

Culinary MSMEs' Strategy in Building Consumer Trust and Purchasing Interest

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ABSTRACT

This study highlights the experiences of culinary MSMEs in building consumer trust through product quality, superior service, and operational consistency. Using an emotional approach based on personal connection and a rational approach based on system standardization, trust has proven to be a key factor in increasing repeat purchase intention and customer loyalty. Obstacles that emerged include limited facilities, reduced service during peak periods, and reliance on seasonal products. This study confirms that for MSMEs, trust is not merely an intangible asset, but rather a strategic instrument that determines the sustainability of business revenue and competitiveness in the food and beverage industry.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyoroti pengalaman pelaku UMKM kuliner dalam membangun kepercayaan konsumen melalui kualitas produk, pelayanan unggul, dan konsistensi operasional. Dengan pendekatan emosional berbasis kedekatan personal serta rasional berbasis standarisasi sistem, kepercayaan terbukti menjadi faktor utama peningkatan minat beli ulang dan loyalitas pelanggan. Hambatan yang muncul meliputi keterbatasan fasilitas, penurunan layanan saat periode puncak, serta ketergantungan pada produk musiman. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa bagi UMKM, kepercayaan bukan sekadar aset tak berwujud, melainkan instrumen strategis yang menentukan keberlanjutan pendapatan usaha dan daya saing di industri makanan dan minuman.

Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a strategic role in the Indonesian economy, creating jobs, increasing incomes, and driving regional economic growth. MSMEs have also proven to be a resilient sector in various economic conditions, including times of national economic instability. In recent years, MSMEs have seen rapid growth, driven by the increasing use of digital technology and social media as marketing tools. However, amidst

increasingly competitive business conditions, MSMEs are required to retain customers to ensure their businesses continue to grow and survive in the long term.

Current trends demonstrate that many MSMEs, particularly in the culinary sector, face challenges in building and maintaining consumer trust. High competition means consumers have numerous product options, making them more likely to switch to other businesses if they are dissatisfied with the quality of the product or service. Furthermore, the proliferation of social media and digital platforms allows information about consumer experiences to spread rapidly.

Negative reviews regarding food quality, unsatisfactory service, or product inconsistencies can impact consumer perceptions of a business. This makes consumer trust a crucial factor in the sustainability of MSMEs, particularly in the culinary sector, which relies heavily on customer satisfaction and repeat purchases.

Consumer trust is the belief that a business is capable of delivering products and services that meet their expectations. In the context of MSMEs, trust is built not only through product quality but also through consumer experiences during interactions with businesses. Consumers tend to choose products that they perceive as providing a sense of security, comfort, and meeting their expectations. Research conducted by (Santoso & Mahargiono, 2023) shows that consumer trust positively influences customer repurchase intention. These findings indicate that the higher the level of consumer trust in a business, the greater the likelihood of repeat purchases and product recommendations to others.

Product and service quality are also important factors in building consumer trust. Research (Putri & Muanas, 2025) explains that product quality, service, and business consistency have a positive influence on customer loyalty in MSMEs. Consumers will feel trust if the product they receive meets their expectations and the service provided is able to satisfy them. On the other hand, (Bilkhisti et al., 2026) stated that consumer purchasing decisions are strongly influenced by the level of trust, especially for MSME products that do not yet have a strong reputation in the market. This shows that trust is a key asset for MSMEs in attracting and retaining customers amidst increasingly fierce business competition.

This research was conducted on MSMEs because they have a closer and more direct relationship with consumers than large companies. The intense interaction between businesses and customers allows the trust-building process to be more clearly observed through the business owners' daily experiences. Furthermore, MSMEs are a business sector that relies heavily on customer loyalty, making consumer trust a crucial factor in maintaining business continuity. Research on MSMEs in the culinary sector is also considered relevant because culinary products are experiential, meaning consumers can only assess a product's quality after they consume it directly. Therefore, consumers require a certain level of trust before deciding to make their first purchase.

