Enrichment: Journal of Management, 13 (5) (2023)

Published by: Instiute of Computer Science (IOCS)

Enrichment: Journal of Management

Journal homepage: www.enrichment.iocspublisher.org

How does user-generated content impact purchase intention through perceived food quality?

Juliyanti[1], Titik Rosnani[2], Bintoro Bagus Purmono[3], Heriyadi[4], Pramana Saputra[5]

[1,2,3,4,5]Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Tanjungpura, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received Nov 17, 2023
Revised Nov 18, 2023
Accepted Nov 278, 2023

Keywords:

User-Generated Content (UGC);
Perceived Food Quality;
Purchase Intention;

ABSTRACT

The increasingly advanced digital world also impacts the changing of the way people around the world do business. Among them is the marketing approach, which is widely utilized on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. This study aims to analyze the effect of User-Generated Content (UGC) on Eat Sambel purchase intention through perceived food quality. This type of research uses a quantitative approach with data collection methods through surveys in the form of questionnaires distributed online through Google Forms. The total sample of 215 respondents from Indonesia was selected based on the purposive sampling method with specified criteria. SEM Amos 24 is used to analyze data and test hypotheses. According to the study's findings, purchase intention was positively and significantly impacted by both User-Generated Content (UGC) and perceived food quality. User-Generated Content (UGC) also has a significant impact on perceived food quality. The results of this research are expected to improve the understanding of UGC and help online entrepreneurs.

Corresponding Author:

Juliyanti,
Faculty of Economics and Business,
Universitas Tanjungpura,
Pontianak, 78124, Indonesia
Email: b1021201112@student.untan.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly growing digital era, various activities, such as digital marketing or buying and selling online, can be done through the Internet. Based on an APJII survey conducted in 2023, there are 215.6 million Internet users in Indonesia, 78.19% of the total population. They use the Internet for the following purposes: 1) To access social media websites like YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp; 2) to use public services; 3) to make online transactions; 4) to get news or information; and 5) to work or study from home (Indahsari et al., 2023). The number of Internet users in Indonesia is expected to grow, creating new opportunities for businesses, including MSMEs, to expand their reach and penetrate a larger market.

Technological advances have changed how companies offer their products and services through new alternatives to attract and retain customers (Rosillo-díaz et al., 2020). Social media has become a powerful tool for marketers to engage with customers and advertise (Yang & Louisa, 2021). One brand that has managed to create unique and effective branding that makes it one of the

trending chili brands on social media is the EatSambel brand. EatSambel is a food production MSME founded by Yansen Gunawan in 2018. EatSambel earned the nickname the "most viral sambel" for successfully introducing its products to all Indonesians. In September 2022, EatSambel managed to control sales in e-commerce by 59.60%. Meanwhile, in the same sales category, Mr. Crispy had sales of 20.09%, and Bu Rudy had sales of 4.33% (Sutiani, 2022).

EatSambel, a successful brand in serving sambel products with various flavors such as sambel cumi ciamik, cakalang candu, ayam suir icikiwir, tuna asap, and pedas ikan ijo, has become a phenomenon among sambel fans across Indonesia. EatSambel products are known for their quality and authentic taste, made from fresh and 100% halal ingredients. In the face of the increasing popularity of these products, many people are interested in trying and buying them. This phenomenon has triggered the emergence of user-generated content (UGC), created to appeal to consumers' purchase intentions to see the marketing review of the content through to completion. UGC is original content created and shared by web users (Park & Lee, 2021). In this context, UGC can be text, videos, images, reviews, etc. Paul and Hogan state that 81% of consumers consider UGC from other consumers as an essential source of information when purchasing a product or service (Park & Lee, 2021).

In addition to user-generated content (UGC), perceived food quality is essential in influencing purchase intention. Perceived quality is a buyer's evaluation of a product's brilliance or dominance, based on a unique judgment (Wasaya et al., 2021). UGC can influence perceived food quality by providing additional information, perspectives, or experiences from other users about EatSambel products. Positive UGC, such as reviews that praise the taste, quality, or uniqueness of EatSambel's flavors, can increase the perceived food quality of the product. A high perceived food quality of the product can influence consumers' purchase intention, which is the desire to purchase the product in the future. If consumers believe that EatSambel has good food quality based on the UGC they read or see, they may be more likely to purchase the product.

