







# “The influence of unverified news and electronic word-of-mouth on customer satisfaction and purchase intention: An empirical study on the food and beverage industry”

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<b>ARTICLE INFO</b>	Ngoc-Hong Duong, Chi Viet Duong, Thien Kim Nguyen Ba, Bao Tran Tran and Minh Chau Thai (2025). The influence of unverified news and electronic word-of-mouth on customer satisfaction and purchase intention: An empirical study on the food and beverage industry. <i>Innovative Marketing</i> , 21(1), 142-156. doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.21511/im.21(1).2025.12">10.21511/im.21(1).2025.12</a>
<b>DOI</b>	<a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/im.21(1).2025.12">http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/im.21(1).2025.12</a>
<b>RELEASED ON</b>	Friday, 07 February 2025
<b>RECEIVED ON</b>	Thursday, 29 August 2024
<b>ACCEPTED ON</b>	Thursday, 16 January 2025
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<b>JOURNAL</b>	"Innovative Marketing "
<b>ISSN PRINT</b>	1814-2427
<b>ISSN ONLINE</b>	1816-6326
<b>PUBLISHER</b>	LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”
<b>FOUNDER</b>	LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”



NUMBER OF REFERENCES

58



NUMBER OF FIGURES

2



NUMBER OF TABLES

6

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## BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES



LLC "CPC "Business Perspectives"  
Hryhorii Skovoroda lane, 10,  
Sumy, 40022, Ukraine  
[www.businessperspectives.org](http://www.businessperspectives.org)

**Received on:** 29<sup>th</sup> of August, 2024

**Accepted on:** 16<sup>th</sup> of January, 2025

**Published on:** 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2025

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### Conflict of interest statement:

Author(s) reported no conflict of interest

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# THE INFLUENCE OF UNVERIFIED NEWS AND ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND PURCHASE INTENTION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY

## Abstract

In the digital age, unverified news and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) have become pervasive, raising concerns about their influence on customer behavior and decision-making. This research aims to investigate how unverified news affects customer purchase intention and satisfaction, emphasizing the mediating role of brand image within customer relationship management. Using the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) as the theoretical framework, the study collected the data from 378 undergraduate and postgraduate students in Vietnam. The hypotheses were tested through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS4. There are two significant results. Firstly, unverified news has significantly influenced brand image and trust, leading to customer satisfaction and purchase intention. Secondly, brand image plays a mediating role in the relationship between e-WOM and purchase intention. This research contributes to the marketing literature by demonstrating how unverified news shapes consumer behavior. The findings provide actionable insights for businesses to adapt their marketing strategies, addressing the growing challenges of misinformation to improve brand trust and customer satisfaction in today's information-driven market.

## Keywords

brand, credibility, misinformation, purchase,  
satisfaction, trust

## JEL Classification

D12, M31

## INTRODUCTION

With a market of nearly 100 million consumers, Vietnam is critical to expanding the domestic and international food and beverage (F&B) industry. The F&B industry has rapidly recovered post-COVID-19, becoming vital to the country's economy. Along with the benefits of an enormous customer volume, Vietnam is considered a country with a unique and diverse traditional culinary culture that is actively preserved and promoted. In recent years, investment in the food, restaurant, and accommodation services sectors has grown, paving the way for the development of Vietnam's F&B sector in terms of market expansion, supply seeking, and promotion. Additionally, the digital economy and social networks have exploded, transforming the F&B field in Vietnam. This phenomenon allows businesses to connect with a broader range of customers and adapt to changing consumer habits, fostering the growth of this industry; however, it also causes several risks. Aside from the macro-level difficulties associated with opera-

tions and supply chains, F&B businesses also face challenges in managing concerns surrounding information and unverified news about their brands and products. In early 2023, Vietnam had 77.93 million internet users (Vnetwork, 2023), with the number of social media users reaching 70 million, which makes it challenging for businesses to regulate such materials, including false reviews, comments, and misinformation. Therefore, there is a growing concern regarding the combination of unverified news and e-WOM, which affects customer perspectives and brand reputation. Understanding how these factors impact consumer purchase intention is essential to help companies take prompt action, grab new opportunities, and enhance their strategy in an increasingly digital market era.

Thus, the authors investigate the factors customers use to identify fake news, including source credibility, news truthfulness, and news credibility, and analyze how these factors influence brand perception, subsequently affecting purchase intention and customer satisfaction. Moreover, the authors examine the impact of e-WOM on brand perception and purchase intention.

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## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

While significant contributions of prior research, there are remaining gaps. Prior studies have investigated the influence of fake news on consumer purchase behaviors; nevertheless, a comprehensive analysis of certain businesses or services, especially the food and beverage sector, remains unexamined (De Costa, 2023; Davali et al., 2023). Moreover, these studies have not yet examined the effects of fake news from the brand's viewpoint, including its influence on purchase intention through diverse elements. Previous studies highlight the mechanisms by which consumers discern misinformation and the elements that influence their perceptions (Chen et al., 2023; Rao, 2022; Oude Nijhuis, 2018).