Another interesting phenomenon in the culinary MSME sector is the link between the emotional and rational dimensions in building consumer trust. The rational dimension is evident in product quality, pricing, business consistency, and customer service. Meanwhile, the emotional dimension emerges through interpersonal relationships, good communication, and closeness between business owners and customers. Consumers who feel valued and have an emotional connection with their business owners tend to have higher loyalty. Thus, consumer trust is built not only through the functional aspects of the product, but also through the emotional experiences customers experience during their interactions with MSMEs.

Many studies have previously been conducted on consumer trust. (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) explain that trust is a key factor in building long-term relationships between businesses and consumers, and this foundational view continues to be supported by more recent studies. Le et al. (2023) examined consumer trust in the context of e-commerce and found that business integrity and competence influence consumer purchase intentions. Susanto et al. (2023) show that good communication and shared values between businesses and customers can increase consumer trust in small businesses, while Rather et al. (2022) demonstrate that brand reputation plays a significant role in building consumer trust. However, most of these studies used a quantitative approach and focused more on consumer perspectives than on business experiences.

In Indonesia, research related to consumer trust in MSMEs has also been conducted. (Bilkhisti et al., 2026) examined the influence of trust on consumer purchasing decisions for MSME products and found that trust has a positive influence on purchasing decisions. Influence of product quality and service on customer loyalty in food and beverage MSMEs. Furthermore, (Santoso & Mahargiono, 2023) showed that consumer trust influences customer repurchase intention. However, these studies still focus on quantitative relationships between variables and have not explored in depth the experiences of MSME actors in building consumer trust through emotional and rational approaches.

There are differences between this study and previous research based on the description. Previous studies generally examined the influence of trust on purchasing decisions or customer loyalty using a quantitative approach. Meanwhile, this study focuses on the experiences of MSMEs in building consumer trust through emotional and rational dimensions using a phenomenological approach. This study not only examines trust as a variable influencing purchase intention but also explores how MSMEs understand, perceive, and implement strategies to build trusting relationships with customers in their daily business practices. Based on this description, the research questions addressed in this study are: (1) How do culinary MSME actors build consumer trust through emotional and rational approaches? (2) What obstacles do MSME actors face in building and maintaining consumer trust? and (3) How does the trust built by MSME actors influence consumer purchase intention?

Method

Types of Research

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. This method was chosen because it aims to understand and describe in-depth the experiences of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in building consumer trust. Through this method, researchers can describe phenomena based on experiences, perspectives, and information obtained directly from informants. Descriptive qualitative research also allows researchers to understand how MSMEs build relationships with customers through product quality, service, business consistency, and emotional and rational approaches to increase consumer purchasing interest. By using descriptive qualitative methods, this research is expected to provide a clear and in-depth picture of the strategies of MSME actors in building consumer trust and its impact on business sustainability.

Research Informan

The informants in this study consisted of the owners of two culinary MSMEs operating in the food and beverage sector in Palu, Central Sulawesi. The first MSME has operated for more than five years, sells processed food products, employs four to six workers, and primarily serves customers offline as well as through social media. The second MSME, branded "Nala," has operated for approximately three years, sells seasonal fruit-based food and beverage products, employs three to five workers, and relies heavily on social media promotion to reach customers. Both informants are the owners who are directly involved in daily operations and customer interactions. Although the number of informants is limited to two, this is consistent with the phenomenological approach used in this study, which prioritizes an in-depth exploration of lived experience over the breadth of coverage typically sought in quantitative research; the two informants were selected because they represent contrasting business maturity levels and customer engagement strategies, allowing for a richer comparative understanding of trust-building experiences. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves selecting informants based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives.

The informant criteria in this study include:

1. Actively running an MSME business
2. Interact and communicate directly with customers, and have experience building relationships with consumers.
3. Understand the service and marketing strategies of the business being run.

