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Deciphering The Interplay of Environmental Trust, Uncertainty, and Herd Behavior Toward Consumer Behavioral Intention: A Meta-analytic Structural Equation Modeling Approach

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Abstract. *This study aimed to identify the influence of environmental trust, uncertainty, and herd behavior on predicting consumer behavior intentions. This study also aimed to assess the most appropriate model to describe the relationship between the four variables. The data type was the result of 105 studies that examined the relationship between environmental trust, uncertainty, herd behavior, and consumer behavioral intent. The data source came from the Scopus.com database. PRISMA was used in the selection process using inclusion criteria such as research is carried out according to the theme in the form of journal articles, proceedings, and book chapters published between 2000 – 2024, in the form of quantitative research that provides information on the number of respondents and correlation values, in English and published in reputable international journals. The method used R software to conduct a Meta-Analysis Structural Equation Modeling (Meta-SEM). The results showed that Environmental Trust (ET) has a significant favorable influence on uncertainty (UC) at a rate of 5%. ET al has a more substantial positive influence on herd behavior (HB) and behavioral intention (BI). In addition, UC significantly influences BI, while HB also has a positive influence on BI. Additional findings from gender moderation imply that demographic factors might impact the formation of the association between these variables, particularly regarding herd behavior and environmental trust.*

Keywords: environmental trust, uncertainty, herd behavior, consumer behavioral intentions, Meta-SEM

JEL Codes : D81

1. Introduction

In today's digital economy, consumer decisions are increasingly influenced by a complex interplay of rational factors, such as price and quality, alongside psychological and social dimensions, including environmental trust, uncertainty, and herd behavior. This phenomenon was particularly relevant as online transactions proliferate, where consumers often rely on reviews, recommendations, and perceptions shaped by the virtual environment (Pham *et al.*, 2023).

One important aspect of consumer decision-making in the digital economy is the role of trust, especially environmental trust. Trust is a major contributor to purchase intention, indicating that consumers' trust in a brand's environmental practices can significantly influence their purchasing behavior (Shen *et al.*, 2016). This behavior was especially relevant when consumers were increasingly concerned about sustainability and ethical practices. Trust in a brand's commitment to environmental issues can increase consumer loyalty and willingness to pay a premium for products perceived as environmentally friendly (Arasyi and Kusumawati, 2023; Singh and Kunja, 2023).

Uncertainty also plays a significant role in shaping consumer behavior. Trust and attitudes are directly related to consumers' intention to use services, such as post-COVID-19 cruise services, suggesting that health beliefs can predict trust and influence attitudes and intentions (Pan *et al.*, 2021). In digital markets, where consumers often face uncertainty regarding product quality and service reliability, building trust can reduce this uncertainty and facilitate decision-making (Yang *et al.*, 2019).

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Herd behavior further expands the dynamics of decision-making. Consumers often look to the actions of others as a guide to their own choices, especially in online environments where social proof is available through reviews and ratings (Ali and Amir, 2024). This phenomenon can lead to a riffle effect, where individuals are likelier to purchase popular products among their peers, regardless of personal preferences (Su *et al.*, 2023; Zhou *et al.*, 2023). The influence of herd behavior is particularly pronounced in social media, where the visibility of consumer choices can amplify the impact of collective behavior on individual decision-making (Chen *et al.*, 2023; Masuda *et al.*, 2022).

Despite increasing recognition of these factors, the literature often treats them in isolation rather than as interrelated elements of a broader decision-making framework. Previous research has explored the impact of trust on consumer behavior (Ladwein and Sánchez Romero, 2021; Laparojkit and Suttipun, 2022; Lu and Chen, 2021; Shabankareh *et al.*, 2024; Yu *et al.*, 2021), but there is a lack of comprehensive research examining how trust interacts with uncertainty and herd behavior in shaping consumer intentions. Furthermore, integrating these psychological and social dimensions into consumer behavior research is critical to developing effective marketing strategies. As consumers become more aware of the implications of their purchasing decisions, businesses must adapt by cultivating trust (Paravastu and Ramanujan, 2021), overcoming uncertainty (Al-Adwan *et al.*, 2022), and leveraging social influence to increase consumer engagement and satisfaction (Lu and Chen, 2021). However, despite the significance of this issue, there is still a gap in the literature that integrates these factors holistically.

The urgency of this research is based on the reality that uncertainty in consumer decision-making is often a barrier to achieving practical marketing goals. A report from the Global Consumer Insight Survey (2023) showed that more than 65% of consumers are skeptical of the reliability of information available online, especially on e-commerce platforms (www.pwc.com, 2023). This uncertainty often affects their intention to purchase, even if they have already shown initial interest in a particular product or service. In such conditions, trust in the environment, whether related to payment systems, data protection, or user reviews, becomes a key determinant in overcoming this uncertainty (Lu and Chen, 2021).

However, environmental trust alone is not enough. In many cases, consumers are also influenced by herd behavior, where they tend to follow the majority's actions without critical analysis. This phenomenon is increasingly prominent on social media and e-commerce platforms, where high reviews and ratings often determine purchasing decisions. A previous study by Ali and Amir (2024) showed that more than 70% of online purchasing decisions are influenced by most reviews, even though these reviews do not necessarily reflect the actual quality of the product.