The "Elaboration Likelihood Model" (ELM) is commonly used as a foundation for developing models to investigate aspects that influence users' elaborative efforts with persuasive items on their attitude (Appelman & Sundar, 2016). The term "elaboration" refers to the extent to which a recipient considers an argument. The user's elaboration of the information received affects behavior properly, implying that it may influence customers' willingness to buy the brand or firm about which the information or argument is received (Wagner & Petty, 2022). Customers may accept news or content if the source is knowledgeable, trustworthy, or appealing (Han et al., 2018). Most ELM research has discovered that attitudes are formed or altered by either a persuasive argument or a cue, not both simultaneously (Davis & Agrawal, 2018).

It is believed that everyone has a unique sense of credibility. Source credibility is widely seen as a favorable trait of the communicator that influences the receiver's acceptance of the message (Aghitashera et al., 2020). According to research on source credibility in persuasive communication, raising the perceived knowledge of the source improves attitude change (Sharif et al., 2022; Visentin et al., 2019). According to Aghitashera et al. (2020), source credibility is a positive trait of the communicator that controls the recipient's acceptance of the message. Furthermore, the degree to which a communication recipient believes in the source's claim is another definition of source credibility (Visentin et al., 2019; Mishra & Samu, 2021). Source credibility plays a vital role in building brand trust, regardless of the individual's level of involvement in the message (Wu & Wang, 2011).

The objective truthfulness of the content communicated is the definition of news truthfulness (Sharif et al., 2022; Mahdi et al., 2022). The term "news truthfulness" simply means whether the news or content provided is real or false. Research indicates that readers will only accept the news conveyed objectively, undermining the news's perceived trustworthiness. Vafeiadis et al. (2019) found that customers are likely to have harmful behavioral intentions toward untrustworthy companies and lower brand trust based on studies on privacy issues in an online context.

The credibility of news is defined by people's opinions of how accurate the material is. Appelman and Sundar (2016) said: "The judgment of an individual about the content being communicated can be used

to determine news credibility. The veracity, authenticity, and accuracy of the information conveyed are evaluated". According to a study, news accuracy affects consumers' trust in businesses by encouraging them to check the news' veracity and adjust their behavior and attitude accordingly. The impact can be more significant if the news originates from a reputable source (Baek et al., 2019; Lee, 2021).

The concept of unverified news is widely available on the Internet these days. As the word implies, unverified news is presented as legitimate even though it is frequently designed to deceive recipients. Unverified news is news designed to be false yet can be substantiated (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). The purpose and strategy utilized by the source or publisher to present the news are critical in determining whether it is accurate or false (Lazer et al., 2018). Hence, in this study, three small variables were used to assess unverified news: source credibility, news truthfulness, and news credibility. According to Visentin et al. (2019), unverified news is fake tales deliberately expressed as accurate, even if they have been independently proven false.

One element that arises from unverified news in an internet context is trust. Wu and Wang (2011) found a positive and direct correlation between brand trust and source credibility. Regardless of the person's degree of engagement with the message, the study showed that source credibility is important for establishing brand trust (Wu & Wang, 2011). According to another study, consumers' trust in brands is impacted by the accuracy of the news, which prompts people to verify the news' accuracy and modify their behavior and attitude accordingly (Marshall & WoonBong, 2004). Misleading information about brands can turn into rumors in this fast-paced age of information transmission, harming the brand by leading customers to think adversely or identify it with unpleasant things. Unreliable news damages a brand's credibility and reputation by making consumers lose faith in it.

The impact of unverified news on a brand's reputation and image can never be understated (Kotler, 2003); defines an image as "the set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person holds regarding an object." Social media is critical in virtualizing crises and harming a company's and brand's repu-

tation. Chakraborty and Bhat (2018) distinguish between two brand images: hedonic and functional. Hedonic brand image measures the brand based on the consumer's sentiments or emotions toward the brand, whereas functional brand image measures the brand's performance or utility. Unfavorable internet reviews can harm a brand's image or reputation, reducing client loyalty. Online evaluations, blogs, and texts about brand usage experiences are more effective than spoken communication when building a solid brand image (Berger & Iyengar, 2013).

E-WOM has risen since customers rely more on their brand interactions and word-of-mouth recommendations (Cheung et al., 2009). O'Reilly (2016) defined e-WOM as "Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company which is made available to many people and institutes via the Internet." Negative online product reviews are one kind of word-of-mouth communication. Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011) examined consumer-based brand equity. Their empirical study confirmed the hypothesis that unfavorable online product reviews harmed consumer-based brand equity and image. Moreover, E-WOM has considerable effects on the brand image (Chakraborty, 2019; Wang et al., 2022).