Although EatSambel is widely recognized by the public, the company experienced a -15.89% decline in sales in March 2023. This decline is significant compared to competitors selling similar products (Salsabila, 2023). There are several consumer issues related to the marketing of the products sold by EatSambel. User-generated content (UGC) issues are uploaded by consumers where there are unsatisfactory reviews related to the product and quality discrepancies with their orders. In addition, some consumers also complained about damage and openness in the Eatsambel product container upon receipt, and some reviews mentioned that the contents of the product were less than what was shown in the advertisement (Wayan Silvi Divani et al., 2023). Then there is the issue of perceived food quality from UGC, which may only sometimes accurately reflect the perception of food quality of EatSambel products for all consumers. Given these issues, the researchers want to know how these factors influence consumers' purchase intentions.

Along with background, this study aims to investigate the influence of UGC on purchase intention of EatSambel products through perceived food quality. According to Raquel and Milhinhos (2015), user-generated content (UGC) does not significantly affect purchase intention. However, different research results show that user-generated content (UGC) has a significant effect on purchase intention, such as Panopoulos et al., (2023) and Geng and Chen, (2021). This research will provide a deeper understanding of how UGC affects explicitly consumers' purchase intentions, which are determined by their perceptions of food quality. In addition, the findings will be used to develop further research in the sales process using UGC.

RESEARCH METHOD

User-generated content (UGC) refers to user-created content or what is widely considered an essential characteristic of self-generated content (H. G. Song et al., 2023). Another definition of UGC would be content, typically text, pictures, video, and other forms of user-generated content

(Najar & Rather, 2020). It includes user-shared shopping experiences on websites or apps, reflecting the empowering and decentralized nature of new media (Geng & Chen, 2021). User-generated content (UGC) is a much-discussed form of marketing content. In particular, business media outlets such as Forbes (Olenski, 2017) and Adweek (Merckel, 2017) have lauded user-generated content as a form of covert marketing that can be highly profitable for companies because it can be blended with editorial social media content (Mayrhofer et al., 2020). The impact of UGC on consumers is critical, as consumers' trust is enhanced by their perception of more than just the appearance of another correspondence advertisement (Gajenderan et al., 2020). Many authors argue that UGC is evaluated by users as a more reliable source of information than content published by companies through traditional channels (Cillo et al., 2019). In addition, user-generated content (UGC) is a lot less expensive to implement and a lot more effective ((Mayrhofer et al., 2020; Merckel, 2017).

Perceived food quality is a term that refers to the subjective perception or judgment of a consumer about the quality of a food product. In essence, perceived quality is an individual's assessment of whether a product or service aligns with his or her expectations (Severt et al., 2020). Customers who possess a high degree of subjective knowledge are inclined to assess the quality of products by considering events relevant to the product, and their intention to buy is likely to be impacted by the perceived quality (Yan et al., 2019). This suggests that quality expectations and experiences are antecedents of overall product quality perceptions (Ho et al., 2020). Perceived quality is seen as a comparison between the quality consumers expect and the quality they experience. consumers' perceived quality influences their intention to buy a product. In other words, the higher the value consumers perceive, the higher the likelihood they will buy (M. Anang, 2019).

Purchase intention is the action of consumers who want to purchase a particular product (Tania et al., 2023). Purchase intention is a step before purchase behavior (Ho et al., 2020). Purchase intention is a behavioral intention that shows consumers' intent to purchase a product or service. It is influenced by their subjective judgments such as perceptions, attitudes, and individual satisfaction (Yang & Louisa, 2021). When consumers make brand evaluations and preferences, purchase intentions arise between the evaluation and purchase decision stages (Indrawati et al., 2023). Purchase intention is the opportunity that determines a customer's willingness to purchase a product; the more excellent the opportunity, the stronger the purchase intention (Chiang et al., 2021). Purchase intention describes the feeling or perceived likelihood of purchasing the advertised product; furthermore, purchase indicates loyalty to the product (Najar & Rather, 2020). Understanding consumers' purchase intentions can help businesses analyze the market and adjust their products or services to increase sales and generate more profit (H. Chen et al., 2020).