The selection of these informants aims to obtain relevant and in-depth data regarding the experiences of MSME actors in building consumer trust and its influence on customer purchasing interest.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection techniques in this research were carried out in several ways, namely:

1. In-depth Interviews
Interviews were conducted directly with informants to obtain information regarding the experiences, perspectives, and strategies of MSMEs in building consumer trust and increasing customer purchasing interest.
2. Documentation

Documentation was conducted by collecting supporting data such as photos of business activities, business records, promotional media, and other documents related to the research.

Data Analysis Techniques

This research used qualitative descriptive analysis techniques, specifically thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke, consisting of familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final analysis. Data analysis was conducted from the data collection process to drawing conclusions.

The stages of data analysis in this research include:

1. Data Collection
Data was collected through in-depth interviews and documentation related to the experiences of MSME actors in building consumer trust.
2. Data Reduction
The interview data was then selected, simplified, and focused on information relevant to the research objectives. At this stage, researchers grouped the data based on specific themes such as product quality, service, business consistency, and customer relationships.
3. Presentation of Data
The reduced data is presented in descriptive narrative form for easier understanding. The data is presented by systematically describing the interview results and research findings.
4. Drawing Conclusions
The final stage involves drawing conclusions based on the patterns, relationships, and themes identified during the research. The conclusions are formulated to address the research focus on the experiences of MSMEs in building consumer trust and its impact on customer purchasing intention.

Data Validity Test

To ensure data validity, this study employed triangulation techniques. Triangulation is performed by comparing interview results with other relevant data or information to ensure the data obtained is reliable.

Furthermore, researchers also double-checked the interview results with informants to ensure the information obtained reflected the actual situation. Thus, the research data is expected to have a good level of validity and accuracy.

Results and Discussion

Building Customer Trust

The research results show that consumer trust is a fundamental factor in the sustainability of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Trust isn't formed instantly, but rather through a continuous process and consistency in delivering value to consumers.

Empirical findings indicate that MSMEs recognize the importance of a long-term orientation in building trust. This is reflected in the statement of the first informant:

"What we actually maintain is... quality, consistency, the quality of the products we sell and the service... that will be the feedback in the future... what we are aiming for is the long term."

This statement demonstrates that trust is built through three main components: product quality, service, and consistency. Product quality is a key determinant because it directly relates to consumers' perceptions of value. Perceived quality plays a crucial role in shaping trust and satisfaction.

In addition, the importance of maintaining trust on an ongoing basis was also emphasized by the second informant:

"We must 100% reclaim consumer trust... when trust decreases, there will automatically be miscommunication or errors on the floor... that's why we always maintain consistency at Nala."

This quote demonstrates that trust is dynamic and vulnerable to decline if not managed properly. Therefore, consistency is a crucial element in maintaining consumer trust.

Experience of MSMEs in Increasing Trust

The research results indicate two main approaches to building consumer trust: rational and emotional. The rational approach emphasizes functional aspects such as product quality, service, and operational consistency. This is reflected in the statement of the first informant:

"There are three most important things... the first is consistency, quality and service... when we want to run, we prioritize the most important service, then the second is product quality."

This approach suggests that trust is built through tangible evidence that consumers can directly experience. In marketing literature, this approach relates to consumers' cognitive evaluations of product and service performance.

In contrast, an emotional approach places more emphasis on the interpersonal relationship between businesses and consumers. This is evident in the second informant's statement:

"The approach is more customer-oriented... we have the hashtag 'let's be good friends,' so we build trust with customers that... we're not just hanging out, but we're all friends."

This approach is reinforced by the value of empathy in service:

"It's more about treatment, more about humanity... we're really driven by empathy."

These findings align with the concept of relationship marketing, which emphasizes the importance of long-term relationships based on trust and emotional closeness. Thus, trust is

built not only through rational aspects but also through affective dimensions that strengthen consumer engagement.

Furthermore, the experience of MSMEs influences the strategies they employ to build trust. More experienced entrepreneurs tend to be able to combine rational and emotional approaches adaptively, business experience serves as learning capital in improving decision-making quality.

