0.037	Supported

*Note: *** indicates a 1% significance level.*
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Bootstrapping is used to explore mediating relationships. The results in Table 5 show that *DESG* has an indirect relationship with *PUIN* through *eWOM*. However, there is no relationship between *PUIN* through *BEU*.

Table 5. Indirect effects results (standardized)

Indirect path	Lower	Upper	Standardized estimate
DESG → eWOM → PUIN	0.065	0.15	0.099***
DESG → BEU → PUIN	0.000	0.015	0.005

*Note: *** indicates a 1% significance level.*
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Multigroup SEM analyses were employed to examine the moderating effects of customer knowledge in the structural model. The sample was divided into two subgroups of high and low-knowledge customers using the median split approach. Next, we conducted a Chi-square difference test to compare a constrained model (all the paths were restricted across the two subgroups) with an unconstrained model (all the paths were not constrained across the two subgroups). If the constrained model presented a significantly larger Chi-square value than the unconstrained model, then this implied a potential moderating effect (Ullman & Bentler, 2012). The Chi-square statistic demonstrated that the constrained (x^2 = 761.537, df = 535) and unconstrained models (x^2 = 750.115, df = 530) were significantly different (Δx^2 = 11.422, df = 5, $p < 0.05$). The unconstrained model has good fitness indices (CFI = 0.982, TLI = 0.979 > 0.9). The impact of *DESG* and *eWOM* on *PUINs* was significant in the group with high customer knowledge (standardized β = 0.712***, standardized β = 0.219***, respectively) and was not significant in the group with low customer knowledge. Thus, all the hypotheses of moderating effects of *H6a*, *H6b*, and *H6c* are supported.

Table 6. The moderating effect of customer knowledge (standardized estimates)

Hypothesis	Standardized coefficients	
	With (n = 365)	Without (n = 247)
PUIN ← DESG	0.712***	557***
PUIN ← eWOM	0.219***	0.188***
PUIN ← BEU	0.153 (0.011)	0.089 (0.026)

*Note: *** indicates a 1% significance level.*
Source: Authors' elaboration.

5. DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study is to examine how *DESG* influences *PUIN*s in the Vietnamese F&B industry, mediated by *eWOM* and *BEU*, and moderated by customer knowledge. Based on these findings, recommendations are proposed to foster sustainable consumption practices in the food industry, benefiting both consumers and businesses.

The research findings indicate a robust direct impact of *DESG* on *PUIN* (β = 0.623), consistent with prior studies such as Koh et al. (2022). Additionally, *DESG* also indirectly affects *PUIN* through *eWOM*. However, *DESG* shows no significant direct relationship with *BEU*, aligning with the findings of Puriwat and Tripopsakul (2022), suggesting that effective implementation of *DESG* initiatives is crucial to avoid negative impacts on consumer behavior.

Moreover, *eWOM* demonstrates a direct positive influence on *PUIN* (β = 0.203), echoing the findings of Khan et al. (2023). In today's digital age, widespread access to detailed product and service information via digital platforms enhances *PUIN*s.

Furthermore, *BEU* directly influences *PUIN* (β = 0.079), similar to the conclusions drawn by Dilip et al. (2021). *BEU* encompasses aspects like brand recognition and reputation, significantly shaping consumer decisions in favor of trusted brands.

Lastly, customer knowledge positively moderates the relationships between *eWOM* and *PUIN* (β = 0.219), *DESG* and *PUIN* (β = 0.712), and *BEU* and *PUIN* (β = 0.153). This moderating effect underscores the pivotal role of consumer knowledge in shaping purchasing decisions and positioning brands as preferred choices during the buying process.

In conclusion, these findings underscore the importance of integrating effective DESG strategies, leveraging eWOM, and building strong BEU to enhance PUINs in the F&B sector. Moreover, fostering consumer knowledge can further strengthen these relationships, contributing to sustainable consumption behaviors and business success.

6. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the impact of DESG on Vietnamese PUINs in the F&B sector, examining the mediating roles of eWOM and BEU. The findings reveal that DESG exerts both direct and indirect effects on PUINs through eWOM, although its relationship with BEU remains unclear. Notably, both eWOM and BEU significantly influence PUINs in Vietnam's F&B industry. Furthermore, customer knowledge positively moderates the relationships between eWOM, DESG, BEU, and PUINs.

This research article pioneers the exploration of DESG and PUINs in Vietnam's F&B sector within the digital era, highlighting both theoretical and practical significance. It proposes strategies to foster sustainable consumption in the industry, benefiting both consumers and businesses. Businesses are urged to understand the diverse impacts of digital technology on consumers, stakeholders, the environment, and society, and to implement DESG initiatives responsibly to mitigate negative consequences. Government involvement is crucial in promoting positive attitudes towards DESG through social networks.

However, the study has limitations. The sample size of 612 consumers may limit representativeness, necessitating further studies with larger and more geographically diverse samples across Vietnam to deepen understanding of the relationships among variables and PUINs. Moreover, the research focuses on specific factors including DESG, eWOM, and BEU, potentially overlooking other influences on Vietnamese consumers' food purchasing decisions in the digital era. This research is based on a framework in Vietnam — a country with considerable cultural, culinary, social, and economic diversity compared to other nations. Therefore, selecting and incorporating cultural conditions suitable for each country is necessary. Future research could integrate behavioral intention theories, such as the theory of planned behavior, into the model to provide a more comprehensive analysis.

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