

The Role of Trust in Mediating Customer Reviews and Influencer Endorsements on Purchase Decisions: A Conceptual Study on GoFood

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Abstract

The rapid growth of online food delivery platforms has transformed consumer behavior, making digital engagement a critical determinant of purchase decisions. Among these factors, customer reviews and influencer endorsements have emerged as powerful drivers that shape consumer perceptions and choices. However, the effectiveness of these drivers often depends on the degree of trust consumers place in the platform. Without trust, even persuasive reviews or endorsements may fail to translate into actual purchasing behavior. This conceptual study seeks to examine the role of trust in mediating the relationship between customer reviews, influencer endorsements, and purchase decisions on the GoFood platform. Drawing upon theories of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), social influence, and trust in digital platforms, this research proposes a framework in which trust functions as a central mechanism that connects external cues (reviews and endorsements) with consumer decision-making. The framework emphasizes how positive reviews and credible influencer recommendations enhance platform trust, which in turn strengthens consumer intention to purchase. The purpose of this paper is not to present empirical findings, but rather to establish a conceptual foundation for future testing. By advancing this model, the study is expected to contribute theoretically to the literature on digital marketing and consumer trust, while offering practical insights for platform managers and marketers seeking to strengthen consumer confidence and loyalty. Ultimately, this conceptual framework highlights the importance of building trust as a sustainable strategy in the competitive online food delivery market.

Keywords: Customer Reviews, Influencer Endorsements, Trust, Purchase Decisions, Gofood, Conceptual Research.

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Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has reshaped consumer behavior in the food and beverage industry, particularly through online food delivery (OFD) platforms. In Indonesia, GoFood has become one of the most widely used platforms, offering convenience, variety, and accessibility to millions of users. This digital transformation has not only changed how consumers make purchase decisions but also how businesses communicate value and build relationships with their customers. Within this evolving ecosystem, understanding the psychological and social mechanisms that drive consumer decision-making has become increasingly important for both scholars and practitioners.

Previous studies highlight that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), especially in the form of customer reviews, significantly influences consumer trust and purchasing behavior. Reviews provide both informational and normative cues that shape consumer decision-making [1], [2]. Moreover, factors such as the perceived reputation of the platform and the type of product also affect how consumers interpret and act upon online reviews [3], [4]. These findings emphasize that reviews are not only sources of product information but also signals that can build or weaken consumer trust in the platform.

Alongside reviews, influencer endorsements have emerged as another powerful driver of consumer behavior. Social media influencers function as “human brands” who establish parasocial relationships with their audiences, thereby enhancing credibility and persuasion [5], [6]. Endorsements from credible influencers provide a sense of social proof that can directly influence consumer attitudes toward products and services. However, prior studies also show that the effectiveness of influencer marketing depends heavily on whether consumers perceive the platform and its endorsers as trustworthy [7].

While both customer reviews and influencer endorsements have been widely acknowledged in digital marketing literature, their effectiveness is not absolute. A critical element that often determines whether these persuasive cues lead to purchase decisions is consumer trust in the platform itself. Without trust, positive reviews or influencer endorsements may fail to translate into actual purchase behavior. This highlights an important gap in the literature: most studies treat reviews or endorsements as direct predictors of purchase decisions, yet few explicitly examine the mediating role of trust that connects these external cues to consumer decision-making.

This paper argues that trust is the central mechanism that bridges external signals—such as customer reviews and influencer endorsements—with purchase decisions in the context of GoFood. The novelty of this study lies in proposing a conceptual framework that integrates eWOM, social influence theory, and trust in digital platforms to explain consumer decision-making in online food delivery services. Unlike prior research, which often views trust as an outcome, this framework positions trust as a mediating variable that amplifies or weakens the effect of external cues.

Accordingly, the research problem addressed in this paper is: *How does trust mediate the relationship between customer reviews, influencer endorsements, and purchase decisions on the GoFood platform?* By formulating this question, the study aims to bridge the gap between existing theoretical discussions and practical challenges faced by digital platforms in fostering consumer confidence.

The purpose of this conceptual article is not to provide empirical validation, but rather to establish a solid theoretical foundation that can guide future empirical studies. From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the literature on digital marketing and consumer trust by highlighting the mediating role of trust in online consumption behavior [1], [7]. From a practical perspective, the findings are expected to provide actionable insights for GoFood managers and marketers in designing strategies that enhance consumer trust, thereby strengthening purchase intentions and loyalty. Ultimately, this study underscores that in the competitive landscape of online food delivery, trust is not merely a supportive factor but a sustainable strategy for long-term growth and differentiation.

