



Social Media Marketing, Online Reviews, and Sushi's Purchase Intention: Trust as Mediator

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Abstract. This study examines the impact of social media marketing and online reviews on purchase intention in sushi restaurants, with customer trust as a mediator. Social media marketing captures consumer attention, while online reviews shape perceptions and decisions. Using a quantitative approach, data from 257 respondents were analyzed with PLS-SEM. Results show that social media marketing and customer trust positively influence purchase intention, while online reviews affect it both directly and through trust. These findings highlight the need for effective digital marketing, proactive review management, and trust-building strategies to enhance consumer engagement and drive sales in the competitive restaurant industry.

Keywords: Sushi Restaurant, Social Media Marketing, Online Reviews, Trust, Purchase Intention.

1 Introduction

With rapid technological advancements, globalization has transformed cultural exchanges in Indonesia, notably in the Food and Beverage (FnB) sector. As food evolves beyond a basic need to a lifestyle preference, urban areas have seen a rise in restaurants serving international cuisines, including Japanese food. According to the Badan Pusat Statistik [1], there were 357 Japanese restaurants in Indonesia as of 2020.

Sushi is one of Indonesia's most popular Japanese foods [2]. Sushi restaurants have gained significant popularity among all Japanese restaurants, driven by the growing consumer interest in Japanese culinary experiences. Sushi's interactive dining experience attracts many customers, driving strong purchase intention. However, growing industry competition demands effective strategies for differentiation and customer attraction.

Studies show that purchase intention is influenced by factors like product quality, pricing, promotions, and past brand experiences. With social media's rise, consumers can easily assess products and read reviews before buying. As of January 2024, Indonesia ranks ninth globally in average social media usage among users aged 16–60 [3]. Many companies in these days are currently utilizing social media for marketing and direct communication with consumers.

Social media marketing is a key strategy in the digital age, offering convenience and efficiency for those who leverage digital innovations and modern media effectively [4]. Indonesian sushi restaurants actively promote their social media and offer special discount on certain days. As a result, social media marketing plays a crucial role in boosting consumer purchase intention.

Customers frequently rely on online reviews as a consideration tool for their purchases [5]. As more consumers rely on online platforms for purchasing decisions, the quality and quantity of reviews play a crucial role in shaping purchase intention. With that, online reviews have become critical in shaping consumer decision-making.

In this study, customer trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing, online reviews, and purchase intention. Research suggests that trust in a brand strengthens the positive impact of social media marketing and online reviews [6]. However, although many studies have been conducted, there is still a lack of knowledge of the specific context of sushi restaurants and how these factors interact in different environments.

The previous study reveals contradictions regarding the impact of online reviews on purchase intention. While (8) found a significant positive effect of online reviews on consumer purchase intention, (9) reported no significant positive effect. This research addresses these contradictions by empirically examining how social media marketing and online reviews impact purchase intention at Indonesian sushi restaurants, with customer trust as a mediator.

This study aims to advance marketing science by exploring the impact of social media marketing and online reviews on purchase intention, mediated by customer trust. Additionally, it provides valuable insights for the Food and Beverage (FnB) industry, particularly sushi restaurants.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Social Media Marketing and *Online Reviews on Purchase Intention*

Social media marketing involves online initiatives aimed at engaging customers or prospective customers by raising awareness, enhancing brand image, and driving sales of products or services [9]. Online reviews, as described by [10] are perceived as reliable and credible sources of information that help clients make purchasing decisions. These consumer evaluations shape a company's image and affect public perception of service quality and value in corporate communication.

The connection among social media marketing, online reviews, and purchase intention has been widely studied. For instance, research by [11] employed a quantitative methodology in Kosovo found that social media marketing has a positive effect on purchase intention. Similarly, the impact of online reviews on purchase intention has been thoroughly examined. A study by [12] conducted in Turkey, revealed that online customer reviews positively and significantly affect purchase intention.

Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are proposed for this study:

H₁: Social media marketing positively affects purchase intention at sushi restaurants.

H₂: Online reviews positively affect purchase intention at sushi restaurants.