With the rise of electronic media as a powerful and trustworthy information source, the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on purchasing decisions has increased significantly (Lopez & Sicilia, 2014). According to Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006), customers can obtain important product or service quality information through e-WOM communications. The effect of online product reviews on the relative sales of two online booksellers was examined by Cui et al. (2012) using publicly available data from two leading online retailers. The study's findings demonstrated how much these online interactions influence other customers' purchasing decisions. Online reviews are potent informants and recommenders that significantly impact both the intention to buy and the actual purchase (Park et al., 2007). Customers' purchasing decisions are impacted by the quantity and quality of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) shared on various social media platforms (Lin et al., 2013).

In Greek online shopping research, brand trust significantly impacts consumer satisfaction (Pappas et al., 2014). Kundu and Rajan (2016) define brand trust as consumer expectations or perceptions about a brand's reliability and intentions in customer risk scenarios. Kundu and Datta (2014) discovered that trust considerably impacts service quality and customer satisfaction.

In general, research suggests that trust predicts purchasing behavior (Arvidsson & Melander, 2020). Additionally, Kim et al. (2017) stated that brand trust significantly influences purchase intention. As brand trust has some important impacts on customers' purchasing behavior, it can become an advantage in helping firms lower the risk of uncertainty and encouraging purchases among consumers (Villagra et al., 2021; Chae et al., 2020).

Previous research has found that brand image increases consumer satisfaction, leading to a long-term connection with a company and good word-of-mouth communication (Chao et al., 2015; Anwar et al., 2019). Verdilla and Albari (2018) describe the brand image as the perception of a brand that is supported by associations with the brand that are memorable to consumers. The research studies conducted by Chao et al. (2015) and Anwar et al. (2019) found that long-term connection with a company and good word-of-mouth communication increase customer satisfaction, which was improved by brand image. Mohammed and Rashid (2018) also discovered that consumer happiness and loyalty, which affect overall satisfaction, correlate directly with brand image.

Customers increase their interest in purchasing the brand when they have a good impression of the brand image (Kotler et al., 2016; Martha & Febriyantoro, 2019). According to Martha and Febriyantoro (2019), a well-known brand image is distinctive in the market. Furthermore, customers employ a strong brand image to increase their interest in purchasing the brand (Kotler et al., 2016; Martha & Febriyantoro, 2019).

Customer satisfaction can predict purchase intent and customer loyalty (Yang & Peterson, 2004). Furthermore, the more customers feel satisfied with the brand, the longer they will stay

and make more purchases (Johnson et al., 2015; Nuraini & Hendratmi, 2021). Yen and Gwinner (2005) observed that overall satisfaction with Internet self-service technology was positively connected to behavioral intentions, namely the willingness to continue purchasing from the same service provider.

This study aims to investigate the impact of unverified news on customers' intention to purchase and satisfaction within the food and beverage industry. It also examines the mediating effects of brand trust and brand image. The following hypotheses are developed based on the literature review and empirical evidence:

*H1a: Source Credibility has a significant impact on Brand Trust.*

*H1b: News Truthfulness has a significant impact on Brand Trust.*

*H2a: News Credibility has a significant impact on Brand Trust.*

*H2b: Source Credibility has a significant impact on Brand Image.*

*H3a: News Truthfulness has a significant impact on Brand Image.*

*H3b: News Credibility has a significant impact on Brand Image.*

*H4: E-WOM has a significant impact on Brand Image.*

*H5: E-WOM has a significant impact on Purchase Intention.*

*H6: Brand Trust has a positive and significant effect on Customer Satisfaction.*