A research gap in the literature lies in the need for studies integrating environmental trust, uncertainty, and herd behavior variables into a comprehensive theoretical model. Most previous studies tend to focus on these variables separately. For example, the study by Falahat et al. (2019) put more emphasis on environmental trust in the context of e-commerce, while Cakan et al. (2019) focused on uncertainty in consumer decision-making. Therefore, a more holistic approach is needed to understand how these three variables interact to influence consumer behavioral intentions.

This study aims to answer the following questions based on the phenomena and background explained.

RQ1: Do environmental beliefs, uncertainty, and herd behavior generally influence consumer behavioral intentions?

RQ2: Can uncertainty generally mediate the relationship between environmental trust and behavioral intentions?

RQ3: Can herd behavior generally mediate the relationship between environmental beliefs and consumer behavioral intentions?

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RQ4: Generally, does Gender moderate the relationship between environmental trust, uncertainty, herd behavior, and consumer behavioral intentions?

The meta-analytic structural equation modeling (meta-SEM) approach can analyze aggregate data from previous studies to answer research questions. By integrating environmental trust, uncertainty, and group behavior into one theoretical framework, this study was expected to provide new insights into how these factors can be used more effectively to influence consumer behavioral intentions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Environmental Trust

Environmental trust, also called external or community trust, is a multifaceted concept encompassing individuals' or groups' trust in their broader social environment, including institutions, communities, and social networks. This trust is critical to fostering social cohesion, enhancing civic engagement, and promoting collective well-being (L'Hermitte and Nair, 2021).

One important aspect of Environmental trust is its correlation with social cohesion within a community. Previous research showed that trust is a foundational element of social cohesion, particularly in educational settings. Higher levels of trust correlate with increased social cohesion among the university community, suggesting that trust is integral to fostering a supportive educational environment (Nesterova *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, social trust is critical in many domains of life, including politics and societal interactions, where a decline in social status can lead to a decline in social trust over time, making it important to maintain trust in society to support social stability and cohesion (Brandt *et al.*, 2015).

Additionally, the implications of Environmental trust extend to health outcomes. A study by Hwang et al. (2020) found a significant association between social trust and cardiovascular health among older adults, suggesting that higher levels of trust within a community may lead to better health outcomes. This relationship suggests that trust facilitates social interactions and contributes to community members' overall health and well-being.

Social norms and individual perceptions also influence trust dynamics, as stated by Oyebode and Nicholls (2023), who discussed how social norms could serve as anchor points for trust, influencing individual trust behavior within a community. This study highlights the role of cultural and social frameworks in shaping trust levels, suggesting that societal trust can be fostered through shared norms and values.

Environmental trust is vital in building relationships between consumers and digital platforms. In online marketing, environmental trust refers to consumers' confidence in their systems' integrity, reliability, and security. Environmental trust can cover payment security, personal data protection, and information transparency and is particularly relevant in the digital age, where consumers are often exposed to risks such as online fraud or privacy breaches (Sales *et al.*, 2021).

Environmental trust contributes significantly to consumer behavioral intentions, especially in purchasing decisions in e-commerce. Consumers with high trust in a platform tend to be more committed to making transactions (Al-Adwan *et al.*, 2022). Other research by Chu et al. (2021) showed that environmental trust increases consumer loyalty and reduces the perception of risk that may arise during the decision-making process.

Based on the explanation above, the research hypothesis proposed as follows:

H1: Environmental trust has an impact on uncertainty (UC)

H2: Environmental trust has an impact on herd behavior(HB)

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H3: Environmental trust has an impact on behavioral intention (BI)

2.2. Uncertainty in Decision Making

Perceived uncertainty in decision-making refers to the subjective assessment of uncertainty associated with the outcome of a choice. This concept is critical in understanding how individuals and organizations navigate complex environments where information is incomplete or ambiguous. Perceived uncertainty can significantly impact the decision-making process, leading to variations in choices and outcomes across contexts (Fjaeran and Aven, 2021).

One of the fundamental aspects of perceived uncertainty is its relationship to confidence in decision-making (Gillman *et al.*, 2023). This idea was supported by the findings of Hong and Cho (2023), which suggested that individuals try to reduce uncertainty based on their existing knowledge before making decisions, especially in high-risk scenarios such as adopting new technologies. Furthermore, perceived uncertainty is not only a cognitive phenomenon but also has an emotional dimension. Perceived environmental uncertainty can have a significant impact on mental health, especially anxiety levels among college students. This anxiety, in turn, can influence their decision-making behavior, illustrating the interaction between emotional responses and cognitive appraisals of uncertainty (Kong and Zeng, 2023).

Uncertainty is one of the most significant barriers to consumer purchasing decisions, primarily online. This uncertainty includes consumers needing to know the product's quality, the seller's reliability, or the outcome of the purchase decision. Kim et al. (2021) explained that uncertainty can arise due to a lack of or ambiguous information. In such conditions, consumers are often reluctant to continue the transaction despite showing initial interest in a product.

Uncertainty can also affect environmental trust. Consumers who feel uncertain about the platform's integrity tend to perceive the entire purchasing process negatively. Reducing uncertainty can be done by providing precise and informative reviews or transparent return policies, which can significantly increase consumer behavioral intentions (Lu and Chen, 2021).