2.2 Customer Trust on Purchase Intention

Customer trust is characterize as the willingness of consumers to depend on a brand despite inherent risks, driven by the belief that the brand will provide positive results [13]. On the other hand, purchase intention refers to the conscious willingness of consumers to make a purchasing decision after being influenced by external stimuli, serving as an initial inclination before finalizing the buying process [14]. The role of customer trust in shaping purchase intention has been examined in various studies. For instance, [15] investigated the impact of trust on purchase intention in the organic food sector in Brazil and found that trust significantly influences purchase intention. Accordingly, this study will test the following hypothesis:

H₃: Customer trust positively affects purchase intention at sushi restaurants.

2.3 Online Reviews on Customer Trust

The connection between online reviews and customer trust has been widely researched. For example, [16] studied the effect of online reviews on trust within the Shopee marketplace, revealing that online reviews positively impact consumer trust. Additionally, [17] investigated this relationship in the context of social e-commerce in Arabia, and the result showed a significant positive effect of online reviews on trust.

This study hypothesizes the following:

H₄: Online Reviews positively affect Customer Trust at Sushi's restaurant.

2.4 Online Reviews on Purchase Intention through Customer Trust

Various researchers have additionally investigated the mediating role of customer trust in the connection among online reviews, and purchase intention has also been explored. For instance, [18] examined this relationship among MS Glow customers in Purworejo, Indonesia and it shows that customer trust effectively mediates the effect of online reviews on purchase intention. Similarly, [17] explored this mediation in social e-commerce, concluding that trust significantly mediates the connection between online reviews and purchase intention. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H₅: Online reviews affect sushi's purchase intention through customer trust.

Figure 1 illustrates the research model.

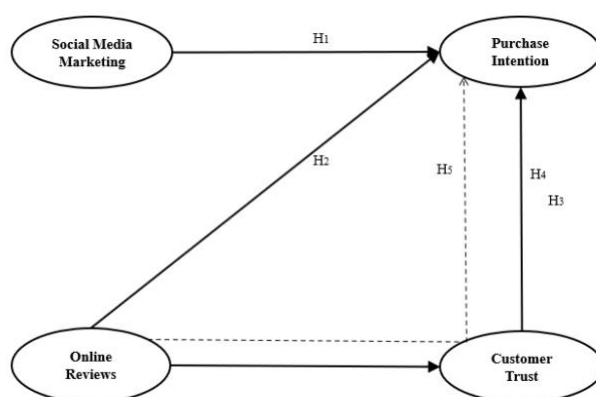


Fig. 1. Research Model

3 Method

This study employed a quantitative approach, targeting sushi restaurant customers in Indonesia. Data from 269 respondents were collected via questionnaire and analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 to examine variable relationships and the mediating role of customer trust. A filter question ensured respondents were sushi enthusiasts. Social media marketing and customer trust were measured with six indicators each, while online reviews and purchase intention had five, adapted from prior research. Validity and reliability tests confirmed instrument accuracy. The variable measurement of this study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Variable Measurement

Variable	Code	Indicator
<i>Social Media Marketing</i>	SMM1	The content displayed on the company's social media page is the latest content [19]
	SMM2	The company's social media accounts provide information that customers need [20]
	SMM3	Customers can easily obtain information thanks to the company's social media accounts [20]
	SMM4	Customers like promotions made on the company's social media accounts [20]
	SMM5	The company's social media positively influences customer attention [20]
	SMM6	Customers are willing to share information about a company's products from social media to others [19]
<i>Online Reviews</i>	OR1	Recent reviews of a product make customers interested [21]
	OR2	The more online reviews, the more fulfilled the customer's information needs are. [21]
	OR3	The number of reviews of a product can influence customers [21]
	OR4	Negative online reviews reflect poorly on a product [21]
	OR5	Positive online reviews give a good impact on a product[21]
<i>Customer Trust</i>	CT1	This restaurant is reliable [22]
	CT2	This restaurant is being honest [22]
	CT3	Customers trust that this restaurant provides good quality [23]
	CT4	Customers trust the management in a restaurant [22]
	CT5	This restaurant is my first choice [23]
	CT6	Overall I trust this restaurant [22]
<i>Purchase Intention</i>	PI1	Customers will consider buying products from a company [24]
	PI2	Customers prefer to buy products from this company compared to other companies [24]
	PI3	Next time I want Japanese food, I will choose this company. [24]
	PI4	Customers have a high intention to buy a company's product in the future [25]
	PI5	Customers highly recommend this company to others [24]