*H7: Brand Trust is positively related to Purchase Intention.*

*H8: Brand Image has a significant positive effect on Customer Satisfaction.*

*H9: Brand Image has a positive effect on Purchase Intention.*

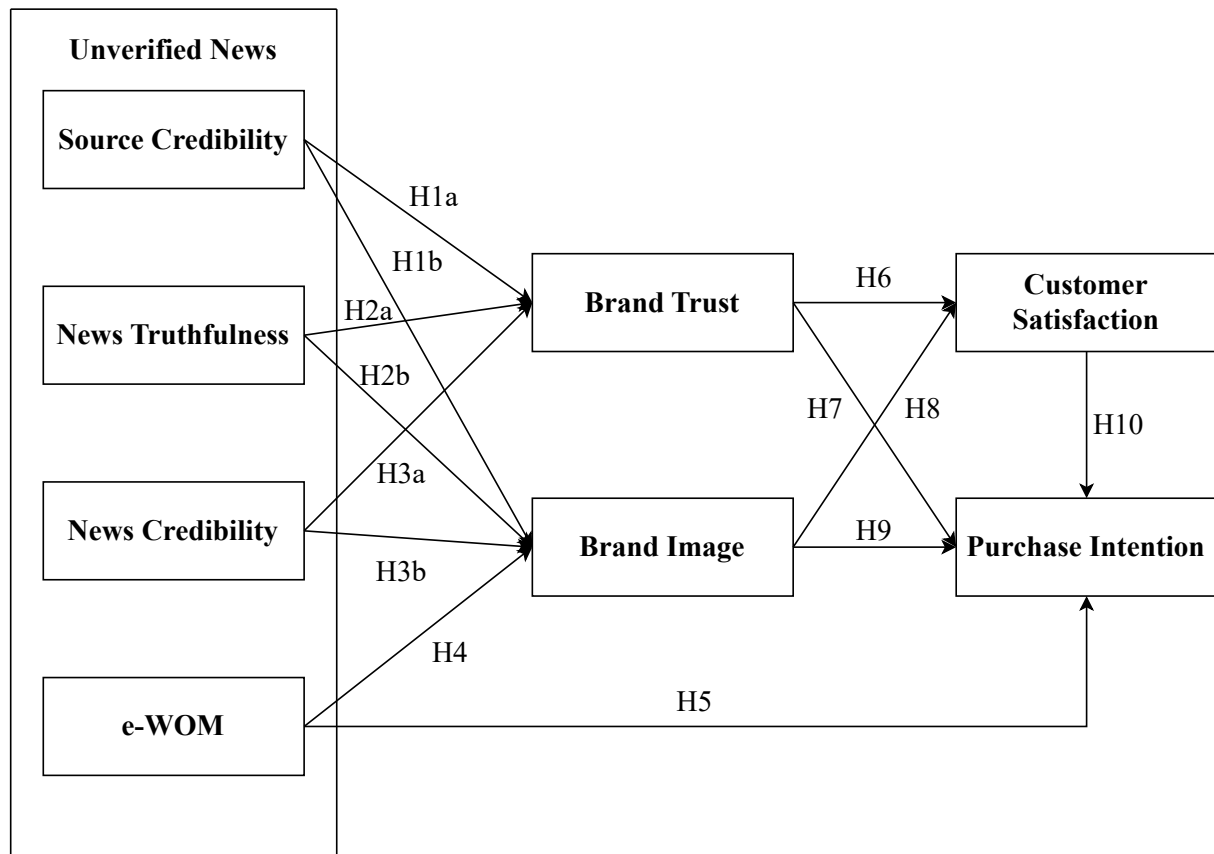


Figure 1. Proposed research model

H10: *Customer Satisfaction has a positive relationship with Purchase Intention.*

The research model is illustrated in Figure 1.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Participants and data collection

Before conducting the primary survey, a pilot study was performed to evaluate the clarity and reliability of the survey scales. This pilot test involved 20 participants who provided feedback on the wording and comprehension of the questionnaire items. During this phase, it was discovered that several questions were difficult to interpret, making it challenging for respondents to provide accurate answers. Based on the feedback, the researchers revised the questionnaire by adapting several items from established scales used in previous studies. This ensured that the questions were straightforward and aligned with the research objectives. After making the necessary adjustments, the final version of the questionnaire was finalized.

A quantitative survey research design was used in the study. The questionnaire was made into Google form and sent through social media and websites from March to May 2024. The researchers used the non-probability method to select the survey sample. The research introduction, guidelines, and screening questions open the questionnaire. The items of the constructs in the models are then measured in the questionnaire's body section. The personal information of the respondent completes the questionnaire. Since the data obtained for this investigation were not normally distributed, the "Partial Least Squares Path Modeling" (PLS-PM) technique was employed. This approach is appropriate for analyzing non-normal data (Hair et al., 2009). The PLS-PM was carried out using SmartPLS 4, and the descriptive statistical analysis was performed using SPSS. For the final analysis, a total of 378 qualified answers were accepted.

### 2.2. Measurements

Scales from previous studies were adopted for the research. The measurement of the unverified news concept was adapted from Sharif et al. (2022) and

Visentin’s (2019) research with five items, six items, and three items for Source Credibility, News Truthfulness, and News Credibility, respectively. E-WOM included six items and was measured by the scale developed by Sagynbekova et al. (2021). The scale for Brand Image was adapted from Lien et al. (2015) with six items. Brand trust and purchase intention were measured using the Bhandari (2020) scale, which includes four items and five items. Finally, the scale to measure customer satisfaction was adopted by Guo et al. (2012), and it had five items. There are 40 items to measure all variables in the survey. All items were measured using the 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 5 indicating “strongly agree”.

### 2.3. Demographic results

According to the data analysis, the gender distribution shows that 54% of the respondents are female, while 46% are male, indicating a balanced yet slightly female-skewed sample. Regarding age, most participants fall within the 20 to 30-year range, representing 53% of the sample, followed by those aged 30 to 40 at 24%. The youngest age group, under 20 years, constitutes 18%, while the oldest group, above 40, makes up only 5%. This distribution in age shows a concentration of individuals in early adulthood. In terms of educational level, the data shows that most participants have completed or are currently studying for a bachelor’s degree, with 76% of university or college students and 37% of postgraduate students. Those with a high school education account for 15% of the popu-

lation. With a high level of educational accomplishment, it is suggested that the sample population is well-educated and highly emphasizes university education.

Regarding monthly income, the sample is relatively evenly distributed across different income levels, but there is a concentration in the middle to upper-income ranges. The most significant proportion of participants is between 10 to 20 million VND per month, accounting for 49%, followed by 25% of people with a monthly salary between 20 to 30 million VND. 16% of the participants earn less than 10 million VND monthly, while those earning over 30 million VND per month comprise 10% of the sample. This income distribution indicates that most participants are financially stable, with a significant portion earning above the average income level.