Based on the explanation above, the research hypothesis in this study is:

H4: Uncertainty (UC) has an impact on behavioral intention (BI)

2.3. Herd Behavior

Herd behavior plays a significant role in shaping customers' behavioral intentions, especially in environments characterized by social influence and collective decision-making. This phenomenon occurs when individuals within a group imitate the actions or decisions of others, often leading to behavioral convergence that can significantly impact market dynamics and consumer choices (Baddeley, 2013).

One of the primary ways herd behavior influences customer intentions is through social proof, where individuals look to the actions of others as a guide to their behavior. In financial markets, herd behavior manifests when individuals follow the crowd in their investment decisions, leading to increased volatility and potential market crises (Bu *et al.*, 2021). This concept can be extrapolated to consumer behavior, where customers may choose a product or service based on its perceived popularity or acceptance by others, thereby reinforcing collective purchasing decisions. The impact of herd behavior is particularly pronounced during periods of uncertainty or market crises where customers are more likely to purchase a product or service simply because they observe others doing so, regardless of their preferences or needs (Ah Mand *et al.*, 2023).

In social media, herd behavior is reinforced by the rapid spread of information and the visibility of consumer choices. A study by Chen *et al.* (2021) highlighted how customer motivation and engagement

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behavior on social media could be influenced by peers' actions, suggesting that a positive feedback loop can emerge where customers are motivated to engage with brands already popular in their social circles. This finding is in line with findings from Xin Jean *et al.* (2017), which emphasized the role of social media influencers in shaping purchase intentions, as consumers often view these numbers as representative of broader social trends.

Based on the explanation above, the research hypothesis in this study is as follows:

H5: Herd behavior (HB) has an impact on behavioral intention (BI)

2.4. The Moderating Role of Gender in the Integration of Trust, Uncertainty, and Herd Behavior

Although each variable has been extensively studied in the integration between trust, uncertainty, and herd behavior, the relationship is sometimes linear. High environmental trust can sometimes reduce consumers' reliance on group behavior because they feel confident enough to make their own decisions. Therefore, further research is needed to understand the complex dynamics between these variables in various contexts.

The moderating role of Gender in integrating trust, uncertainty, and herd behavior is one area of study that examines how Gender influences individual and collective decision-making processes. Gender differences can significantly influence how trust is formed, how uncertainty is perceived, and how individuals behave in groups, especially in consumer behavior, social interactions, and organizational dynamics.

One important aspect of gender moderation is its impact on behavioral intentions, especially regarding technology adoption and consumer choice. Gender differences occur in the adoption of mobile banking services, and men and women may have different motivations and barriers that influence their intentions to use the technology (Glavee-Geo *et al.*, 2017). These findings suggested that Gender not only moderates the relationship between beliefs and behavioral intentions but also suggests that tailored approaches may be needed to address different genders' unique needs and concerns in technology adoption.

In addition, Frank and Seaman (2023) further stated the influence of Gender on group behavior and decision-making. They examined how public brand image affects repurchase intentions differently for male and female customers. Their findings suggest that gender differences strengthen the effects of brand perceptions on customer satisfaction and loyalty, suggesting that marketing strategies should be gender-sensitive to increase effectiveness.

Furthermore, a study by Gruning and Krueger (2023) highlighted the relationship between beliefs about uncertainty and intolerance of uncertainty, noting that Gender can influence how individuals cope with uncertainty in different contexts. Their research suggests that beliefs can shape emotional responses to uncertainty, which may differ across genders, influencing decision-making processes.

Based on the explanation above, the research hypothesis proposed is as follows:

H6: Gender moderates the relationship between environmental beliefs and uncertainty.

H7: Gender moderates the relationship between environmental beliefs and herd behavior.

H8: Gender moderates the relationship between environmental beliefs and behavioral intentions.

H9: Gender moderates the relationship between uncertainty and behavioral intentions.

H10: Gender moderates the relationship between herd behavior and behavioral intentions.

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3. Research Elaboration

3.1. Research Approach

This study uses the Meta-Analytic Structural Equation Modeling (Meta-SEM) approach that comprehensively analyses the relationships between these variables based on aggregate data from multiple studies. Meta-SEM is an effective tool for identifying common patterns in the literature and testing complex theoretical hypotheses. This approach can also help overcome methodological limitations in individual studies, such as small samples or contextual bias (Jak *et al.*, 2021).

Meta-SEM also provides deeper insights into the mechanisms underlying the relationships between the variables studied and allows researchers to test more robust and generalizable theoretical models across contexts (Lee and Beretvas, 2022).

3.2. Data Sources and Types

The data sources come from the Scopus.com and Google Scholar databases. The data types are articles, proceedings, and book chapters published between 2000 and 2024 that discuss the relationship between the variables studied. The study used 106 studies from 84 documents.

3.3. Data Collection and Selection

The data collection process is carried out by determining specific keywords so that the articles that are the research objects can be used for research purposes. The data collection process uses keywords like Trust, Uncertainty, Herd behavior, and Behavioral intention. The keyword syntax used in this search is:

"((KEY (trust) AND KEY (uncertainty)) OR ((KEY (trust) AND KEY (herd)) OR ((KEY (uncertainty) AND KEY (herd)) OR ((KEY (trust) AND KEY (uncertainty) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (intention)) OR((KEY (trust) AND KEY (uncertainty) AND KEY (herd) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (intention)) AND PUBYEAR > 2001 AND PUBYEAR < 2025"

The inclusion criteria used include articles, proceedings, and book chapters published between 2000 and 2024, using English, published in indexed journals, and providing quantitative data such as the number of respondents and correlation coefficients between the variables studied. The data selection stage was done by applying the Prisma method (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), with the following process description (Figure 1).

