

The Influence of Social Proof and User-Generated Content (UGC) on Brand Perception through Consumer Trust among Digital Consumers

Osly Usman¹, Cakra Nenggala Samudra Wijaya²

¹Department of Digital Business, Faculty of Economics, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia

²Department of Digital Business, Faculty of Economics, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia.

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of Social Proof and User-Generated Content (UGC) on brand perception among digital consumers, with a particular focus on the mediating role of consumer trust. As digital platforms become central to consumer interactions, Social Proof—such as product reviews, testimonials, likes, and shares—has emerged as a powerful factor shaping consumer decisions and enhancing brand credibility. Similarly, UGC, which includes consumer-generated content like photos, videos, and honest product reviews, provides an authentic perspective often viewed as more trustworthy than traditional brand-generated content. These digital peer influences play a pivotal role in modern brand perception, as consumers increasingly seek real, relatable experiences when assessing brand value. This research employs a quantitative approach, targeting digital consumers in the Jabodetabek area to examine how Social Proof and UGC contribute to brand perception through the intermediary of consumer trust. By analyzing survey data, this study aims to reveal the extent to which trust, fostered by Social Proof and UGC, can strengthen brand perception and consumer loyalty. The findings are anticipated to provide valuable insights into digital marketing strategies, underscoring the importance of peer recommendations and user-generated authenticity in building trusted consumer-brand relationships. Ultimately, this research seeks to guide marketers in optimizing digital strategies that resonate with the expectations and trust preferences of today's digital consumers.

Keyword: Social Proof; User-Generated Content; Consumer Trust; Brand Perception; Digital Consumers; Digital Marketing

1. Introduction

Consumer behavior shifts in the digital era have made social media a powerful tool for influencing purchasing decisions. Social Proof and User-Generated Content (UGC) are increasingly recognized as critical in shaping brand perception by building consumer trust, which enhances brand loyalty and purchase intention. In 2021, 79% of Indonesian internet users shopped online, with many influenced by user-shared content on social media (We Are Social, 2021).

Social Proof, where individuals base decisions on others' actions, is evident in digital platforms through product reviews, testimonials, and engagement metrics like likes and shares. Positive reviews can increase conversions significantly, especially for higher-priced products (HubSpot, 2022). Similarly, UGC—content created by consumers such as reviews, photos, and videos—offers authenticity that often surpasses firm-generated content in trustworthiness, influencing 74% of purchase decisions (Statista, 2022).

Trust generated through Social Proof and UGC directly shapes brand perception. Studies show that consumer trust mediates the relationship between UGC and purchase intention, with trusted peer-generated content fostering positive brand perceptions (Mathur et al., 2021; Nosi et al., 2021).

Amid growing consumer reliance on digital platforms, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses must understand the interplay between Social Proof, UGC, and consumer trust. This knowledge is vital for crafting effective digital marketing strategies in an increasingly discerning marketplace.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Proof

Social Proof, a psychological phenomenon introduced by Robert Cialdini, describes how individuals rely on others' actions or decisions, particularly in uncertain situations. In the digital sphere, it manifests through visible user feedback such as reviews, testimonials, likes, and purchase counts. For instance, platforms like Tokopedia and Shopee in Indonesia leverage customer reviews to boost consumer trust, which can increase trust in emerging brands by up to 30% (Iskandar & Mahendra, 2021). Various forms of Social Proof include consumer reviews, endorsements by influencers, and engagement metrics like likes and shares. Detailed reviews significantly influence purchase decisions, surpassing simplistic star ratings (Wibowo & Astuti, 2022). Indicators of Social Proof effectiveness include the credibility of the source, the relevance and quantity of reviews, and detailed evaluations of product advantages and drawbacks (Sutanto, 2017).

2.2 User-Generated Content (UGC)

UGC encompasses content such as reviews, images, videos, or comments created by users rather than brands. It provides authenticity, making it more credible than traditional advertisements. In Indonesia's beauty and fashion industries, UGC on platforms like Instagram and TikTok can improve brand loyalty by 37% among young consumers (Andriani & Sutrisno, 2021). Examples of UGC include reviews on e-commerce sites and social media posts. Hashtag campaigns often encourage UGC creation, fostering greater engagement and promotional

opportunities (Prasetyo et al., 2021). High-quality and authentic UGC tailored to audience preferences has a stronger impact on brand perception and purchase intent (Kusuma et al., 2022). Key UGC indicators include content quality, originality, and audience relevance (Wijayanti & Saputra, 2020).

