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Investigating the Relationship Between User-Generated Content and Purchase Intention: Brand Image as a Mediator

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A B S T R A C T

Digital innovation has expanded the role of consumers in shaping brand image through User-Generated Content (UGC). This study aims to analyze the effect of UGC on purchase intention with brand image as an intermediary variable. Using quantitative methods and questionnaires as data collection instruments, this study involved 130 Gen Z respondents in Malang City who were selected through purposive sampling. The analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the help of the SmartPLS 3.0 application. The results of the study indicate that UGC has a significant influence on brand image, which in turn increases consumer purchase intention. The more positive UGC created by consumers, the stronger the brand image formed and the resulting purchase intention. This study highlights the importance of marketers implementing UGC strategies to build authentic relationships with consumers, such as through interactive campaigns and online communities. However, this study is limited to a sample of Gen Z in Malang and a cross-sectional approach, so these findings may not be fully generalizable to other demographic groups or regions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The culinary industry in Malang City shows rapid growth influenced by the demand for practical and affordable food, especially among students and young workers who dominate Malang City, in addition, fast food restaurants present a special attraction for young consumers who tend to like unique menu variations and differentiation that is adjusted to local tastes, as implemented by Gacoan in its product innovation (Erinda et al. (2016).

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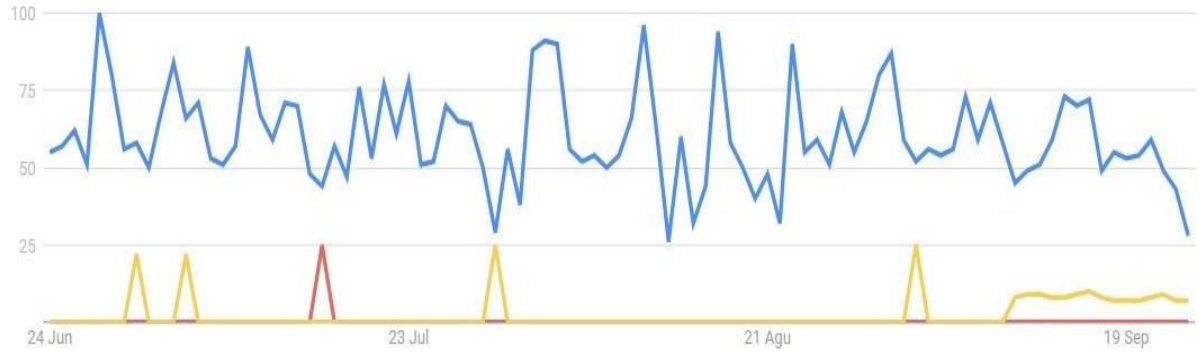

Figure 1. Comparison Chart of Interest Rates Over Time
Source: https://trends.google.com, 2024

Based on figure 1 of the Google Trend research graph in the last 3 months, it is known that interest in Mie Gacoan has reached 88% and 0% for Mie Jebew and 12% for Whizz Mie (Google Trends 2024). From this data, it can be seen that many people buy noodle products at the Mie Gacoan restaurant, Malang branch. Mie Gacoan was founded in early 2016 in Malang City, East Java. The Mie Gacoan trademark from PT Pesta Pora has emerged as a leading spicy noodle restaurant chain in Indonesia, with more than 100 branches throughout the country (Jati & Sudrajat, 2024). This development shows that this culinary business has succeeded in attracting customer buying interest and has been able to grow into a large network. Mie Gacoan's strong brand image plays an important role in attracting consumers (Kurnianingsih & Achsa, 2022).

This research will be tested on generation Z in Malang City. According to Hu (2023) the UGC model presents an opportunity to bring in Gen Z consumers, who are the main creators and consumers of content. UGC is considered an effective marketing strategy for a tech-savvy generation like Generation Z. According to Stillman (2017), Generation Z is also called the internet generation or the internet generation born between 1995 and 2012. Generation Z is a generation that understands technology and can easily find various forms of user-generated content spread across the internet and social media. When choosing a restaurant, Generation Z prioritizes variety, junk food options, and the availability of fast food (Stillman, 2017). Malang City was chosen as the research location because of its easy access to the Mie Gacoan restaurant and Malang City is dominated by 889,761 students, most of whom are Generation Z (BPS Malang City 2023). Purchase intention is an important issue to study in various industrial fields today (Xiao & yang, 2019), especially the creative industry, namely the food industry. Purchase intention is one of the factors that plays a very vital role in the success of a business (Nurjannah, 2022). Purchase intention is a choice made by customers after analyzing similar competitor products (Selly & Purba, 2023).