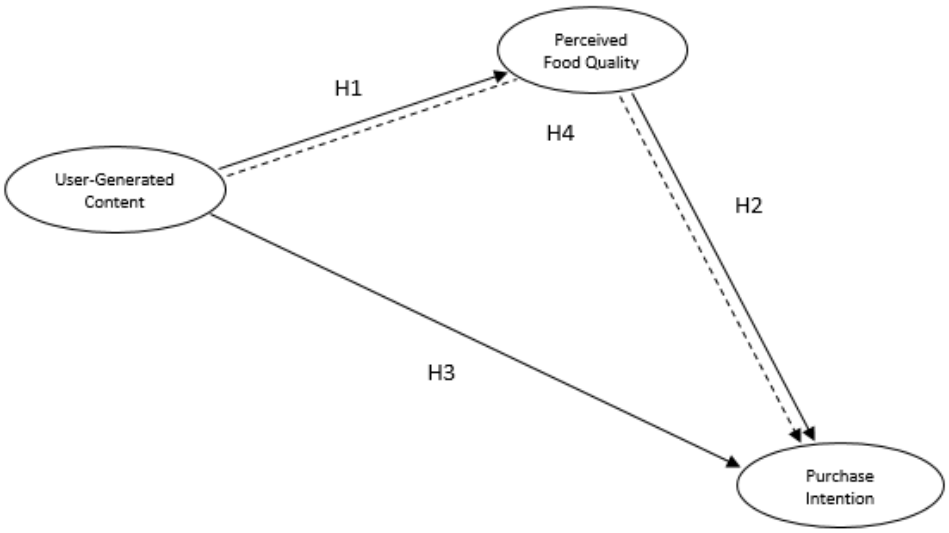

Figure 1. Research Framework

User-Generated Content (UGC) and Perceived Food Quality

User-generated content (UGC) is content generated by its users. Types of UGC include pictures, videos, reviews, comments, blogs, etc. (Wei et al., 2023). Perceived food quality is a subjective assessment based on sensory attributes such as taste, texture, aroma, and appearance. In the context of UGC, consumers often rely on UGC to evaluate the perceived food quality of a product. When users leave positive reviews about the product, it influences consumers' perceptions of food quality. Online users today think user-generated content (UGC) is more reliable than the information presented (Geng & Chen, 2021). Therefore, if the content displayed by UGC is optimistic about a product, consumers tend to perceive the product better. Wei et al., (2023) demonstrated that UGC is positively related to perceived quality.

H1 = User-generated content (UGC) influences perceived food quality.

User-Generated Content (UGC) and Purchase Intention

User-generated content (UGC) is media content that is mainly shared online and produced by members of the general public instead of hired experts (Jia et al., 2023). Consumers rely on UGC from various sources to gather information about product attributes and quality, especially in the context of experiential product consideration (Song et al., 2019). Consumers are attracted to purchase products and services based on previous user experiences, preferences, and external environments (Indahsari et al., 2023). Online shopping cannot provide consumers with the experience of touching, seeing, and smelling products (Chen & Dermawan, 2020). Therefore, consumers need reviews from UGC on social media platforms to build purchase intentions. UGC, which is attractively created and has a fun concept, can increase viewers' interest in watching video content to the end and attract consumers' purchase intention (Anisa & Marlena, 2022). UGC affects reducing customer perceptions of risk and increasing online store sales. Previous research by Panopoulos et al., (2023) & Geng and Chen, (2021) supports the finding that UGC positively impacts purchase intent.

H2 = User-generated content (UGC) influences purchase intention.

Perceived Food Quality and Purchase Intention

Perceived food quality refers to "consumer judgments of overall product superiority" (Konuk, 2019). High food quality is an important marketing strategy for customer satisfaction, loyalty, and an enjoyable shopping experience (Zhong & Moon, 2020). When consumers have a positive perception of the food quality of a product, they tend to have a higher purchase intention. Food quality plays an essential role in increasing purchase intention. Therefore, when food quality increases, purchase intention tends to increase. This study is supported by Wang et al., (2020), Konuk, (2019) and Yan et al., (2019), who found that perceived food quality has a positive effect on purchase intention.

H3 = Perceived food quality influences purchase intention.

User-Generated Content, Perceived Food Quality and Purchase Intention

Perceived food quality from user-generated content (UGC) can lead to consumer purchase intentions. UGC influences consumer purchase through embedded information and persuasion, as natural recipes have greater credibility than companies (Romero-Rodriguez & Castillo-Abdul, 2023). Consumers' purchase intentions will increase if user-generated content conveys a positive impression of food quality. Additionally, high-quality goods can meet consumer demands and add value to them (Wang et al., 2020). If consumers believe that food is of good quality regarding taste and ingredients, they will be interested in trying or buying it. Positive UGC can increase the perception of good food quality for consumers, so consumers will likely be interested and motivated to buy the product.