2.3 Consumer Trust

Consumer trust reflects confidence in a brand's reliability and delivery on promises. In digital marketing, trust is often built through Social Proof and UGC. Transparent information, brand reputation, and authentic testimonials are critical trust-building factors. Brands with positive user reviews are significantly more trusted, with up to 85% of Indonesian consumers influenced by them (Rizky et al., 2022). Testimonials from relatable users enhance product credibility, increasing trust by 45% (Prasetyo et al., 2021). Indicators of consumer trust include product quality, reliability, effective communication, and consumer satisfaction (Tjiptono, 2017).

2.4 Brand Perception

Brand perception encompasses consumer attitudes shaped by direct and indirect interactions with the brand. Digital brand perception is heavily influenced by UGC and Social Proof. Positive reviews and user endorsements on platforms like Instagram and YouTube enhance brand credibility (Wahyuni et al., 2023). Continuous high-quality product offerings and active social media engagement contribute to positive brand perceptions. Key metrics for assessing brand perception include brand awareness, perceived quality, competitive pricing, and consumer preference (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Kim & Lee, 2018).

3. Material and Method

3.1 Research Object

The research focuses on digital consumers in the Jabodetabek region actively using social media and digital platforms for consumption and brand interactions. This study examines the influence of Social Proof and User-Generated Content (UGC) on brand perception, with consumer trust as a mediating factor.

The target population includes individuals who:

- Actively use social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, or YouTube to seek product or brand information.
- Have encountered reviews, testimonials, or user-generated content related to specific products or services.
- Utilize social media and e-commerce platforms in their purchasing decisions.

The study emphasizes urban dynamics in a tech-savvy society, leveraging data from 100 respondents selected to meet the criteria for statistical representation. This ensures a comprehensive understanding of the interaction between Social Proof, UGC, and brand perception in a digital context.

3.2 Conceptual Definitions

3.2.1 Social Proof

Social Proof refers to social validation from others' actions or opinions, influencing individual decisions in uncertain situations. In digital marketing, it strengthens consumer trust through visible endorsements such as reviews, testimonials, likes, and shares. Social Proof is most effective when consumers are uncertain or relate to others with similar needs (Cialdini, 2022). Its primary forms include:

- Customer reviews and testimonials that reflect real experiences.
- Metrics such as likes and shares, indicating product popularity.
- Influencer endorsements leveraging public figures' trust to boost brand credibility.
- Positive social validation can convert consumer doubt into trust, significantly influencing brand perception and purchase behavior (Wardhana, 2023).

3.2.2 User-Generated Content (UGC)

UGC includes content created and shared by users, offering authenticity compared to company-generated material. It comprises reviews, photos, and videos that illustrate real-life product applications. Authenticity, emotional connection, and viral potential make UGC essential for building positive brand perceptions (Kusuma et al., 2022). UGC fosters trust and engagement, especially on platforms like Instagram, where it facilitates interactive communication between consumers and brands (Kertamukti, 2019).

3.2.3 Consumer Trust

Consumer trust is the confidence in a brand's integrity, honesty, and capability to meet expectations. It is a cornerstone for long-term relationships, driving loyalty and repeat purchases. Trust in digital contexts arises from transparent communication, consistent product quality, and authentic testimonials reflecting real consumer experiences (Wardhana, 2023). Trust also mediates the effects of Social Proof and UGC on brand perception, enhancing credibility and customer retention.

3.2.4 Brand Perception

Brand perception reflects consumers' understanding and evaluation of a brand based on their experiences and received information. In digital contexts, it is shaped by UGC and Social Proof through interactions on social media (Wahyuni et al., 2023). Key dimensions include brand awareness, perceived quality, and consumer preference. Positive brand perception fosters strong loyalty, making it a strategic asset in competitive markets (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

3.3 Operational Definitions

Operational definitions are used to describe in detail the variables to be measured in this research. This is aimed at ensuring that each variable can be measured consistently, systematically, and in alignment with the research objectives. By providing operational definitions, this study facilitates the process of data collection and hypothesis testing through appropriate statistical approaches. The following table presents the operational definitions of each variable examined in this study:

Variabel	Indikator	Pengertian	Skala Ukur (Likert)	Item
<i>Social Proof</i> (X1)	Quality of Reviews	The level of detail and accuracy of reviews provided by consumers	1-5	2
	Number of Reviews	The number of reviews available to provide information about a product or brand	1-5	2
	Reviewer Reputation	The credibility level of the buyer providing the review	1-5	2
	Consumer Trust	The level of consumer confidence in a product or brand based on social reviews	1-5	2
	Purchase Experience	Perceptions gained based on consumers' actual experience with the product or brand	1-5	2
<i>User-Generated Content</i> (UGC) (X2)	Content Quality	The quality level of visuals and information provided by consumers	1-5	2
	Number of Contents	The quantity of content produced by consumers relevant to the product or brand	1-5	2
	Content Originality	The uniqueness and authenticity level of content produced by users	1-5	2
	Content Relevance	The relevance level of content to the values and messages the brand intends to convey	1-5	2
	Consumer Interaction	The extent to which other consumers respond to and engage with the content	1-5	2
Consumer Trust (Z)	Product Quality	The level of consistency of product quality with consumer expectations	1-5	2
	Product Reliability	The level of consumer confidence in the consistency and reliability of the product	1-5	2
	Consumer Satisfaction	The level of consumer satisfaction with the experience of using a product or service	1-5	2
Brand Perception (Y)	Brand Awareness	The level of consumer recognition of a brand	1-5	2

	Brand Image	The mental image, whether positive or negative, towards the brand	1-5	2
	Consumer Preference	The tendency of consumers to choose a specific brand over others	1-5	2
	Perceived Quality	The level of consumer perception regarding product quality based on experience or reviews	1-5	2
	Competitive Pricing	The extent to which the product price is deemed reasonable in line with the offered value	1-5	2

3.4 Type of Research

The type of research used is quantitative with a descriptive and causal approach. This study aims to analyze the influence of Social Proof and User-Generated Content (UGC) on brand perception, with consumer trust as a mediating variable. This approach is chosen because it is relevant for testing relationships between variables based on numerical data from respondents.

3.5 Population and Sample

The population of this study comprises digital consumers in the Jabodetabek area who are actively using social media and e-commerce platforms. This population is chosen because it aligns with the characteristics relevant to the phenomenon being studied, namely the interaction between Social Proof, UGC, and brand perception through consumer trust.

Population criteria:

- Actively use social media such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or Facebook as a source of product/brand information.
- Have been exposed to Social Proof (reviews, testimonials, likes, shares) or user-generated content (UGC) related to specific products or services.
- Aged between 18–40 years, as this age range is considered the most active in using digital media.

The sample is selected using purposive sampling, where respondents are chosen based on criteria relevant to the research. The planned sample size is 100 respondents to ensure sufficiently representative data.

3.6 Data Collection Techniques

Data is collected through an online questionnaire designed using digital platforms such as Google Forms. The questionnaire is divided into two main sections:

1. Demographics Section: Identifying respondent information such as age, gender, education, and social media usage patterns.
2. Core Section: Consists of statements measuring research variables using a Likert scale of 1-5:
1 = Strongly Disagree

- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

3.7 Research Instrument

The research instrument is a questionnaire measuring four main variables:

1. Social Proof: Review quality, review quantity, reviewer reputation, purchase experience.
2. User-Generated Content (UGC): Content quality, content quantity, content originality, content relevance, consumer interaction.
3. Consumer Trust: Product quality, product reliability, customer satisfaction, information transparency.
4. Brand Perception: Brand awareness, brand image, consumer preference, perceived product quality, competitive pricing.

3.8 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data is analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 to ensure accuracy in structural model testing and hypothesis testing. The analysis process is carried out in several stages:

1. Validity and Reliability Testing
 - Convergent Validity: Measured using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), where a value ≥ 0.5 is considered adequate.
 - Discriminant Validity: Using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion to ensure that each variable correlates more strongly with its indicators than with other variables.
 - Reliability: Using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha to ensure internal consistency, with a value ≥ 0.7 considered reliable.
2. Evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The outer model is used to evaluate the relationship between latent variables (Social Proof, UGC, consumer trust, brand perception) and their indicators.
3. Evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model)
 - Using path coefficients to evaluate relationships between variables.
 - Calculating the R-Square value to measure the predictive strength of the structural model.
 - Multicollinearity Testing
4. Interpretation of Results and Conclusions

The results of the analysis are interpreted to address the research problems, evaluate the research model, and support or reject the formulated hypotheses.