Literature Review

The increasing reliance on digital platforms has significantly transformed consumer decision-making processes, particularly in the context of online food delivery (OFD) services. Among the wide range of factors that shape consumer choices, customer reviews and influencer endorsements have emerged as two dominant external cues. However, the effectiveness of these cues is not always straightforward; their influence on purchase decisions is often contingent upon the degree of trust consumers place in the platform. This section reviews the conceptual foundations, theoretical perspectives, and measurement dimensions of each construct—customer reviews, influencer endorsements, trust, and purchase decisions—while emphasizing the mediating role of trust.

2.1 Customer Reviews (eWOM)

Customer reviews, often framed as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), are user-generated messages that reflect consumers' evaluations of products or services on digital platforms. They provide informational and normative signals that shape consumer perceptions and purchase intentions [2], [1]. Theories of eWOM and information adoption highlight that reviews serve as diagnostic cues for consumers who cannot directly evaluate products before purchase. Key dimensions of reviews include valence (positive versus negative orientation), volume (the number of reviews available), credibility (trustworthiness of the reviewer), informativeness (depth and relevance of information), and recency (timeliness of the reviews). These indicators not only guide perceptions of product quality but also influence the credibility of the platform itself.

2.2 Influencer Endorsements

Influencer endorsements represent another powerful form of persuasion in the digital marketplace. Defined as promotional messages delivered by social media personalities with a significant following, influencer endorsements rely heavily on perceived credibility, expertise, and authenticity [5], [6]. Drawing on Source Credibility Theory, influencers exert impact when they are perceived as trustworthy and knowledgeable. Moreover, theories of social influence and parasocial interaction explain how consumers internalize influencers' recommendations due to identification and emotional connection with them. Important dimensions of influencer endorsements include credibility, attractiveness or likeability, brand-influencer fit, authenticity and transparency, and reach and engagement. These attributes together determine the extent to which endorsements translate into consumer trust and eventual purchase decisions.

2.3 Trust in Digital Platforms

Trust serves as a central mechanism in digital transactions, particularly when consumers face uncertainty and risk. In this study, platform trust is defined as consumers' willingness to rely on the competence, integrity, and benevolence of the platform to deliver services and safeguard their interests [8], [9]. Trust theory and trust transfer mechanisms suggest that credible reviews and authentic endorsements can transfer trust to the platform, thereby enhancing consumers' willingness to engage [7]. Dimensions of trust include competence or reliability, integrity or honesty, benevolence, security and privacy assurance, and reputation. By reducing perceived risks, trust acts as the foundation that enables consumers to transform external cues into confident decisions.

2.4 Purchase Decisions

Purchase decisions refer to the cognitive and behavioral processes through which consumers progress from intention to actual behavior. Within the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control predict behavioral intention, which in turn predicts behavior [10]. In the OFD context, consumer choices are strongly influenced by perceptions shaped through online cues such as reviews and endorsements. Dimensions of purchase decisions include purchase intention, actual purchase behavior, choice confidence or satisfaction, and loyalty or repeat purchase propensity. Measuring both intention and behavior provides a more holistic understanding of decision-making.

2.5 The Mediating Role of Trust

Although customer reviews and influencer endorsements provide valuable cues, their effectiveness in driving purchase decisions often depends on whether consumers perceive the platform as trustworthy. Without trust, even positive reviews or persuasive endorsements may fail to influence actual purchase behavior. From a theoretical perspective, trust functions as a mediating mechanism that transforms external informational cues into action. Reviews and endorsements enhance perceptions of credibility and authenticity, which increase platform trust; this, in turn, strengthens purchase intentions and behaviors [1], [6], [7]. Conceptually, trust reduces uncertainty, mitigates perceived risk, and fosters confidence making it a critical determinant in the consumer journey on platforms such as GoFood.

Taken together, the literature underscores that while reviews and endorsements are significant predictors of consumer choice, their influence is not direct or absolute. Instead, trust emerges as the pivotal connector, mediating the relationship between social cues and purchase outcomes. This conceptual framework not only enriches the theoretical understanding of consumer behavior in digital ecosystems but also offers practical guidance for managers and marketers of OFD platforms: building and sustaining trust is essential for translating engagement into sustained purchase behavior.