One of the factors that influences the emergence of purchase intention in potential consumers is user-generated content on social media that reviews a brand or product (Umbara, 2021) or commonly referred to as UGC. According to Kim & Johnson (2020), UGC can be described as "media content created by members of the general public and includes all forms of online content created, initiated, distributed, and consumed by users". This statement is not much different from the statement put forward by Gordon & Wilson (2019) who argue that UGC is content published on social media or accessible to the public through networking websites and is created exclusively through amateur practices and routines. Likewise, according to Bruns (2016) UGC is content in the form of photos, videos, or even blogs containing information uploaded by users, or customers, to their own social media or other web-based applications to review the products or services they purchase. UGC in marketing refers to brand-related content created by anyone who does not officially represent a business, UGC can

take many forms including podcasts, videos, reviews, or social media updates (Thomsett-Scott, 2014). UGC is becoming increasingly important in various aspects of consumer behavior and product development, Unboxing videos, one form of UGC, can influence purchase intention through social interaction with unboxers, which serves as an effective promotional channel (Hyosu, 2020). In Malaysia, UGC is quite integrated into newsroom practices, especially as a source of news material, with viral content considered to have great potential for verification and publication (Othman, 2021). Consumers rely on brand-related UGC, such as reviews, to seek pre-purchase information (Cheong & Mohammed-Baksh, 2021). According to Anisa & Marlena (2022) UGC-generated content encourages users to watch videos and attracts purchase intention. UGC is important in the world of research because UGC is a strong construct in shaping online users' perceptions in driving their behavioral purchase intentions (Nusairat et al., 2021). In addition to UGC, brand image is also a factor in shaping purchase intention. Brand image is a consumer's impression of a brand (Sikteubun et al., 2022). Meanwhile, according to Kotler & Keller (2016), brand image is "the perceptions and beliefs held by consumers, as reflected in associations stored in consumer memory, consumer perceptions and beliefs, as reflected in associations in consumer memory". Creating the right brand image for a product will be very useful for marketers, because brand image will influence consumer assessments of expected alternative brands. Brand image must provide a good perception in terms of quality so that it can increase purchase intentions (Neupane, 2019). Several previously studied studies have revealed that brand image can also contribute to bridging the relationship between perception variables and behavioral intentions (Nusairat et al., 2021).

2. METHOD

The method applied in this study is a quantitative method with a descriptive approach. This study was conducted in Malang City, which consists of 5 sub-districts such as Sukun, Blimbing, Kedungkandang, Lowokawaru and Klojen. Data analysis was carried out using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method using SmartPLS software version 3.0 to test the relationship between variables and the significance of the influence of variables in the research model. This study uses purposive sampling which is a technique for calculating the number of samples that considers certain criteria. In this study, the criteria determined were the people of Malang City with an age range of 19 to 27 years because at that age limit is the phase of identity exploration and decision-making decisions including brand preferences and have seen reviews or content about Mie Gacoan. This study uses a Likert scale measurement. The Likert scale is used to measure the attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of a person or group about social phenomena. In measuring the variables that have been determined previously, a five-level Likert scale is used with points at each level. Table 1 shows the questionnaires of research.

Table 1. Item Questionnaire

Variables	Sub Variables	Indicators
UGC Delia Vazquez et al. (2020)	Aesthetic experience	1. Sensory involvement. 2. Emotional response.
	Relational experience	1. Social support. 2. Communication.
	Exploratory behavior	1. A sense of curiosity. 2. Interaction.
	Emotional Experience	1. Emotion Intensity. 2. Behavioral response.
	Flow Experience	1. Full engagement. 2. Feeling in complete control of the action.