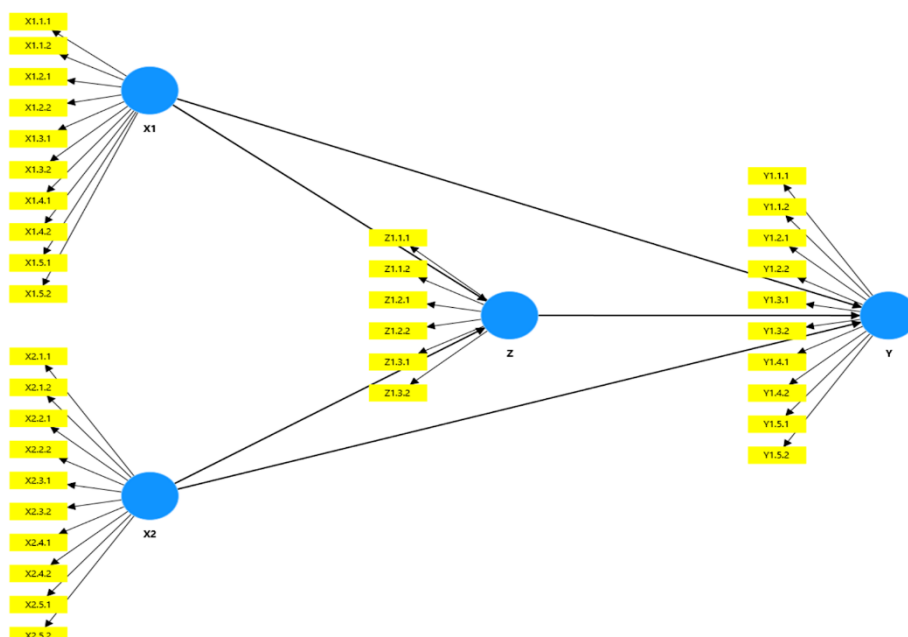
4. Result

4.1 Outer Model

In the analysis using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, the evaluation of the Outer Model is conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the indicators used. The Outer Model aims to evaluate the relationship between the indicators (measured variables) and the latent constructs they represent.

4.1.1 Loading Factor

	X1	X2	Y	Z
X1.1.1	0.726			
X1.1.2	0.741			
X1.2.1	0.723			



X1.2.2	0.718			
X1.3.1	0.670			
X1.3.2	0.750			
X1.4.1	0.730			
X1.4.2	0.739			
X1.5.1	0.758			
X1.5.2	0.775			
X2.1.1		0.763		
X2.1.2		0.775		
X2.2.1		0.710		
X2.2.2		0.711		
X2.3.1		0.724		
X2.3.2		0.724		
X2.4.1		0.746		
X2.4.2		0.712		
X2.5.1		0.776		
X2.5.2		0.773		
Y1.1.1			0.713	
Y1.1.2			0.730	
Y1.2.1			0.728	
Y1.2.2			0.724	
Y1.3.1			0.774	
Y1.3.2			0.736	
Y1.4.1			0.774	
Y1.4.2			0.755	
Y1.5.1			0.737	
Y1.5.2			0.729	
Z1.1.1				0.716
Z1.1.2				0.696
Z1.2.1				0.764

Z1.2.2				0.778
Z1.3.1				0.727
Z1.3.2				0.737

Indicator validity indicates how well an indicator represents its latent construct. This is measured through the loading factor, which shows the strength of the relationship between each indicator and the construct it represents.

Validity Criteria:

- A loading factor is considered to meet the criteria if it has a value of ≥ 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014). However, indicators with loading values between 0.6–0.7 are still acceptable if the construct remains reliable overall (Chin, 1998).
- Indicators with loading values below 0.6 should ideally be eliminated, as they indicate a low contribution to the latent construct.