## 3. RESULTS

Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability were used to examine dataset’s reliability and internal consistency objectively. All variables have Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient values and Composite Reliability values greater than 0.7 but less than 0.9, indicating that the latent variables have adequate internal consistency and reliability. Item elimination was done to confirm the constructs’ convergent validity. The final measurement model meets all of Cronbach’s Alpha, Composite Reliability, and AVE thresholds shown in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Respondent demographics

Classification		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	205	54%
	Male	173	46%
Age	Under 20	68	18%
	20-30	201	53%
	30-40	89	24%
	Above 40	20	5%
Academic level	High school	59	15%
	University/college	282	76%
	Master or higher	37	9%
Monthly income (million VND)	Under 10	61	16%
	10-20	185	49%
	20-30	93	25%
	Above 30	39	10%

Note: n = 378.

**Table 2.** Reliability and validity

Variable		Item	Outer loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
Source Credibility (SC)	SC1	The source of information is reputable	0.892	0.953	0.802	0.938
	SC2	The source of information is highly rated by the forum members	0.884			
	SC3	The source of information is good	0.894			
	SC4	The source of information is trustworthy	0.905			
	SC5	The source of information is reliable	0.903			
News Truthfulness (NT)	NT1	The news is trustable	0.902	0.920	0.693	0.876
	NT2	The news provides true content	0.916			
	NT3	The news is accurate	0.924			
	NT4	The news is reliable	0.911			
	NT5	The news does not lie	0.904			
	NT6	The news is verity	0.056			
News Credibility (NC)	NC1	The news is believable	0.926	0.941	0.841	0.906
	NC2	The news is factual	0.918			
	NC3	The news is trustworthy	0.908			
e-WOM (EW)	EW1	My friends/family influenced my evaluation of F&B brand	0.853	0.958	0.792	0.948
	EW2	Comments/reviews of Internet users are very helpful in selecting F&B brand	0.906			
	EW3	Comments/reviews of Internet users provide information I had not been aware of F&B brand	0.905			
	EW4	I often read other consumers' online product reviews to know what products/brands make good impressions on others	0.909			
	EW5	To make sure I buy the right product/brand, I often read other consumers' online product reviews	0.897			
	EW6	If I don't read consumers' online product reviews when I buy a product/brand, I worry about my decision	0.868			
Brand Trust (BT)	BT1	I think brand X would have high integrity.	0.905	0.955	0.840	0.937
	BT2	I believe brand X would be reliable	0.927			
	BT3	If I was to discuss brand X with others, I would probably say positive things	0.928			
	BT4	Brand X appears like a good quality brand	0.908			
Brand Image (BI)	BI1	Brand X has a rich history	0.918	0.854	0.580	0.755
	BI2	Customers (we) can reliably predict how brand X will perform	0.942			
	BI3	My purchased brand X offers me a sense of group belonging	0.943			
	BI4	Brand X is well established	0.924			
	BI5	Brand X has a clean image	0.079			
	BI6	Brand X has a differentiated image in comparison with the other product/brand	0.030			
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	CS1	Brand X makes me feel delighted	0.864	0.952	0.799	0.937
	CS2	Brand X gives me pleasure	0.876			
	CS3	Brand X increases my frequency of use	0.925			
	CS4	Brand X makes me feel good.	0.917			
	CS5	Brand X prevents me from looking cheap and another brand	.0887			
Purchase Intention (PI)	PI1	I would still consider purchasing brand X that is claimed to have nutritional or health benefits which is truly verified by comment/review of Internet users	-0.123	0.744	0.508	0.897
	PI2	I would continue purchasing brand X with nutritional or health benefits which is truly verified by comment/review of Internet users	0.922			
	PI3	I would recommend that my relatives and friends purchase brand X that is claimed to have nutritional or health benefits which is truly verified by comment/review of Internet users	0.935			
	PI4	I would like to receive information about brand X that is claimed to have nutritional or health benefits which is truly verified by comment/review of Internet users	0.893			
	PI5	I intend to purchase brand X in the future	0.043			



**Table 3.** Fornell and Larcker’s criterion for discriminant validity

Variable	BI	BT	CS	NC	NT	PI	SC	EW
BI	0.762	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
BT	0.568	0.917	–	–	–	–	–	–
CS	0.316	0.196	0.894	–	–	–	–	–
NC	0.480	0.414	0.132	0.917	–	–	–	–
NT	0.478	0.481	0.090	0.581	0.832	–	–	–
PI	0.455	0.480	0.268	0.422	0.287	0.713	–	–
SC	0.481	0.496	0.056	0.545	0.700	0.264	0.896	–
EW	0.210	0.116	0.272	0.054	0.086	0.072	0.113	0.890

Note: square roots of AVE are on the main diagonal.

The discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell and Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and the HTMT ratio (Henseler et al., 2015). The square roots of the AVE are compared to the correlations between latent variables to examine the criterion established by Fornell and Larcker (1981). If the square roots of a construct’s AVE are more significant than the squared correlations of other constructs, discriminant validity is considered established. Table 3 shows that the square root of all AVE values on the significant diagonal exceeds the correlation coefficient between constructs in the matrix’s corresponding rows and columns, providing preliminary support for discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2009).

Besides, HTMT is another criterion for assessing discriminant validity. Table 4 presents that all

HTMT ratios are below 0.90, indicating that discriminant validity is achieved (Hair et al., 2009).

Furthermore, a bootstrapping technique in SmartPLS is used for t-statistics tests to verify the empirical nature of the theoretical model and clarify the relevance of path coefficients. Before this, the collinearity statistic checks the model’s collinearity problem. The results in Table 5 demonstrate that the VIF value is 1.000, lower than 3.3, which emphasizes that the multicollinearity phenomenon among the independent variables does not affect the hypothesis testing or cause bias or flip regression coefficients (Kock et al., 2012).

As shown in Figure 2 and Table 6, the direct path relationships were accepted, and the other two were rejected at a significance level of 5%. The re-

**Table 4.** Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios for discriminant validity

Variable	BI	BT	CS	NC	NT	PI	SC	EW
BI	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
BT	0.643	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
CS	0.401	0.208	–	–	–	–	–	–
NC	0.543	0.448	0.143	–	–	–	–	–
NT	0.544	0.518	0.115	0.640	–	–	–	–
PI	0.608	0.566	0.369	0.518	0.389	–	–	–
SC	0.571	0.527	0.062	0.591	0.756	0.319	–	–
EW	0.355	0.122	0.286	0.059	0.098	0.114	0.117	–

**Table 5.** Collinearity statistics (inner VIF)

Variable	BI	BT	CS	NC	NT	PI	SC	EWOM
BI	–	–	1.000	–	–	1.000	–	–
BT	–	–	1.000	–	–	1.000	–	–
CS	–	–	–	–	–	1.000	–	–
NC	1.000	1.000	–	–	–	–	–	–
NT	1.000	1.000	–	–	–	–	–	–
PI	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
SC	1.000	1.000	–	–	–	–	–	–
EWOM	1.000	–	–	–	–	1.000	–	–

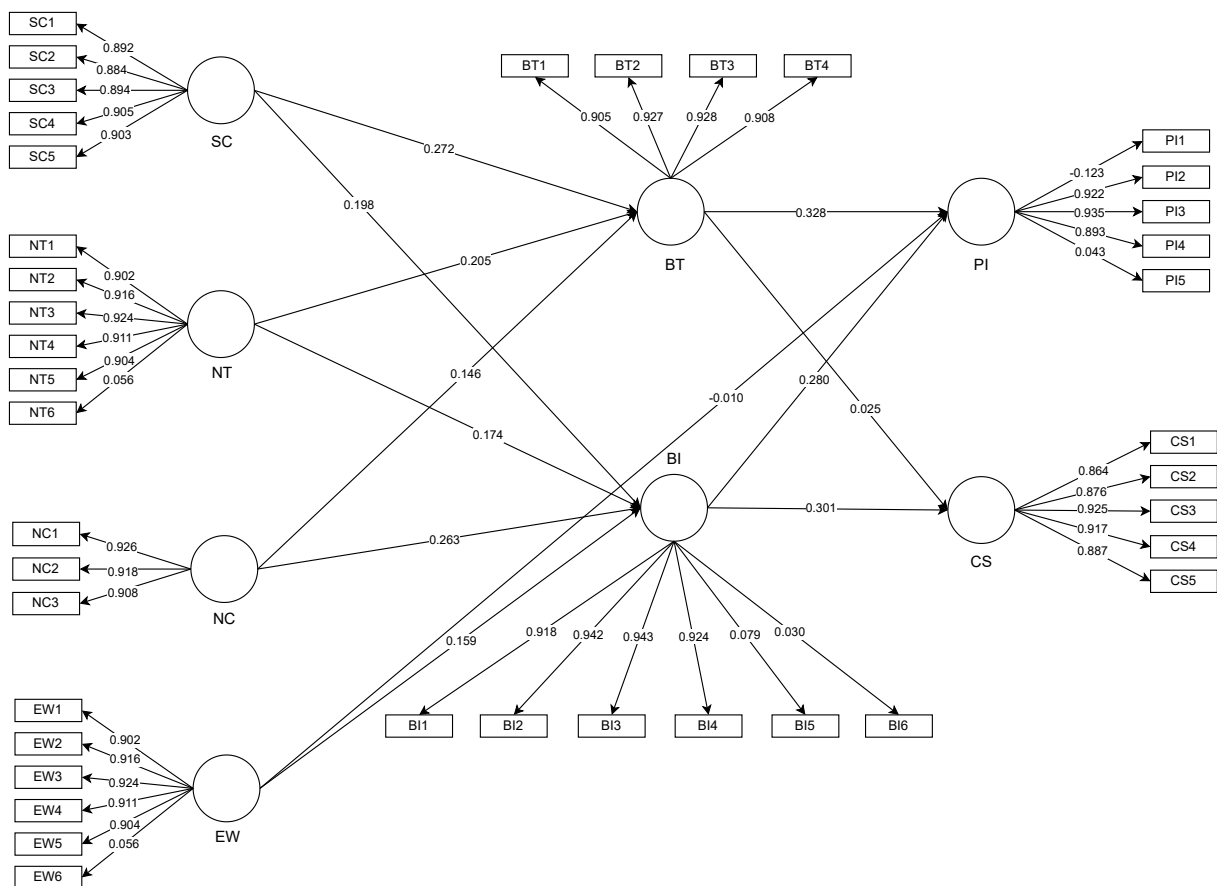
**Table 6.** Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-statistics	p-values	Supported
BI → CS	0.301	0.307	0.058	5.185	0.000	Yes
BI → PI	0.280	0.286	0.063	4.456	0.000	Yes
BT → CS	0.025	0.024	0.059	0.423	0.672	No
BT → PI	0.328	0.327	0.076	4.333	0.000	Yes
CS → PI	0.145	0.144	0.055	2.615	0.009	Yes
NC → BI	0.263	0.268	0.052	5.112	0.000	Yes
NC → BT	0.146	0.148	0.061	2.396	0.017	Yes
NT → BI	0.174	0.176	0.079	2.199	0.028	Yes
NT → BT	0.205	0.207	0.082	2.494	0.013	Yes
SC → BI	0.198	0.197	0.081	2.447	0.015	Yes
SC → BT	0.272	0.272	0.074	3.678	0.000	Yes
EWOM → BI	0.159	0.164	0.055	2.905	0.004	Yes
EWOM → PI	-0.010	-0.011	0.049	0.049	0.211	No