H4 = User-generated content influences purchase intention through perceived food quality.

This study uses a quantitative methodological approach to determine the causal relationship between the variables of user-generated content, perceived food quality, and intention to purchase EatSambel products. The sample in this study consisted of 215 respondents obtained through the purposive sampling method. The sample is Indonesian, aged 15+, and has seen EatSambel reviews on social media platforms.

The activities performed in this study are validity and reliability tests, tests between variables in the measurement model, and obtaining a model fit associated with structural model analysis. Model fit measurements are considered appropriate when there are three to four goodness of fit (GOF) index measurements, as in this study, CMIN/DF, RMSEA, RMR, NFI, IFI, TLI, and CFI. Validity scores are adjusted for Standardized Loading Factor (SLF), which must be ≥ 0.50. Reliability scores are adjusted for Construct Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extract (AVE). The next step is the SEM analysis to determine the t-value, where the t-value ≥ t-table (1.96) with $\alpha = 0.05$. The mediation variable in this study was tested using the Sobel test to determine the effect between variables.

Data was collected using a questionnaire distributed online using Google Forms. A Likert scale was used for measurement, ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". All the items of the questions were taken from the excellent literature from the Scopus journals. For example, five items adapted from Panopoulos et al., (2023) and Karunakaran and Brorson, (2019) were used to measure the user-generated content variable. Four items, adapted from Tacardon et al., (2023) and Singh and Alok, (2021), measure the perceived food quality variable. Four items measure the intention to purchase variable, adapted from Tacardon et al., (2023), Jha et al., (2022), and Ho et al., (2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Characteristics of Respondents

Analysis of the profiles of the respondents in this study is based on the demographic characteristics listed in Table 1. The demographic characteristics presented include gender, age, last education, domicile, occupation, and monthly Income.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Item	F	%
Gender	Male	50	23,3
	Female	165	76,7
	Total	215	100
Age	15-25 years old	190	88,4
	26-42 years old	25	11,6
	43-58 years old	0	0
	>59 years old	0	0
	Total	215	100
Last education	Elementary School	1	0,5
	Junior High School	5	2,3
	Senior High School	157	73
	Diploma	9	4,2
	Bachelor's Degree	42	19,5
	Master's Degree	1	0,5
	Doctorate	0	0
	Total	215	100
Domicile	Sumatera	14	6,5
	Kalimantan	120	55,8
	Jawa	70	32,6
	Sulawesi	11	5,1
	Papua	0	0
	Total	215	100
Occupation	Student	11	5
	College/University student	157	73
	Employee	22	10,2
	Entrepreneur	16	7,4
	Farmer	1	0,5
	Civil Servant	3	1,4
	Supervisor	1	0,5
	Private sector employee	1	0,5
	Housewife	1	0.5
	Freshgraduate	1	0,5
	Content creator	1	0,5
	Total	215	100
Monthly Income	1 million to < 3 million	179	83,3
	3 million to < 5 million	20	9,3
	5 million to < 10 million	8	3,7
	10 million to < 30 million	3	1,4
	> 30 million	5	2,3
	Total	215	100

Model Measurement

The results of the model suitability, validity, and reliability tests are as follows.

Table 2. Goodness of Fit Index

Goodness of Fit Index	*Cut off Value*	Results	Results
χ^2	Expected to be low	96,058	
Df		62	
χ^2- Significance Probability	≥ 0.05	0.004	
CMIN/DF	≤ 3.00	1,549	Good Fit
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.051	Good Fit
RMR	< 0,05	0.015	Good Fit

NFI	≥ 0.90	0.944	Good Fit
IFI	≥ 0.90	0.980	Good Fit
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.974	Good Fit
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.979	Good Fit

Table 2 is the result of the model fit test, which shows that the requirements for the model fit are acceptable, and the model is declared to fit. Five measurements show the degree of fit; the research model configuration can be declared adequate and accepted if 3-4 measurements obtain a reasonable degree of fit or above the cut-off value.