4.1.2 Convergent Validity

Average variance extracted (AVE)
0.538
0.551
0.548
0.543

Convergent Validity indicates the extent to which the indicators measuring a construct are highly correlated. Based on the presented table, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for the four constructs are 0.538, 0.551, 0.548, and 0.543. These values are all greater than 0.50, which is the minimum recommended threshold to establish convergent validity (Hair et al., 2014). Thus, these results demonstrate that the indicators for each construct adequately represent the construct being measured. This implies that each construct has a high correlation with its respective indicators, making them reliable for the research.

In the context of quantitative research based on structural equation modeling, convergent validity is a crucial element to ensure that each measured indicator accurately reflects the theoretical concept of the intended construct. With AVE values above the threshold, the four constructs in this study can be considered to have good convergent validity.

4.1.3 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. This approach requires that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (represented on the diagonal of the table) must be greater than the correlation between the construct and other constructs.

Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	X1	X2	Y	Z
X1	0.733			
X2	0.801	0.742		
Y	0.673	0.732	0.740	
Z	0.570	0.553	0.545	0.737

Based on the table, the square root of the AVE for construct X1 is 0.733, for X2 is 0.801, and for other constructs, it is consistently higher than the correlation between the construct and others. For instance, the correlation between X1 and Y is 0.673, which is still lower than the square root of AVE for X1 (0.733). The same applies to X2, Y, and Z.

These results indicate that the constructs analyzed exhibit good discriminant validity, meaning each construct is more closely related to its own indicators than to other constructs. This discriminant validity implies that the measured constructs are not overlapping and reflect distinct theoretical concepts.

Overall, these findings support that the measurement tools used in the study are of high quality and can be trusted to analyze the relationships between constructs in the structural model.

4.1.4 Reliabilitas

Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
X1	0.904	0.907	0.921	0.538
X2	0.909	0.909	0.924	0.551

Y	0.908	0.909	0.924	0.548
Z	0.833	0.842	0.877	0.543

The reliability of the measurement instrument was analyzed using two main approaches: Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). The results show that all Cronbach's Alpha values are above 0.70: X1 (0.904), X2 (0.909), Y (0.908), and Z (0.833). This threshold indicates that the measurement instrument has a high level of internal consistency. In other words, the indicators used to measure each construct consistently assess the same concept. As stated by Hair et al. (2014), a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 indicates sufficient reliability for use in research.

Additionally, the Composite Reliability (CR) values also provide satisfactory results, with all values exceeding the threshold of 0.70: X1 (0.921), X2 (0.924), Y (0.924), and Z (0.877). Composite Reliability offers a more holistic evaluation of reliability compared to Cronbach's Alpha, as it accounts for the weighting of indicators. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), high CR values reflect that a construct has a strong ability to explain the variance of its indicators.

Convergent validity was also evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which indicates the extent to which the indicators represent their respective constructs. All AVE values exceed 0.50: X1 (0.538), X2 (0.551), Y (0.548), and Z (0.543). These values meet the criteria proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981), where AVE values greater than 0.50 indicate that more than 50% of the construct's variance is explained by its indicators. Thus, the measurement instrument can be considered valid in terms of convergent validity.

Overall, the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement instrument are excellent. This indicates that the constructs being measured have sufficient levels of consistency and accuracy for further analysis.

4.2 Inner Model

4.2.1 Multicollinearity Test

The multicollinearity test is conducted to ensure that the independent variables in the model do not have excessively high correlations, which could distort regression parameter estimates.

	X1	X2	Y	Z
X1			2.990	2.796

X2			2.906	2.796
Y				
Z			1.540	

The independent variables were tested using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), where the VIF value for X1 against Y is 2.990, and for X1 against Z is 2.796. Meanwhile, the VIF value for X2 against Y is 2.906, and for X2 against Z is also 2.796. The VIF value for Y against Z is 1.540.

All these values are below the threshold of 5.0, as recommended by Hair et al. (2014). This indicates that there is no multicollinearity issue in the model. Low multicollinearity ensures that each predictor uniquely contributes to the dependent variable without overlapping information among the independent variables. Thus, these results indicate that the model used in this study is stable.

4.2.2 R-Square Test

The R-Square test is a statistical indicator that shows the extent to which the variation in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables in the model. The Adjusted R-Square value is used to provide a more accurate adjustment for the number of variables in the model.