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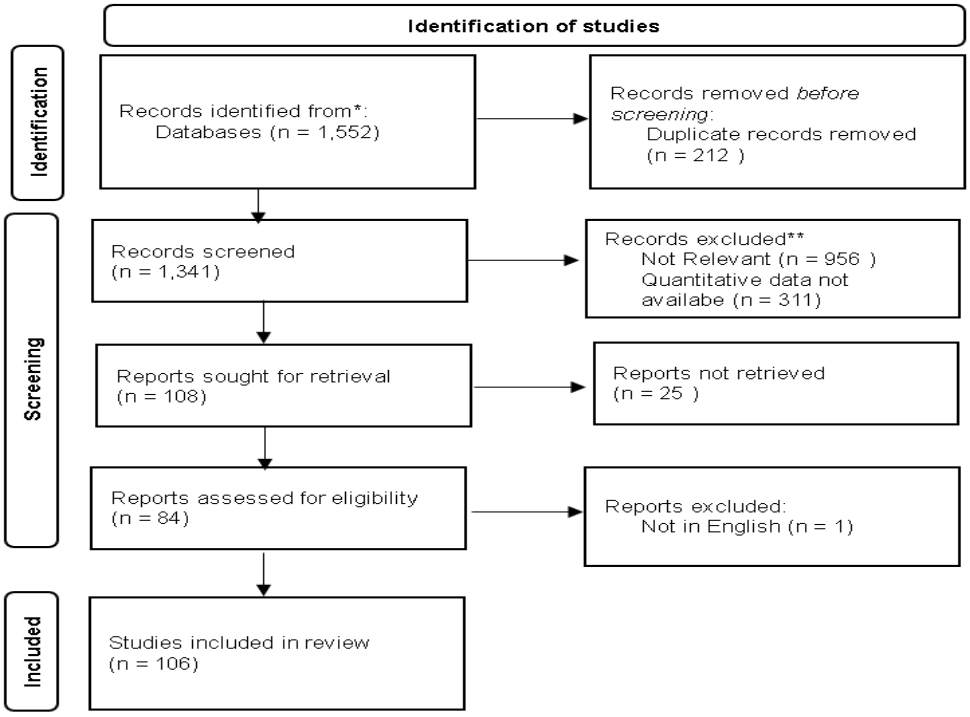


Fig 1: Data Selection Process-PRISMA
Source: Prepared by Author

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study was in the form of Pairwise Meta-Analysis and Meta-Analysis Structural Equation Model (Meta-SEM). The Pairwise meta-analysis data analysis technique is used to systematically evaluate the relationship between variables based on the results of various studies to obtain an overview of the effects, estimate the overall effect, and identify the level of heterogeneity. At the same time, Meta Analysis-Structural Equation Model (Meta-SEM) is used to evaluate the relationship between variables based on aggregate data from several studies by combining meta-analysis and SEM.

The R program syntax used in this study was adapted and modified to the Meta-Analytic Structural Equation Model script by Jak *et al.* (2021). The syntax modifications made include:

```
## Read in data
data <- read.table("Data_MetaSEM1.txt", header = TRUE, sep = "\t")
head(data)
nvar <- 4
varnames <- c("ET", "UC", "HB", "BI")
labels <- list(varnames, varnames)

## Create list of correlation matrices
cormatrices <- readstack(data[, 3:6], no.var = nvar, var.names = varnames, diag = FALSE)
## Create vector with sample sizes
n <- data$N

# Regression coefficients
UC ~ beta1*ET
```

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```
HB ~ beta2*ET
BI ~ beta3*ET + beta4*UC + beta5*HB
# Variances
UC ~~ p1*UC
HB ~~ p2*HB
BI ~~ p3*BI
# Fix variances of independent variables
ET ~~ 1*ET
'
RAM1 <- lavaan2RAM(model, obs. variables = varnames)
RAM1