Table 1. Summary of Variables, Theories, and Dimension

Variable	Definition	Supporting Theory	Dimensions & Indicators
Customer Reviews (eWOM)	User-generated evaluations of products/services on digital platforms that influence perceptions and decisions (Filieri, 2015).	eWOM Theory, Information Adoption Model	1) Valence (positive/negative) 2) Volume (number of reviews) 3) Credibility (trustworthiness) 4) Informativeness (depth, detail) 5) Recency (timeliness)
Influencer Endorsements	Promotional messages from social media personalities leveraging credibility, attractiveness, and authenticity to persuade followers (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019).	Source Credibility Theory, Social Influence Theory, Parasocial Interaction	1) Credibility(expertise, trustworthiness) 2) Attractiveness/Likeability 3) Brand–Influencer Fit 4) Authenticity & Transparency 5) Reach & Engagement
Trust in Digital Platforms	Willingness to rely on the competence, integrity, and benevolence of the platform in delivering reliable and secure services (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).	Trust Theory, Trust Transfer Mechanisms	1) Competence/Reliability 2) Integrity/Honesty 3) Benevolence 4) Security & Privacy Assurance 5) Reputation
Purchase Decisions	The cognitive and behavioral process of forming intentions and engaging in actual purchase behavior on digital platforms (Ajzen, 1991).	Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	1) Purchase Intention 2) ActualPurchase Behavior 3) Choice Confidence/Satisfaction 4) Loyalty/Repeat Purchase Propensity

Research Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual research design, focusing on the development of a theoretical framework rather than the collection of primary empirical data. Conceptual studies are essential in advancing knowledge because they provide a systematic synthesis of existing theories and empirical findings, while simultaneously identifying gaps and proposing new linkages among variables. In this paper, the methodology centers on a literature-based approach to analyze the problem and propose a framework that positions trust as a mediating variable in the relationship between customer reviews, influencer endorsements, and purchase decisions on online food delivery platforms such as GoFood.

3.1 Problem-Solving Analysis

The central problem addressed in this research is the inconsistency of findings in previous studies regarding the influence of customer reviews and influencer endorsements on consumer purchase decisions. While prior research highlights the persuasive power of reviews [1], [2] and influencer endorsements [6], [5] evidence shows that these external cues are not always sufficient to drive actual purchase behavior. This gap indicates the need to identify an intervening mechanism that explains when and how these cues become effective.

To solve this problem, this study proposes trust in digital platforms as a mediating construct. Trust reduces uncertainty, mitigates perceived risks, and transforms external signals into consumer confidence and action [8], [7]. By integrating theories of eWOM, social

influence, and trust transfer, the conceptual framework addresses the shortcomings of existing models and provides a more comprehensive explanation of purchase behavior in the digital food delivery context.

3.2 Methods and Instruments

The method applied in this study is a structured literature review, which involves systematically collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing academic sources relevant to customer reviews, influencer endorsements, trust, and purchase decisions. Sources were drawn from reputable journals, books, and conference proceedings indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and other recognized databases. The analysis focused on identifying definitions, dimensions, and theoretical underpinnings of each variable, as well as prior empirical findings that demonstrate their interrelationships.

Since this is a conceptual paper, no instruments such as questionnaires or interviews were employed. Instead, the "instrument" of this research is the analytical framework constructed from the reviewed literature. This framework serves as a basis for future empirical testing and provides direction for operationalizing the variables in subsequent studies.

3.3 Research Analysis Technique

The analysis technique used is conceptual synthesis, which integrates multiple streams of research into a coherent model. The process involved:

1. Identifying core constructs: customer reviews, influencer endorsements, trust, and purchase decisions.
2. Mapping theoretical linkages based on prior studies and relevant theories.
3. Proposing mediating pathways where trust functions as the central mechanism connecting external cues to behavioral outcomes.
4. Formulating a conceptual model that can guide future empirical validation.

This technique ensures that the proposed framework is not only theoretically grounded but also practically relevant for online food delivery platforms and digital marketing strategies.

Results

The results of this conceptual study are presented in the form of a proposed theoretical framework that explains the mediating role of trust in the relationship between customer reviews, influencer endorsements, and purchase decisions on online food delivery platforms. Rather than empirical findings, the results reflect a systematic synthesis of prior literature and the identification of new linkages that contribute to both theory and practice.

First, the literature highlights that customer reviews serve as an essential form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), providing consumers with informational and normative cues that guide their evaluations of products and services. Positive reviews enhance perceptions of product quality and platform reliability, whereas negative reviews may undermine trust and discourage purchases [11], [12].

Second, influencer endorsements emerge as a powerful persuasion mechanism, leveraging credibility, authenticity, and parasocial interaction to influence consumer behavior [5], [6]. Influencer recommendations are particularly effective when there is a strong fit between the influencer and the brand, and when the message is perceived as authentic rather than overly commercialized.