Variables	Sub Variables	Indicators
2. Brand image (Shimp, 2010)	Sincerity	1. Honesty. 2. Openness.
	Excitement	1. Emotional reactions. 2. Connectedness.
	Competence	1. Reputation. 2. Product and service quality.
	Sophistication	1. Customer experience. 2. Product quality.
3. Purchase Intention (Ferdinand, 2014)	Transactional Interest,	1. Product quality. 2. Product benefits.
	Referral Interest	1. Recommendations 2. Content.
	Preferential Interest,	1. Brands are in demand. 2. Brands are the main choice.
	Exploratory Interest,	1. Interest 2. Attract.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Results Outer Model

Instrument testing is carried out by applying the PLS algorithm using the SmartPLS version 3.0 program. In the context of the PLS equation of this algorithm, the assessment of data validity and reliability is carried out.

3.1.2 Convergent Validity Analysis Test

According to Hair et al. (2017) in the convergent validity analysis, if the value is less than 0.5, it is recommended to remove the variable from the model. If the measurement value is more than 0.5 but is still considered invalid, a gradual removal step from the model is carried out until validity is achieved. After achieving validity, further testing can be continued. The final stage in the Convergent Validity examination is when the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value has exceeded 0.5.

Based on Figure 2. The magnitude of the outer loading convergent validity value of each item measuring the brand image variable is shown in Z1.2 at 0.727; Z2.1 0.681; Z2.2 0.685; Z3.1 0.752. The magnitude of the loading factor value of each item measuring the purchase intent variable is 0.646 for Y1.2; 0.687 for Y2.2; 0.748 for Y3.1; 0.791 for Y3.2; 0.726 for Y4.1; 0.792 for Y4.2. Furthermore, the magnitude of the outer loading value for the UGC variable is 0.805 for X1.1; 0.692 for X1.2; 0.721 for X2.2; 0.663 for X4.2; 0.716 for X5.1. So it can be concluded that all items that measure each variable in this study based on the loading factor value are declared valid because they have a value of more than 0.5. Based on Table 2. the AVE value for the brand image variable is 0.507, the AVE value for the purchase intent variable is 0.538, and the AVE value for the UGC variable is 0.539. The average variance extracted (AVE) value for each variable has exceeded 0.5, indicating that the convergent validity stage is considered valid and can be continued with the next test. It can be seen in Table 3 that the R Square for the Brand Image variable reaches 0.532, while for the Purchase Intention variable it is 0.647. This shows that the exogenous influence on the endogenous is categorized as moderate, referring to the minimum

limit of 0.33 explained by (Duryadi, 2021). This result can be interpreted that together, the independent variables have a 53% influence on brand image and 65% on Purchase Intention.

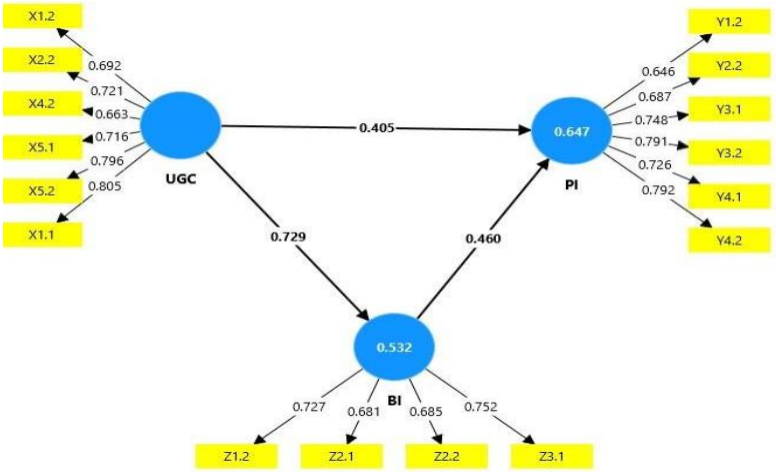

Figure 2. Path Diagram Model
Source: Data processed by researchers (2024)

Reliability Test

Table 2. Composite Reliability

	Cronbach's Alfa	rho_A	Composite Raliability	AVE	Information
BI	0.675	0.676	0.804	0.507	Valid
PI	0.827	0.833	0.874	0.538	Valid
UGC	0.827	0.829	0.875	0.539	Valid