Table 3. Value of Standardized Loading Factor, Construct Reliability (CR), & Average Variance Extracted (AVE) in Overall Model Fit

	Items	***SLF***	***CR***	***AVE***
User-Generated Content (UGC)	User reviews of EatSambel products are easy for me to understand	0,75	0,944	0,560
	I believe that user reviews of EatSambel products are a relatively accurate representation of the product	0,735		
	I trust EatSambel product reviews from friends or people I follow on social media	0,825		
	I believe the content on social media platforms related to EatSambel products helps me find what I want	0,753		
	I believe the information I get from the content is correct	0,668		
Perceived Food Quality (PFQ)	The ingredients used in EatSambel products are of the highest quality	0,834	0,945	0,608
	The taste of EatSambel products is good	0,652		
	The flavors of EatSambel products vary according to taste	0,83		
	EatSambel products have a good shelf life	0,789		
Purchase Intention (PI)	I have a high potential to buy EatSambel products	0,793	0,938	0,650
	I will consider the choice of EatSambel products compared to similar products	0,806		
	I consider EatSambel products to be my first choice to buy	0,852		
	I am planning to buy other EatSambel products	0,774		

Table 3 is the result of testing the validity and reliability of the entire model. The Standardized Loading Factor (SLF) value of all indicator variables in the full model is greater than 0.50. This indicates that all indicators are declared valid and are believed to be able to measure the overall construct of the model being built. The reliability test results are relevant. All instruments are declared reliable and can consistently measure the constructs of the constructed model. This is indicated by the Avariance Extraction (AVE) value of all instrument indicators obtaining a value ≥ 0.50 and the Construct Reliability (CR) value obtaining a value ≥ 0.70 for overall model reliability.

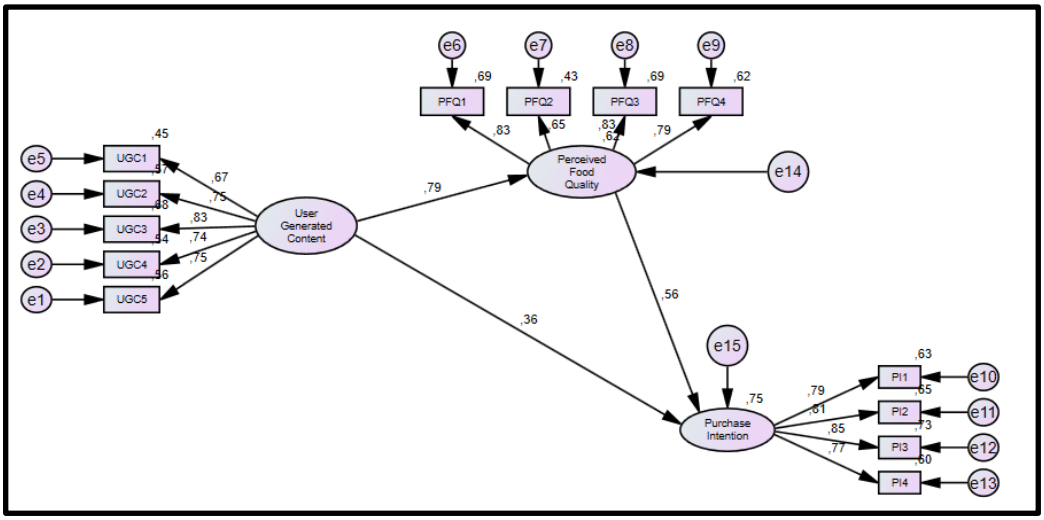

Figure 2. full model testing

The results of testing the effect of the relationship between variables in the research configuration built into this study can be presented as follows:

Table 4. Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
H_1	Perceived_Food_Quality --> User-Generated_Content	0,896	0,091	9,886	0.000
H_2	Purchase_Intention --> Perceived_Food_Quality	0,624	0,116	5,395	0.000
H_3	Purchase_Intention --> User-Generated_Content	0,451	0,128	3,53	0.000

Table 4. the t-value for the variable Perceived Food Quality on User-generated Content is 9.886, which shows a gain greater than the t-test value of 1.96. Similarly, a p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that the value is less than 0.05 (α = 0.05). This shows that perceived food quality has a positive and significant effect. In the second hypothesis, the t-value of purchase intention on perceived food quality obtained a value of 5.395 and a p-value less than 0.001, indicating a value less than 0.05 (α=0.05). This means that purchase intention positively and significantly affects perceived food quality. In the third hypothesis, the t-value of purchase intention on user-generated content is 3.53, and the p-value is less than 0.001, indicating a value less than 0.05 (α=0.05), which means that purchase intention positively and significantly affects user-generated content.