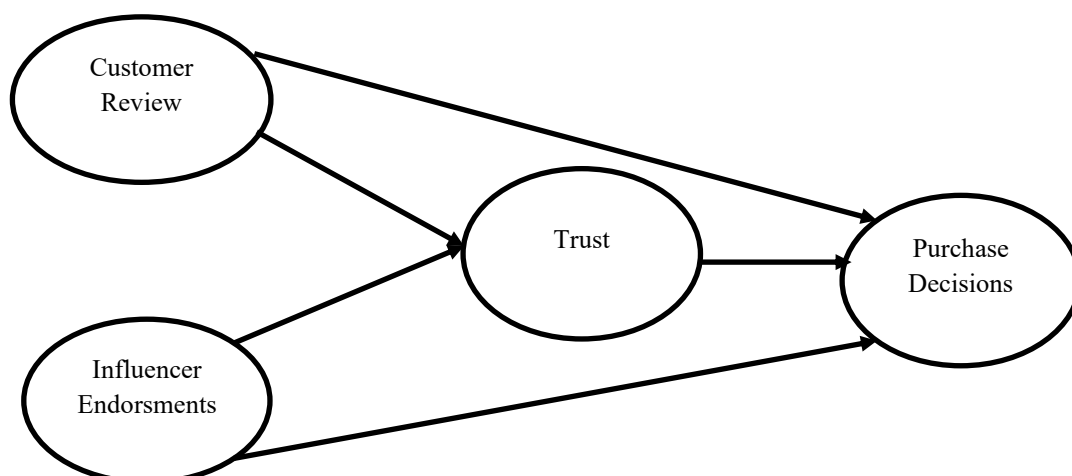
Third, this study identifies trust in digital platforms as the central mechanism that determines whether the persuasive impact of reviews and endorsements translates into actual purchase decisions. Trust reduces perceived uncertainty and risk, while strengthening consumers' confidence in relying on the platform [7], [8]. Without trust, even highly positive reviews or credible endorsements may fail to trigger consumer action.

Based on these insights, the conceptual model proposed in this study positions trust as a mediating variable that bridges the relationship between external cues (customer reviews and influencer endorsements) and purchase decisions. Specifically:

1. Customer reviews enhance platform trust, which in turn increases the likelihood of purchase.
2. Influencer endorsements strengthen platform trust, thereby encouraging consumers to act on their purchase intentions.
3. Trust functions as the mediator that transforms persuasive signals into behavioral outcomes, explaining why some reviews or endorsements succeed while others do not.

These results align with, yet extend, previous research. While prior studies have examined the direct effects of reviews and endorsements on consumer behavior, this study emphasizes the indirect pathways through trust, offering a more nuanced explanation of decision-making in digital consumption contexts. The model also reflects current consumer realities, where skepticism toward online content is rising, and trust becomes the critical determinant of whether digital cues translate into actual behavior.

Ultimately, the results of this conceptual paper provide a solution to the research problem by presenting a framework that clarifies the role of trust in digital marketing dynamics. This framework contributes theoretically by integrating eWOM, social influence, and trust theories, and practically by offering insights for managers of online food delivery platforms. By focusing on building and maintaining trust, platform managers can maximize the effectiveness of customer reviews and influencer campaigns, ensuring sustainable consumer engagement and loyalty in the competitive digital marketplace.



Picture 1. Research Framework

Conclusion

This conceptual study concludes that trust plays a pivotal role in mediating the influence of customer reviews and influencer endorsements on purchase decisions in the context of online food delivery services such as GoFood. Reviews and endorsements serve as persuasive external cues; however, their effectiveness fundamentally depends on the degree of consumer trust in both the source of information and the platform itself. Without sufficient trust, even the most positive review or the most credible endorsement may fail to translate into actual purchasing behavior.

The conceptual framework proposed in this study emphasizes trust as the central mechanism that bridges external stimuli and consumer decision-making processes. By positioning trust as a mediator, this model illustrates that consumer behavior in digital platforms is shaped not only by the availability and persuasiveness of information but also by the psychological assurance and relational confidence that the platform provides.

The implications of this study are twofold. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on digital marketing, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and consumer trust by offering an integrative conceptual model that connects customer reviews, influencer endorsements, and purchase decisions. Practically, it provides valuable insights for managers and marketers of online food delivery platforms. For GoFood in particular, enhancing transparency in customer review systems, ensuring the authenticity of endorsements, and fostering credibility through verified influencers can strengthen consumer confidence. In addition, implementing trust-building mechanisms such as verified purchase labels, algorithmic detection of fake reviews, and stricter influencer partnership standards may help ensure that consumer trust is consistently reinforced.

Ultimately, this study highlights that building and sustaining trust is not only a strategic necessity but also a sustainable competitive advantage in the highly competitive online food delivery market. Future research is encouraged to empirically test this framework across diverse platforms and cultural contexts to validate its applicability and broaden the understanding of trust-driven consumer decision-making in digital ecosystems.

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