## Add moderator to the dataset
my.df$data <- data.frame(my.df$data, gender = data$gender, check.names = FALSE)
head(my.df$data)
## Create matrix for moderating effects
Ax <- matrix(c(0, 0, 0, 0,
               0, 0, 0, 0,
               "0*data.gender", "0*data.gender", 0, 0,
               "0*data.gender", "0*data.gender", "0*data.gender", 0),
             nrow = nvar, ncol = nvar, byrow = TRUE)
Ax
## Create the model implied correlation structure with moderator
M1 <- create.vechsR(A0 = RAM1$A, S0 = RAM1$S, Ax = Ax)
## Fit model with moderator
mx.fit1 <- osmasem(model.name = "gender as moderator", Mmatrix = M1, Tmatrix = T0, data = my.df)
```

The research model used is shown in Figure 2.

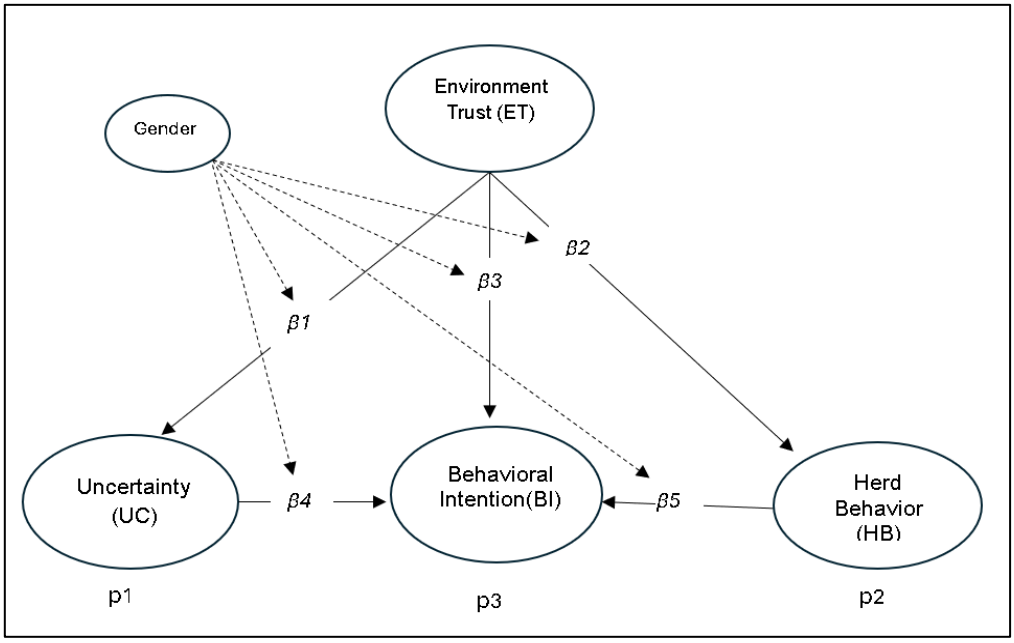


Fig. 2: Research Model
Source: Prepared by author

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4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Pairwise Meta-Analysis

Table 1 presents information about the number of studies, total sample size, effect size, standard error, upper-lower limits, and heterogeneity parameters of the studies used in this study.

Table 1. Pairwise Meta-Analysis

Relationship	k	N	Overall All Effect Size	Lower; Upper Bound	know2	Q Stat	I2
ET→UC	37	16,779	0.176	[0.020; 0.330]	0.228	9215.5	99,280
ET→HB	8	1,983	0.222	[0.134; 0.310]	0.172	826.4	98,548
ET→BI	13	5,182	0.393	[0.175 ;0.612]	0.159	765.9	98,433
UC→BI	6	1,487	0.203	[0.119 ;0.494]	0.396	558.8	99.105
HB→BI	42	14,116	0.401	[0.233; 0.569]	0.340	6544.2	99.297

Note: k number of studies, N combined sample size,
Source: Meta-SEM R Output

Based on Table 1. the relationship between Environmental Trust (ET) and Uncertainty (UC) has an overall effect of 0.176, indicating a strong relationship and the confidence interval [0.02; 0.330] does not include zero. The level of heterogeneity is very high (I^2 = 99.280), indicating a significant variation among the studies analyzed. Furthermore, the relationship between ET and Herd Behavior (HB) shows an overall effect of 0.222, indicating a strong relationship. The confidence interval [0.134; 0.310] does not include zero, supporting this result. However, heterogeneity remains high (I^2 = 98.548), indicating a significant difference between studies.

The relationship between ET and Behavioral Intention (BI) showed a more substantial effect with a value of 0.393. The confidence interval [0.175; 0.612] supports this result, but high heterogeneity (I^2 = 98.433) indicates substantial variation between studies. In contrast, the relationship between UC and BI shows a strong effect (0.203) with a confidence interval [0.019; 0.494], not including zero. The high heterogeneity (I^2 = 99.105) indicates highly variable results between studies. The relationship between HB and BI shows the most potent positive effect among the relationships analyzed, with a value of 0.401. The confidence interval [0.233; 0.569] strengthens this finding. However, heterogeneity remains high (I^2 = 99.297), reflecting substantial variation between studies.

The high level of heterogeneity across all relationships indicated the need for further analysis to understand other factors contributing to the variation in effects and for further moderator analyses to explain this variation. An approach that considers contextual factors, such as demographics, may help improve the interpretation and generalization of research results.

4.2. Meta-Structural Equation Modeling (Meta-SEM)

4.2.1. Beta Coefficient

The results of the Meta-SEM analysis showed a significant causal relationship between the variables in the model (Figure 3 and Table 2).

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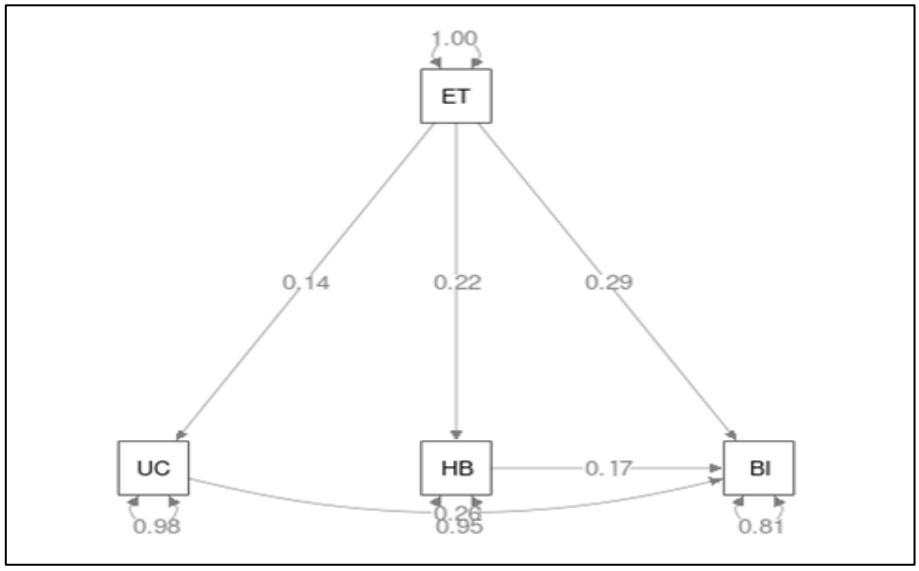


Fig. 3: Meta-SEM Plotting Non-Moderator Models
Source: Processed by researchers via web MASEM (*https://sjak.shinyapps.io/webMASEM/*)

Based on the parameter estimation results, Environmental Trust (ET) has a positive effect on Uncertainty (UC) with a coefficient of 0.143 (z = 2.217, p = 0.026), which is significant at the 5% level. Et al. so has a more substantial positive effect on Herd Behavior (HB) with a coefficient of 0.218 (z = 5.139, p < 0.001) and on Behavioral Intention (BI) with a coefficient of 0.288 (z = 2.991, p = 0.003). In addition, UC significantly affects BI with a coefficient of 0.264 (z = 5.339, p < 0.001), while HB also has a positive effect on BI with a coefficient of 0.168 (z = 2.995, p = 0.003). These results indicated that the relationship between variables in the model has strong empirical support, especially on the ET path to BI, both directly and through mediating variables.

Table 2. Beta Coefficient Meta-SEM Model

Hypothesis	Estimate	Std.Error	p-Value	Conclusion
H1:ET→UC	0.143	0.0645	0.026*)	Supported
H2:ET→HB	0.218	0.0424	< 0.001**)	Supported
H3:ET→BI	0.288	0.0963	0.003**)	Supported
H4:UC→BI	0.264	0.0494	< 0.001**)	Supported
H5:HB→BI	0.168	0.0543	0.003**)	Supported