To confirm the indirect effect of the built-in mediator, we present Table 4.5, obtained from Sobel test results.

Table 5. Sobel Test - Significance of Mediation

	Sobel test statistic	Two- tailed probability
User-Generated_Content --> Perceived_Food_Quality --> Purchase_Intention	4,72	0,00000253

Table 5 displays the Sobel test findings. The fourth hypothesis's Sobel test statistic is 4.72, which is greater than the 1.96 t-test value and has a p-value of 0.00000253 less than 0.05 (α=0.05). These results indicate a significant indirect effect of user-generated content on purchase intention through perceived food quality.

Discussion

This study aims to test the conceptual model of user-generated content on the purchase intention of EatSambel products through perceived food quality. Based on the results of this study,

the first hypothesis is accepted, which shows that user-generated content (UGC) affects perceived food quality. This is consistent with previous research that user-generated content can influence perceived food quality (Wei et al., 2023). Positive user reviews about a product have been shown to influence consumers' perceptions of food quality. Furthermore, the second hypothesis is accepted, which shows that user-generated content (UGC) affects purchase intention. The results of this study are also obtained from previous researchers who state that user-generated content can influence purchase intention (Geng & Chen, 2021; Panopoulos et al., 2023). Using UGC to introduce EatSambel products has been shown to increase purchase intention. UGC is believed to be more credible than company-generated content in influencing purchase intention, as user-generated content includes consumers' honest reviews and experiences about positive and negative aspects of the product (Afifah, 2022). Then, the third hypothesis is accepted, which shows that perceived food quality influences purchase intention. These results are also consistent with previous research that shows that perceived food quality can affect purchase intention (Konuk, 2019; Wang et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2019). When consumers positively perceive a product's food quality, purchase intention increases. In addition, the fourth hypothesis is also accepted, which suggests that perceived food quality mediates the relationship between user-generated content and purchase intention. Positive user-generated reviews about a product can increase purchase intention..

The results show that to increase purchase intention, companies are expected to use the right user-generated content to represent their products to the market to increase positive perceived food quality towards the brand and create purchase intention

CONCLUSION

In this all-digital business era, user-generated content (UGC) is the primary key to attracting the attention of potential customers. UGC refers to content generated by the general public based on their experience and knowledge of a product, without compensation from a brand, and distributed online (Afifah, 2022). UGC must provide transparent information to build consumer trust, as online consumers trust user-generated content more than company advertisements (Cillo et al., 2019). The high perceived food quality created by UGC increases consumer purchase intent. When consumers have confidence in the quality of a product, they are more likely to try it and make a purchase. High-quality products can satisfy the needs of the consumer and create more value for the consumer (Wang et al., 2020). Therefore, building good perceptions of food quality can increase consumers' purchase intentions (M. Anang, 2019). This is because consumers believe the product can meet their needs and expectations, thus increasing the likelihood of purchase. The EatSambel company needs to carefully compile and manage user-generated content (UGC) in its marketing strategy to ensure its relevance, authenticity, and usefulness to consumers. The company also needs to pay attention to the criticism and suggestions provided by UGC and comments from viewers to improve the quality of taste in the future. In addition, companies can also use UGC as a means to build consumer trust by ensuring the transparency and authenticity of user-generated content. By combining the variables of UGC, perceived food quality, and purchase intention in marketing strategies, companies can strengthen brand image, increase consumer trust, and stimulate the purchase intention of EatSambel products. For knowledge, this research can provide a deeper understanding of consumer behavior in the context of how UGC affects consumers' perceptions of food quality and purchase intention. The results of this study can provide new insights into the development of effective marketing strategies, especially in the use of UGC in food marketing campaigns. In addition, this research can provide practical implications in online reputation management, where companies can realize the importance of positive UGC management to improve brand image and consumer trust. Furthermore, this research can also serve as a basis for future research in the same area, contributing to the development of a broader knowledge and understanding of UGC's influence on food purchases. This study used a small sample size of 215 respondents, which is not sufficiently representative of the Indonesian

population. Future research should examine larger samples and add variables using other indicators to achieve more remarkable universality and in-depth results. However, these findings are expected to support the literature review and references that researchers will use to develop more in-depth research on the purchase intention.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks are given to the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Tanjungpura, which has allowed the author to publish this article. I also thanks to Titik Rosnani, Bintoro Bagus Purmono, Heriyadi, Pramana Saputra.

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