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Y	0.575	0.564
Z	0.351	0.339

Y (R-Square = 0.575; Adjusted R-Square = 0.564):

The results indicate that 57.5% of the variation in variable Y can be explained by the model. Meanwhile, the Adjusted R-Square value of 56.4% shows that the model maintains good performance after adjusting for the number of predictors. This is considered relatively high, indicating that the model can explain most of the variation in Y.

Z (R-Square = 0.351; Adjusted R-Square = 0.339):

A total of 35.1% of the variation in variable Z can be explained by the model, while the Adjusted R-Square value of 33.9% shows a slight decrease after adjustment. This indicates that the model has a lower ability to predict variable Z compared to Y.

4.2.3 F-Square Test

The F-square test is used to measure the effect size of each independent variable on the dependent variable in the model.

	X1	X2	Y	Z
X1			0.026	0.070
X2			0.196	0.039
Y				
Z			0.044	

Effect of X2 on Y (F-square = 0.196):

This value indicates that variable X2 has a moderate effect on variable Y. According to Cohen (1988), an F-square value of 0.02 is considered small, 0.15 moderate, and 0.35 large. Thus, X2 plays a significant role in explaining variable Y.

Effect of X1 on Y (F-square = 0.026):

This value is categorized as small, indicating that the contribution of X1 to Y is not practically significant.

Effect of X1 and X2 on Z (F-square = 0.070 and 0.039):

Both variables have a small effect on Z. These values suggest that X1 and X2 are not strong enough to explain the variation in Z. Therefore, it is recommended to review the model or consider additional independent variables.

4.3 Hypothesis Analysis

Direct Effect (Path Coefficient)

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
X1 -> Y	0.182	0.184	0.141	1.293	0.196

X1 -> Z	0.356	0.354	0.134	2.653	0.008
X2 -> Y	0.493	0.484	0.161	3.059	0.002
X2 -> Z	0.267	0.272	0.139	1.930	0.054
Z -> Y	0.169	0.173	0.080	2.111	0.035

Relationship Between Social Proof (X1) and Brand Perception (Y)

Based on the hypothesis testing results, the relationship between Social Proof (X1) and Brand Perception (Y) is not significant, with a P-value of 0.196 and a T-statistic of 1.293. This indicates that changes in Social Proof do not directly and significantly affect Brand Perception.

Relationship Between Social Proof (X1) and Consumer Trust (Z)

The relationship between Social Proof (X1) and Consumer Trust (Z) shows significant results, with a P-value of 0.008 and a T-statistic of 2.653. This means that Social Proof has a significant direct effect on Consumer Trust. It indicates that an increase in Social Proof will directly enhance Consumer Trust.

Relationship Between User-Generated Content (UGC) (X2) and Brand Perception (Y)

The relationship between User-Generated Content (UGC) (X2) and Brand Perception (Y) is significant, with a P-value of 0.002 and a T-statistic of 3.059. This suggests that UGC has a significant direct impact on Brand Perception. Therefore, an increase in UGC will have a direct positive effect on Brand Perception.

Relationship Between User-Generated Content (UGC) (X2) and Consumer Trust (Z)

The analysis results indicate that the relationship between UGC (X2) and Consumer Trust (Z) is not significant, with a P-value of 0.054 and a T-statistic of 1.930. Although the value is close to significance, the relationship is not statistically strong enough to conclude that UGC directly affects Consumer Trust.

Relationship Between Consumer Trust (Z) and Brand Perception (Y)

The relationship between Consumer Trust (Z) and Brand Perception (Y) is significant, with a P-value of 0.035 and a T-statistic of 2.111. This shows that Consumer Trust plays an important role in influencing Brand Perception. Thus, an increase in Consumer Trust will directly impact the improvement of Brand Perception.

Indirect Effects

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
X1 -> Y	0.060	0.059	0.035	1.723	0.085
X2 -> Y	0.045	0.050	0.039	1.167	0.243

Indirect Relationship Between Social Proof (X1) and Brand Perception (Y) Through Consumer Trust (Z)

The analysis of the indirect relationship between Social Proof (X1) and Brand Perception (Y) through Consumer Trust (Z) shows insignificant results, with a P-value of 0.085 and a T-statistic of 1.723. Although Social Proof significantly influences Consumer Trust, its indirect effect on Brand Perception through Consumer Trust is not strong enough.