*) Significant at 5% level, **) Significant at 1% level
Source: Meta-SEM R Output

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4.2.2. Fit Model

Table 3 shows the level of model fit to the data (model fit). Based on the results of the analysis, the data model was perfect. The chi-square value of 0.003 (p = 0.957) indicates that the model almost entirely fits the data. Other indicators, such as RMSEA = 0, with a 95% confidence interval [0; 0.005], CFI = 1.018, and TLI = 1.111, strengthen this finding, indicating that the model is appropriate and may be too perfect. A very small residual (SRMR = 0.004) indicated that the remaining variance not explained by the model is very minimal.

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Table 3. Fit Model

Model Statistics:
chi-square: χ^2 (df=1) = 0.002898024, p = 0.957068

Information Criteria:	df Penalty	Penalty Parameters	Sample Size Adjusted
AIC:	-163.4726	124.5274	124.5325
BIC:	-1340.6615	221.8889	186.9307
CFI:	1.018477		
TLI:	1.110864	(also known as NNFI)	
RMSEA:	0	[95% CI (0.004580851)]	
Prob(RMSEA <= 0.05):	1		

Source: Meta-SEM R Output

4.2.3. Residual and Between Studies Variances

Table 4 shows the residual variance of the variables used in Meta-SEM. Based on the residual variance values, the UC (0.9795) and HB (0.9525) variables indicate that there is still variability that the model has not fully explained. However, the residual variance for BI is more minor (0.8103), which means that the model successfully explains most of the variability of BI. On the other hand, the analysis of variance between studies revealed significant heterogeneity, especially in the relationship between UC and ET (0.152) and HB and BI (0.152). This variability indicates that the results between studies are not uniform and need further analysis to understand the specific context that influences the results.

Table 4. Residual Variances and Correlation Coefficients Between Study Variances

	Residual Variance	*Correlation Coefficients of Between Study Variances*
Residual:		
ET	1,000	
UC.	0.980	
HB	0.953	
BI	0.810	
Relationship:		
UC_ET		0.152
HB_ET		0.000
BI_ET		0.105
HB_UC		0.230
BI_UC		0.086
BI_HB		0.152

Source: Meta-SEM R Output

Table 4 also shows significant variations in correlation between several pairs of variables. The largest correlation was found in the relationship between UC and ET an*d* HB and BI, each with a variance value of 0.152.

4.2.4. Moderator Analysis

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The results of the moderation analysis in the form of beta coefficient testing are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5.Beta Coefficient Of Moderator Analysis

	Estimate	Std.Error	p-Value	Conclusion
Beta1	0.129	0.063	0.0402	Supported*)
Beta2	0.180	0.082	0.0297	Supported*)
Beta3	0.334	0.084	<0.001	Supported**)
Beta4	0.251	0.227	0.0269	Supported*)
Beta5	0.066	0.082	0.0423	Supported*)
H6: Gender *ET_UC	0.085	0.051	0.0096	Supported*)
H7: Gender *ET_HB	-0.128	0.238	0.0591	Not Supported
H8: Gender *ET_BI	0.021	0.388	0.0956	Not Supported
H9: Gender *UC_BI	-0.073	0.733	0.0921	Not Supported
H10: Gender *HB_BI	0.134	0.143	0.0348	Supported*)

*) Significant at 5% level, **) Significant at 1% level

Source: Meta-SEM R Output

Table 5 shows that the gender variable significantly moderates only the relationship between ET and UC and the relationship between HB and BI in this study (H6 and H10 are supported). While hypotheses H7, H8, and H9 cannot be supported because the p-value is <0.05, it can be said that Gender cannot moderate the relationship between ET and HB, ET and BI, and UC and BI.

The highest beta estimate value was found in gender moderation on the relationship between HB and BI (0.1334), which indicated that Gender had a more substantial influence on this relationship than moderation on other relationships.

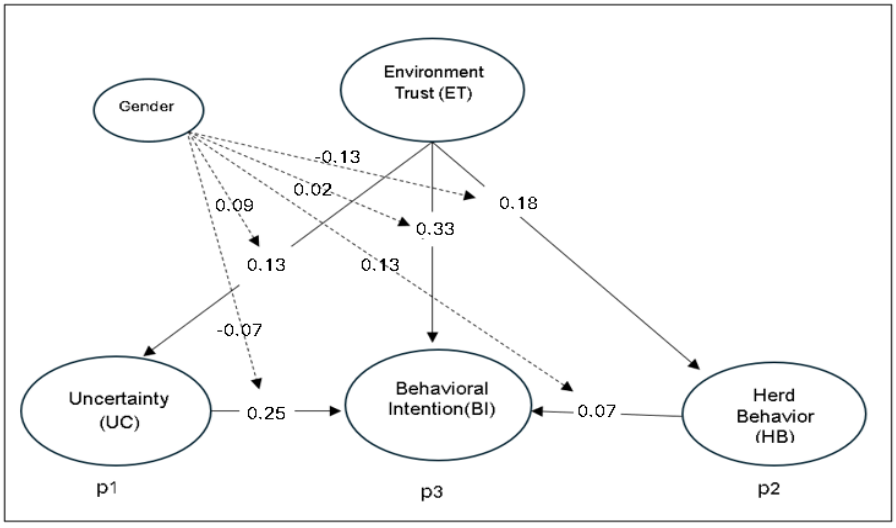


Fig. 4: Plotting *Moderator Model*
Source: Prepared by author

Based on the model testing results (Table 6), the overall analysis model showed a good fit based on the AIC and BIC criteria, with an adjusted AIC value of 128.9327 and a BIC of 219.6906. Variations between studies in model correlations also reflect the level of heterogeneity of the variable relationships, with the highest variance between HB and UC (0.2257) and UC and ET (0.1412).

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Table 6. Fit Model

Information Criteria:	df Penalty	Penalty Parameters	Sample Size Adjusted
AIC:	-159.0779	128.9221	128.9327
BIC:	-1292.0116	270.5388	219.6906

Source: Meta-SEM R Output

Furthermore, the inter-study variation in model correlations also reflects the degree of heterogeneity of the variable relationships, with the highest variance between HB and UC (0.2257) and UC and ET (0.1412). The results in Table 7 indicate that differences between studies, including potentially relevant contextual factors, influence these relationships. The combination of the moderation results and the model fit evaluation supports the conclusion that Gender is an important variable influencing how environmental trust, uncertainty, and herd behavior predict consumer behavioral intentions.