Source: Data processed by researchers (2024)

Inner Model

Tabel 3. R-Square

	R squared	Adjusted R Square
BI	0.532	0.528
PI	0.647	0.641

Source: Data processed by researchers (2024)

Hypothesis Test Results of direct and indirect effects

Table 4. Coefficient Path

	Original Sample	Sample	Dev-Standard	T Statistic	P Value	Information
UGC -> PI	0.405	0.406	0.082	4.949	0.000	Significant
UGC -> BI	0.729	0.727	0.050	14.469	0.000	Significant
BI -> PI	0.460	0.458	0.088	5.203	0.000	Significant

Source: Data processed by researchers (2024)

In Duryadi's (2021) perspective, a significant coefficient can be measured by comparing the T- T-statistic > T-table value, which is equivalent to 1.96. Based on Table 4. Above, it can be concluded that brand image directly has a significant influence on purchase intention because the value of 5.203> T-Table. Likewise, UGC has a positive and significant influence on brand image, marked by a t-statistic value of 14.469, which exceeds the T-Table. Meanwhile, UGC has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention with a value of 4.949> T-Table.

Tabel.5 Mediation Test Results

	Original Sample	Sample	Dev-Standard	T Statistic	P Value	Information
UGC->BI -> PI	0.335	0.341	0.078	4.303	0.000	Significant

Source: Data processed by researchers (2024)

The results of the analysis are in Table 5. show that there is a positive and significant influence of UGC on purchase intention, through the intermediary of the brand image variable. This is evident from the T-table value, P-Value of 0.00 <0.05, indicating that the mediation relationship between UGC, brand image and purchase intention has a positive and significant influence. Therefore, the role of brand image in mediating the influence of UGC on purchase intention can be considered as partial mediation which means that the independent variable can directly influence the dependent variable without involving or through the mediating variable.

The above illustrates the relationship between variables as a whole, the table explains that each relationship has significant relationship and provides a detailed explanation of the influence between variables. The relationship between brand image and purchase intention when viewed from the t- statistic value, which is smaller than the t-table 1.96, indicates that this relationship is significant. With a p-value of 0.00 which is smaller than 0.05, the hypothesis stating "brand image on purchase intention" is accepted. The relationship between UGC and brand image can be seen from the t-statistic value of 14.469, which is greater than the t-table of 1.96, indicating that this relationship is significant. With a p-value of 0.000 which is smaller than 0.05, the hypothesis stating "the effect of UGC on Purchase Intention" is accepted. The relationship between UGC and brand image can be seen from the t-statistic value of 4.949, which is greater than the t-table of 1.96, indicating that this relationship is significant. With a p-value of 0.000 which is smaller than 0.05, the hypothesis stating "the effect of UGC on Purchase Intention" is accepted. UGC indirectly has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention through the brand image of Generation Z intermediaries in Malang City towards Mie Gacoan products, so that hypothesis (H4) is accepted. The results of the analysis show that UGC has a positive and significant effect with a T-statistic value of 4.303 which is greater than the T-table of 1.96. A P value of less than 0.00 confirms that the mediation relationship between UGC, brand image, and purchase intention is highly significant.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Influence of UGC on Purchase Intention

The results of this study indicate that UGC has a significant and positive influence on purchase intention, which means that H1 is accepted. UGC can influence purchase intention of Mie Gacoan in Malang City according to research because UGC content related to Mie Gacoan products creates feelings, emotional responses, and full involvement with Generation Z in

Malang City. Thus, the results of this study support the hypothesis that UGC has a positive and significant impact on purchase intention of Mie Gacoan products in Malang City.
These results are in line with research by Nusairat et al. (2021) which found that UGC functions as an effective form of marketing because content from consumers is more easily accepted and trusted by other consumers, thus contributing to increased purchase interest. Previous studies, such as by Anisa & Marlena (2022), also showed that UGC plays an important role in driving purchase interest. These findings support the theory that UGC, which is considered more honest and personal, can shape consumer purchase intention more effectively than advertising from the brand itself.