4 Results and Discussions

4.1 Results

Of 269 responses, 12 failed screening, leaving 257 valid responses. The sample comprised 58% women and 42% men, with 50.6% aged 17–21. Most earned under Rp 5,000,000 (50.2%) and spent below Rp 3,000,000 (47.9%). Students made up 55.6%, and 54.9% had a high school education. In the discriminant validity test, five indicators (SMM3, SMM4, SMM6, CT4, and PI5) did not meet criteria and were removed. The final validity results are shown below.

Table 2. Outer Model

Variable	Indicator	Loading	CA	CR	AVE	HTMT		
						CT	OR	PI
Customer Trust (CT)	CT1	0.854	0.864	0.865	0.650	-	-	-
	CT2	0.829						
	CT3	0.762						
	CT5	0.765						
	CT6	0.815						
Online Reviews (OR)	OR1	0.797	0.828	0.836	0.593	0.769	-	-
	OR2	0.815						
	OR3	0.772						
	OR4	0.703						
	OR5	0.756						
Purchase Intention (PI)	PI1	0.747	0.843	0.854	0.681	0.899	0.755	-
	PI2	0.864						
	PI3	0.888						
	PI4	0.795						
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	SMM1	0.861	0.825	0.830	0.741	0.861	0.840	0.798
	SMM2	0.870						
	SMM5	0.851						

Notes: Loading : Cross loading, CA: Cronbach's Alpha, CR: Composite Reliability, AVE: Average Variance Extracted, HTMT: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

Table 2 confirms the validity of all variables, as their AVE values exceed the 0.50 threshold [26]. Based on the loadings in Table 2, each variable's loading factor exceeds those of other variables, confirming that the results meet the criteria for discriminant validity. Moreover, the HTMT test results indicate discriminant validity values below 0.90, confirming the model's validity.

4.2 Reliability Test

This study assesses reliability using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Results confirm the reliability of customer trust, online reviews, purchase intention, and social media marketing, as all values exceed 0.6 but remain below 0.95.

4.3 Inner Model

R-square (R²) Test

R-squares value categorized as strong (≥ 0.75), moderate (0.50–0.75), and weak (≤ 0.25 –0.50). The results show that customer trust has an R-square of 0.433, meaning 43.3% of its variation is explained by the model, while 56.7% is influenced by other factors. Purchase intention has an R-square of 0.639, with 63.9% explained by the model and 36.1% by unexamined variables. This places purchase intention in the moderate influence category and customer trust in the weak influence category.

F-square (f²) Test

An f-square of 0.02 indicates a small effect, 0.15 a moderate effect, and 0.35 a strong effect. Table 3 shows that Social Media Marketing and Online Reviews have small effects on Purchase Intention (0.02–0.15). In contrast, Customer Trust strongly influences Purchase Intention (0.363), and Online Reviews significantly impact Customer Trust (0.764).

Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesis testing in this study is divided into two parts, namely direct effect testing and mediation effect testing. According to [26] the p-value assesses the strength and direction of relationships in the PLS-SEM model. Path coefficients range from -1 to +1, with values near +1 indicating a strong positive relationship and near -1 a strong negative one. A p-value < 0.05 denotes significance, while ≥ 0.05 indicates insignificance. Table 3 displays the p-values and path coefficients for direct effect hypotheses.

Table 3. Inner Model

	<i>Variable Relationship</i>	<i>Path</i>	<i>f²</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>p-Values</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
H ₁	<i>SMM → PI</i>	0.145	0.022 (Weak)	0.639	0.021	Accepted
H ₂	<i>OR → PI</i>	0.539	0.039 (Weak)		0.000	Accepted
H ₃	<i>CT → PI</i>	0.555	0.363 (Strong)	0.433	0.000	Accepted
H ₄	<i>OR → CT</i>	0.658	0.764 (Strong)		0.000	Accepted
H ₅	<i>OR → CT → PI</i>	0.365			0.000	Accepted

The path coefficient and p-value analysis confirm that all hypotheses tested have positive and significant relationship. Notably, online reviews affect purchase intention through customer trust, with a path coefficient of 0.365 and a p-value of 0.000. These findings demonstrate that customer trust as a key mediator between online reviews and purchase intention.