Note: SC – Source Credibility; NT – New Truthfulness; NC – News Credibility; EW – e-WOM; BT – Brand Trust; BI – Brand Image; CS – Customer Satisfaction; Purchase Intention – PI.

sult of the bootstrapping test confirmed that there is a positive relationship between Brand Image and Customer Satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.301$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), between Brand Image and Purchase Intention ( $\beta = 0.280$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), between Brand Trust and Purchase Intention ( $\beta = 0.328$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), between Customer Satisfaction and Purchase Intention ( $\beta = 0.145$ ;  $p = 0.009$ ),

between News Credibility and Brand Image ( $\beta = 0.263$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), between News Credibility and Brand Trust ( $\beta = 0.146$ ;  $p = 0.017$ ), between News Truthfulness and Brand Image ( $\beta = 0.174$ ;  $p = 0.028$ ), between News Truthfulness and Brand Trust ( $\beta = 0.205$ ;  $p = 0.013$ ), between Source Credibility and Brand Image ( $\beta = 0.198$ ;  $p = 0.015$ ),



**Figure 2.** PLS-SEM results

between Source Credibility and Brand Trust ( $\beta = 0.272$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), between e-WOM and Brand Trust ( $\beta = 0.159$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ). Thus, the result confirmed that *H1a*, *H1b*, *H2a*, *H2b*, *H3a*, *H3b*, *H4*, *H7*, *H8*, *H9*, *H10* are accepted. However, the result rejected *H5* and *H6*, which means that e-WOM is not positively associated with Purchase Intention ( $\beta = -0.010$ ;  $p = 0.049$ ) and Brand Trust does not positively affect Customer Satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.025$ ;  $p = 0.672$ ).

In brief, Table 6 examines the relationships between various constructs such as Brand Image (BI), Brand Trust (BT), Customer Satisfaction (CS), Purchase Intention (PI), and other factors like News Credibility (NC), News Truthfulness (NT), Source Credibility (SC), and electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM).

## 4. DISCUSSIONS

The results show that Brand Image significantly influences Customer Satisfaction and Purchase Intention, which is crucial in driving consumer behavior. Brand Trust has a significant effect on purchase intention, but it does not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction. The credibility of the news factors, including News Credibility, news truthfulness, and Source Credibility, positively affect both Brand Image and Brand Trust. This result shows that credible and truthful information shapes consumer views. Finally, e-WOM significantly positively affects Brand Image but does not directly influence Purchase Intention. These findings imply that to improve consumer happiness and purchase intention; firms should develop a solid brand image and trust backed by reputable information sources and accurate communication.

The significant role of source credibility and news truthfulness in influencing brand trust and image reflects higher consumer awareness in the digital age. Consumers are increasingly critical of the information they encounter, prioritizing trustworthy and transparent sources. This is particularly relevant in Vietnam, where rapid digitalization has exposed consumers to a mix of credible and unverified information.

On the other hand, the observed weaker impact of news truthfulness on brand image diverges from

studies such as Berthon and Pitt (2018), which argued for a stronger influence. This difference might be attributable to Vietnam's unique consumer culture, where experiential factors like product quality and customer service are heavily weighted in brand image formation. Additionally, the prevalence of unverified news in Vietnam's digital ecosystem may desensitize consumers to misinformation, diminishing its effect on brand image.