3.2.2 Influence of UGC on Brand Image

The second hypothesis in this study is that UGC has a positive and significant influence on the brand image of Mie Gacoan in Malang City so that H2 is accepted. The results of the analysis show that consumers tend to trust content created by other users because it is considered more honest and impartial than official advertisements. Positive UGC can strengthen consumer perceptions of brand quality and credibility, thereby forming a better brand image. The results of this study indicate that UGC directly affects brand image.

The results of this study indicate that User-Generated Content (UGC) has a significant influence on brand image. The consumer perception theory by Kotler & Keller (2016) supports this finding, where UGC is considered more authentic compared to official marketing content, increasing consumers' positive perceptions of the brand. This finding is in line with studies by Jesselyn & Sari (2024) and Kusuma et al. (2023), which show that UGC strengthens brand image in the eyes of consumers through higher credibility than conventional advertising. Thus, this study enriches the theory of brand image in a digital context and shows that UGC can significantly improve brand image, especially among Generation Z consumers.

3.2.3 The Influence of Brand Image on Purchase Intention

The results of this study indicate that brand image has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention of Mie Gacoan products in Malang City. The majority of respondents who filled in were dominated by students who prioritized the reputation and quality of products and services. Thus, the results of this study support the hypothesis that brand image has a positive and significant impact on purchase intention of Mie Gacoan products in Malang City. These results are in line with research studies by Mao et al. (2020) and Isyanto et al. (2019) also showed a positive influence of brand image on purchase intention, which supports the view that a good brand image can motivate consumers to buy products. These findings strengthen the understanding that brands that have a positive image become more competitive in attracting consumer purchase interest, confirming the importance of image building strategies for marketers.

3.2.4. The Influence of UGC on Purchase Intent Through Brand Image

The results of the study show that brand image plays a mediating role between UGC and purchase intention, which means that H4 is accepted. UGC not only increases purchase intention in Mie Gacoan products directly but also strengthens brand image which then influences consumer purchase intention in Mie Gacoan products in Malang City. These results are in line with the research of Keller & Brexendorf's (2019) brand image theory which states that brand image is an important factor in purchase intention because it forms trust. Studies by Nusairat et al. (2021) and Ryeong & Jyeong (2021) also support this view by showing that brand image can bridge the effect of UGC on purchase intention. Thus, this study confirms

that an effective UGC strategy can form a strong brand image, which in turn increases purchase intention.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine the effect of UGC on purchase intention, both directly and through intervention variables, namely brand image, on Mie Gacoan products for Gen Z in Malang City. Based on the analysis conducted, it was found that UGC has a significant positive effect on purchase intention through brand image on Mie Gacoan products. This shows that content generated by consumers (such as reviews, comments, photos, or videos) can form a positive perception of brand image. When brand image increases due to positive UGC, consumers' desire to make a purchase (purchase intention) also increases. In other words, UGC plays an important role in creating positive experiences and perceptions that motivate consumers to try and buy Mie Gacoan products.Therefore, this study provides suggestions, namely, 1.) Strengthening UGC Strategy, Mie Gacoan can encourage more UGC by holding online campaigns or competitions that invite consumers to share their experiences about the product. For example, an invitation to upload photos or videos while enjoying Mie Gacoan with a certain hashtag can increase the amount of content generated by consumers. 2.) Building a Consumer Community on Social Media. By creating a space for consumers to share their experiences through social media platforms, Mie Gacoan can further strengthen consumer engagement and strengthen emotional connections with the brand. This can be done through special groups or story features that feature content from loyal consumers. 3.) Actively manage and respond to UGC. Companies also need to actively monitor and respond to UGC, both positive and negative, to build more personal interactions with consumers. Liking, commenting on, or sharing positive UGC content can increase engagement and strengthen brand image. 4.) Improve Customer Experience. UGC is usually influenced by customer experience. Therefore, it is important for Mie Gacoan to continue to maintain and improve the quality of products and services so that consumers feel satisfied and encouraged to share their positive experiences voluntarily. With the right strategy, Mie Gacoan can maximize the potential of UGC in improving brand image and purchase intention.

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