Discussions

The findings of the hypothesis testing align with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory [27], which provides a theoretical framework for understanding how

external stimuli (e.g., social media marketing and online reviews) trigger internal processes (e.g., customer trust) that lead to behavioural responses (e.g., purchase intention). This alignment underscores the importance of considering both external influences and internal mediating factors when examining consumer behaviour in the context of sushi restaurants.

The first hypothesis confirms that social media marketing positively influences purchase intention ($\beta = 0.145$, $R^2 = 0.639$, $p = 0.021$). From the SOR perspective, it acts as a "stimulus," delivering engaging content that enhances brand perception and drives purchases. This finding is consistent with [11], effective social media marketing fosters brand awareness and emotional connection, activating positive consumer responses. For sushi restaurants, engaging social media content is a powerful tool for attracting and retaining customers.

Hypothesis 2 shows that online reviews significantly influence purchase intention ($\beta = 0.539$, $R^2 = 0.639$, $p = 0.000$). Within the SOR framework, they act as a "stimulus," shaping perceptions, building trust, and reducing risk, leading to purchase decisions. This finding is supported by the research of [12], which emphasizes the affect of online reviews on purchase intention. However, it contrasts with the discovery of [21], where the effect was not significant. Managing and encouraging positive online reviews for sushi restaurants can significantly enhance consumer confidence and purchase likelihood.

The third hypothesis establishes that customer trusts significantly and positively influence purchase intention ($\beta = 0.555$, $R^2 = 0.639$, $p = 0.000$). In the SOR framework, trust acts as the "organism," reducing uncertainty and increasing purchase willingness. This result is consistent with studies by [15] which shown that trust is crucial for purchase decisions. Sushi restaurants can build trust through transparent communication, consistent quality, and responsive customer service to drive conversions.

Hypothesis 4 confirms that online reviews positively impact customer trust ($\beta = 0.658$, $R^2 = 0.433$, $p = 0.000$), acting as the "stimulus" that triggers trust formation. This finding aligns with research by [17], which underscores the role of online reviews in enhancing trust. Sushi restaurants can strengthen trust by encouraging happy customers to share their experiences online.

Finally, hypothesis 5 confirms that customer trust mediates the link between online reviews and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.365$, $p = 0.000$). In the SOR framework, reviews (stimulus) influence intention (response) through trust (organism), highlighting the interplay of external and internal factors in consumer behavior. The findings align with the study by [17], which also demonstrated the mediating role of trust but differ from [16], which found no such mediation. Notably, trust acts as a partial mediator, as online reviews still directly and significantly impact purchase intention without trust as the mediator.

Using the SOR theory, this study explores how social media marketing and online reviews influence customer trust and purchase intention in sushi restaurants. Findings confirm that trust mediates the impact of online reviews, while all factors significantly affect purchase decisions. These insights guide sushi restaurants and Indonesia's Japanese food industry in optimizing content and review management to strengthen trust and boost sales.

5 Conclusion & Suggestion

Several key conclusions emerge from this study. This study concludes that social media marketing and online reviews significantly influence purchase intention. Customer trust reduces risk, boosts confidence, and mediates the impact of reviews on purchase decisions, highlighting the interplay of external and internal factors.

Several recommendations are proposed for future research and industry practice. For future research, can expand their scope by including additional factors that might influence purchase intention, such as product innovation [5], brand awareness [14], and perceived value [15]. These factors offer valuable insights into consumer behaviour. Sushi restaurants should optimize social media marketing by sharing engaging content on menu updates, promotions, and testimonials. Transparency and timely information can boost attention and purchase intent, while highlighting positive reviews enhances trust, strengthens brand perception, and increases sales.

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