Table 7. Between Studies Variances Of Correlation Coefficients

	Between-studies variances of model-implied correlation coefficients
UC_ET	0.141
HB_ET	0.000
BI_ET	0.105
HB_UC	0.226
BI_UC	0.086
BI_HB	0.141

Source: Meta-SEM R Output

Discussion

Environmental trust significantly affected consumer uncertainty, herd behavior, and behavioral intention. The coefficient of 0.143 ($p = 0.026$) indicates that environmental trust can effectively reduce uncertainty. This result supports previous findings by Huang et al. (2022), which stated that uncertainty reduction is often mediated by the level of trust in the information source or system used. In addition, environmental trust also has a positive effect on herd behavior ($\beta = 0.218$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that consumers who trust a platform are more likely to follow the majority's actions. This finding is in line with the study by Chen et al. (2021), which showed that most reviews on online platforms often influence consumer decisions, especially if consumers feel confident in the platform's credibility.

The effect of environmental trust on consumer behavioral intentions shows a coefficient of 0.288 ($p = 0.003$), strengthening the argument that trust is a key element in driving purchase intentions. A study by Al-Adwan et al. (2022) also supported this finding, finding that high environmental trust in e-commerce platforms increases consumer loyalty and reduces risk perception.

Uncertainty, although having a significant relationship with behavioral intention ($\beta = 0.264$, $p < 0.001$), showed a lower level of influence than other variables and suggests that the influence of uncertainty on behavioral intention is more indirect and is often moderated or mediated by other variables, such as environmental trust and herd behavior. Research by Lu and Chen (2021) supported this by stating that uncertainty can often be minimized through risk mitigation strategies, such as clear return policies or transparent user reviews.

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Herd behavior strongly affects consumer behavioral intention (β = 0.168, p = 0.003). This finding supports previous studies by Ah Mand et al. (2023)), which showed that majority reviews or collective actions often influence consumer behavior in online environments. This herd behavior is reinforced by social mechanisms, such as social networks and influencer influence, which make collective actions an indicator of decision validity.

The variation analysis results show that the relationship between the variables is heterogeneous across studies, likely caused by differences in context, method, or sample characteristics in the studies analyzed. In addition, the relationship between BI and ET has a variance of 0.105, which, although smaller than the other relationships, still reflects differences between studies. This variation emphasizes the importance of considering contextual factors that may influence the results, such as culture, demographics, or specific environmental conditions, better to understand the dynamics of the relationships between variables.

The Meta-SEM model used perfectly fit the data, as indicated by the model fit indicators (χ^2 = 0.003, p = 0.957; RMSEA = 0; CFI = 1.018). However, the high level of heterogeneity (I^2 above 98% for most relationships) indicates substantial variation between the studies analyzed. This result indicates that context, culture, and sample-specific characteristics influence the relationships between variables.

Furthermore, the results of the moderation analysis show that Gender moderates the relationship between environmental trust and uncertainty as well as between herd behavior and behavioral intention. In the relationship between environmental trust and uncertainty, gender moderation provides a coefficient of 0.085 (p = 0.009), indicating that men and women may respond differently to uncertainty based on their level of trust in the environment. Glavee-Geo et al. (2017) stated that demographic factors, including Gender, can influence how consumers process information and make decisions.

The results of the model testing with gender moderation indicate that these relationships may be influenced by differences between studies, including potentially relevant contextual factors. The combination of the moderation results and the evaluation of the model fit supports the conclusion that Gender is a variable that can influence how environmental trust and herd behavior affect consumer uncertainty and behavioral intentions.

5. Conclusion