The mediating role of brand image in the e-WOM–purchase intention pathway underscores the importance of brand perception in the F&B industry. Given the sensory nature of F&B products, consumers often rely on the brand image as a heuristic for quality, especially when direct experience is unavailable. However, the weaker relationship between e-WOM and purchase intention may also stem from information overload. With the proliferation of online reviews, consumers might struggle to discern valuable insights, diluting e-WOM's direct impact on decision-making.

## 5. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

### 5.1. Theoretical contributions

Our findings align with the broader literature on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which posits that consumers process information differently based on its perceived relevance and credibility (Appelman & Sundar, 2016; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Similar to prior studies (e.g., Cheung et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2022), the results emphasize the critical role of credible information in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors. However, discrepancies such as the limited direct impact of e-WOM on purchase intention highlight the need for industry-specific research. While López and Sicilia (2014) found stronger direct effects of e-WOM in the electronics sector, this study underscores the nuanced motivation within the F&B industry, where brand trust and image play more central roles.

In addition, this study investigated the impact of unverified news and electronic word-

of-mouth (e-WOM) on customer satisfaction and purchase intention in Vietnam's food and beverage (F&B) industry. The findings provide meaningful insights into the mediating roles of brand trust and brand image in shaping consumer behavior. It particularly explores that unverified news significantly influences brand trust and brand image. Specifically, source credibility and news truthfulness were identified as critical drivers of brand trust, reinforcing prior research by Wu and Wang (2011), which emphasized the importance of credible sources in fostering consumer trust. Similarly, Visentin et al. (2019) demonstrated that news credibility significantly impacts brand trust and image, findings that align with our results.

Lastly, this study confirms its positive influence on brand image but finds no direct impact on purchase intention. This is similar to Chakraborty and Bhat (2018) who highlighted the mediating role of brand constructs in the e-WOM-purchase intention relationship. However, López and Sicilia (2014) reported a direct effect of e-WOM on purchase intention in other sectors, suggesting that the F&B industry's reliance on tangible, sensory experiences may explain the weaker direct relationship observed in this study.

## 5.2. Managerial implications

In recent years, there has been an increasing demand for reliable and accurate information sources about products and companies. Firms in the F&B sector must develop official channels, such as websites or social media platforms, to provide updated information about brands, products, product usage, and relevant information. This is especially important in Vietnam, where the population using the Internet is very large, and information control becomes necessary to protect brand reputation.

This study shows that e-WOM can improve brand image, influencing purchase intention. Therefore, businesses should invest in providing e-WOM channels and encouraging consumers to participate in product discussions. Identifying consumer trends and creating valuable content can help businesses create positive customer interactions.

Social media platforms such as Facebook can build group discussions, track trends, and reach out to industry experts for feedback and product improvements.

At the same time, businesses should have a specific strategy for managing misinformation through e-WOM. This includes filtering tools to control misinformation and provide accurate information about effectiveness. Ensuring the authenticity of information helps businesses maintain customer trust and improves brand image in the eyes of consumers. Proactively transparently communicating with customers is crucial to ensure that misinformation does not damage the brand.

Finally, businesses should encourage close coordination between communications, customer service, product management, and IT departments to manage brand information effectively. This will help businesses respond quickly to customer requests and protect their brand signals during information crises.

## 5.3. Limitations and future research

Despite the significant contribution to theory and practice, this research has some limitations. Firstly, the authors only surveyed several cities in Vietnam, and the sample size still needs to be increased. The analysis results are for reference only and cover a limited number of samples and cities. As a result of this constraint, the study could be more thorough and general. Second, given the study's length restrictions, other limited aspects should have been taken into account, in addition to the effects of unverified news and e-WOM on purchasing intention and customer satisfaction indicated in the survey form. Thirdly, time and financial constraints have an impact on the findings of the study. Ultimately, the research topic could cover only some aspects that continue to influence customer satisfaction and purchase intention in the F&B market. Future research should explore other moderators, such as cultural differences and industry-specific contexts, to determine whether these relationships persist in different environments. Additionally, examining the long-term effects of brand communication strategies on consumer behavior could provide additional insights into maintaining customer loyalty and trust.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates the effects of unverified news attributes, brand trust, brand image, e-WOM, and purchase intention to understand their influence on consumer behavior. The results demonstrate that unverified news, primarily when evaluated through source credibility and news truthfulness, significantly affects both brand trust and brand image, affecting customer satisfaction and purchase intention. Besides, e-WOM plays a vital role in shaping brand image, although its direct impact on purchase intention is less pronounced. These findings suggest that businesses must prioritize managing the credibility of the information they share, especially in the digital environment. Companies can improve customer satisfaction and increase purchase intentions by enhancing brand trust and promoting a positive brand image through high-quality communication. Companies should also actively monitor online reviews and e-WOM to ensure that inaccurate or misleading information does not harm their reputation.

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