Indirect Relationship Between User-Generated Content (UGC) (X2) and Brand Perception (Y) Through Consumer Trust (Z)

The indirect relationship between UGC (X2) and Brand Perception (Y) through Consumer Trust (Z) is also not significant, with a P-value of 0.243 and a T-statistic of 1.167. This indicates that although Consumer Trust has a direct relationship with Brand Perception, the indirect influence of UGC through Consumer Trust is not significant enough.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the interplay between Social Proof, User-Generated Content (UGC), Consumer Trust, and Brand Perception among digital consumers. Social Proof was found to have a significant direct impact on Consumer Trust, indicating its importance in shaping consumer confidence through elements like testimonials, reviews, and third-party endorsements. These findings align with previous studies emphasizing the role of Social Proof in enhancing brand credibility and influencing purchase decisions. However, its direct effect on Brand Perception was not significant, suggesting that while Social Proof builds trust, it may require complementary strategies to translate this trust into a strong brand image.

Conversely, UGC demonstrated a significant direct impact on Brand Perception, highlighting its effectiveness in creating positive consumer attitudes through authentic and relatable content. Despite this, UGC did not show a significant influence on Consumer Trust. This could be attributed to variations in content quality or the presence of less credible sources within UGC, suggesting an opportunity for businesses to guide and curate consumer-generated content for better impact.

Consumer Trust emerged as a critical mediator, significantly influencing Brand Perception. This underscores the pivotal role of trust in digital consumer-brand relationships. However, the mediating effects of Consumer Trust in the relationships between Social Proof

and UGC with Brand Perception were found to be insignificant. This result indicates that trust, while important, may not entirely bridge the gap between these elements and how consumers perceive brands.

These findings reinforce the strategic importance of integrating Social Proof and UGC in digital marketing. While each element has distinct strengths, their combined influence on Consumer Trust and Brand Perception requires further exploration. Future research could examine additional factors such as content relevance, source credibility, or product type to uncover nuanced interactions within these relationships. This approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Social Proof and UGC can be optimized to enhance consumer trust and brand perception in the digital era.

6. Conclusion, Implication, and Recommendation

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of Social Proof, User-Generated Content (UGC), and Consumer Trust on Brand Perception. The findings indicate that Social Proof significantly impacts Consumer Trust, emphasizing the importance of elements like testimonials, reviews, and third-party recommendations in building trust. However, Social Proof does not directly affect Brand Perception significantly, as its influence is limited to enhancing trust rather than shaping overall perceptions. UGC, on the other hand, significantly improves Brand Perception, demonstrating its potential to positively influence how consumers view a brand. Despite this, UGC does not have a significant impact on Consumer Trust, indicating room for improvement in leveraging UGC to build trust. Consumer Trust itself has a substantial impact on Brand Perception, underscoring its critical role in creating positive brand associations. Indirect effects of Social Proof and UGC on Brand Perception through Consumer Trust were found to be insignificant, suggesting that the mediating role of Consumer Trust is not strong in this context.

Implications

The results of this study provide several implications for businesses. First, leveraging Social Proof is essential to strengthening Consumer Trust, making it important to showcase positive reviews and endorsements from credible sources. Second, UGC proves to be an effective tool for enhancing Brand Perception, highlighting the need to encourage consumers to create and share brand-related content. Third, as Consumer Trust plays a direct role in shaping Brand Perception, businesses must prioritize trust-building strategies, including consistent product quality, excellent service, and transparent communication. Fourth, an integrated approach that combines Social Proof and UGC—such as featuring authentic consumer reviews in promotional campaigns—can amplify their collective impact on Brand Perception. Lastly, future research should explore additional variables that might influence the relationships between these elements and test these dynamics across various industries to gain broader insights.

Recommendations

To strengthen Consumer Trust, businesses should actively highlight positive reviews, testimonials, and credible third-party recommendations. Encouraging the creation and sharing of User-Generated Content through creative campaigns, such as contests, branded hashtags,

and consumer rewards, can further enhance Brand Perception. Trust-building efforts should remain a priority, focusing on delivering high-quality products, consistent service, and clear, transparent communication. Additionally, integrating Social Proof and UGC strategies can create a synergistic effect, maximizing their overall influence on Brand Perception. Lastly, future studies are recommended to include other potential influencing factors and apply the framework to various product or service categories to enrich the understanding and application of these strategies.

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