This study successfully revealed a significant relationship between environmental trust, uncertainty, herd behavior, and consumer behavioral intention in a digital context. The results of the Meta-SEM analysis showed that Environmental Trust (ET) has a positive influence on Uncertainty (UC) with a coefficient of 0.143 (z = 2.217, p = 0.026), which is significant at the 5% level.

ET also has a more substantial positive influence on Herd Behavior (HB) with a coefficient of 0.218 (z = 5.139, p < 0.001), as well as on Behavioral Intention (BI) with a coefficient of 0.288 (z = 2.991, p = 0.003). In addition, UC significantly affects BI with a coefficient of 0.264 (z = 5.339, p < 0.001), while HB also has a positive influence on BI with a coefficient of 0.168 (z = 2.995, p = 0.003).

Based on the study's results, environmental trust significantly reduces uncertainty, encourages herd behavior, and increases consumer behavioral intentions. In addition, uncertainty and herd behavior have also been proven to play an important role as mediating variables in the relationship. However, the effect of uncertainty is relatively weaker compared to other variables.

Herd behavior is dominant in influencing consumer behavioral intentions, especially in the digital environment, where reviews, recommendations, and collective action play a significant role in decision-making. Gender moderation provides additional findings suggesting that demographic factors may influence how the relationship between these variables is formed, especially regarding environmental trust and herd behavior.

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6. Research Implications

Theoretically, this research contributes to the marketing literature by helping us better understand how the interaction between trust, uncertainty, and collective behavior can predict and influence consumer behavioral intentions, especially in the digital era.

Furthermore, this study's findings are very relevant to modern marketing practices. By understanding the relationship between environmental trust, uncertainty, and herd behavior, marketers can design more effective strategies to increase consumer behavioral intentions. Strategic marketing activities such as increasing consumer trust in the platform through transparency and security can be a significant first step.

This study provides several practical implications for businesses, especially in digital marketing and e-commerce strategy. By highlighting the role of environmental trust, uncertainty, and herd behavior in shaping consumer behavioral intention, our findings can inform how businesses build consumer confidence and drive conversions.

First, the strong influence of environmental trust suggests that companies must enhance transparency, ethical practices, and data security to foster trust. Demonstrating commitment to sustainability or social responsibility can enhance trust, as consumers are increasingly sensitive to environmental issues. Second, addressing perceived uncertainty is critical. Businesses can reduce uncertainty by offering guarantees, clear return policies, and detailed product information. As our study shows, lowering uncertainty positively affects behavioral intentions. Third, leveraging herd behavior—such as showcasing product reviews, ratings, and testimonials can reinforce social proof and guide consumers in decision-making. This is particularly effective in social media environments where visibility and influence are amplified. The integrated model helps businesses understand that consumer intention is not only driven by rational factors but also by psychosocial elements. Tailoring strategies to strengthen trust and reduce uncertainty while utilizing the power of social influence will enable more effective marketing interventions and higher customer engagement.

7. Research Limitations

This study's limitations are its reliance on secondary data from previous studies and its lack of exploration of broader contextual variables. Therefore, further research is recommended to explore the role of contextual factors, such as culture and social norms, in influencing this relationship to gain a more holistic insight into the dynamics of consumer behavior in the evolving digital context.

Another limitation is the high heterogeneity across studies, which indicates that these results are highly contextual and influenced by various factors, such as culture, social norms, and sample characteristics. Therefore, further research is recommended to explore the role of contextual factors and expand the theoretical framework to more comprehensively understand the dynamics of consumer behavior.

8. Conflict Of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently, and no financial, professional, or personal interests were identified to influence the results. All data sources and methodologies used were transparent, and any potential biases were addressed to ensure the integrity of the findings.

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