The Influence of Trust on Purchase Intention

The research results show that consumer trust has a significant influence on purchase intention. Trust serves as a prerequisite in the transaction process, as expressed by the second informant:

"Consumer trust is important... we have to gain their trust first before we can sell... initially, they only want to buy one, but they might end up buying more."

This statement indicates that trust not only influences purchasing decisions but also has the potential to increase purchase volume, trust is a key determinant in shaping purchase intention.

Furthermore, increased trust also impacted business growth, as the first informant stated:

"Since we've been consistent, the number of orders has increased... and also on social media, the number of viewers has reached several thousand... so the number of contacts on the admin's phone has increased."

This shows that trust has a long-term impact on customer loyalty and market expansion. Consumers with high levels of trust are more likely to make repeat purchases and recommend products to others.

Obstacles in Building Consumer Trust

The research results show that MSMEs face various obstacles in building trust, both internal and external. One major obstacle is limited facilities, such as business location, as expressed by the second informant:

"The obstacle might be our location... there's a lack of parking, so customers sometimes think twice."

Furthermore, operational challenges also arise when order volume increases, potentially reducing service quality. This was explained by the first informant:

"When there are a lot of orders... customers want to be served quickly... service is important because several complaints are about service issues."

Another obstacle is the limited availability of seasonal raw materials, as expressed:

"The problem is... durian is seasonal... so how do we ensure a steady supply?"

Furthermore, handling complaints is also a significant challenge in maintaining trust. The first informant stated:

"If there's a complaint... we replace the item with the exact item ordered, free of charge... which clearly minimizes complaints."

This demonstrates that a responsive complaint handling strategy can help maintain consumer trust. This finding is supported by (Hassan & Soliman, 2021)

which emphasizes the importance of complaint handling in maintaining relationships with customers.

Discussion

The research results show that consumer trust in MSMEs is formed through two main dimensions: the rational dimension and the emotional dimension. The rational dimension is evident in consumers' assessments of product quality, business consistency, price, and the business's ability to provide services that meet customer expectations. Consumers tend to trust a business if the product they receive is of good and consistent quality. This finding suggests that consumers consider not only price but also the satisfaction and experience gained after using the product. Meanwhile, the emotional dimension is evident in the interpersonal relationships established between businesses and consumers. A friendly attitude, good communication, attention to customer needs, and the business's ability to create a comfortable environment are important factors in building emotional closeness with consumers. Consumers who feel valued and cared for tend to have higher loyalty to the business. Thus, consumer trust is built not only through the functional aspects of the product but also through the social relationships established during the transaction process.

The results of this study align with the Commitment-Trust Theory proposed by Morgan and Hunt, which explains that trust is a key factor in creating long-term relationships between businesses and consumers. This theory asserts that a good business relationship will be formed when there is commitment and trust between both parties. In the context of MSMEs, consumer trust is a crucial foundation for retaining customers and increasing customer loyalty to the business. Furthermore, the results of this study also support the concept of relationship marketing, which emphasizes the importance of long-term relationships between businesses and customers. This approach explains that business success is determined not only by product quality but also by the business owner's ability to build good relationships with consumers. MSMEs that are able to create positive communication and provide satisfactory service will more easily gain customer trust.

The findings of this study are also relevant to Yoon's research, which explains that trust consists of two dimensions: cognition-based trust and affect-based trust. Cognition-based trust relates to consumers' rational assessments of a business's competence and quality, while affect-based trust relates to the emotional connection, concern, and comfort consumers feel toward the business owner. In this study, these two dimensions are clearly visible through product quality, business consistency, and the interpersonal relationships built by MSMEs

with customers. The results of this study also support previous research conducted by (Bilkhisti et al., 2026) which states that consumer trust influences purchasing decisions for MSME products. Consumers are more likely to make purchases if they believe in the quality of the product and the service provided. Product quality, service, and business consistency positively influence customer loyalty in the food and beverage MSME sector. These findings align with the results of this study, which demonstrate that business and service consistency are important factors in building consumer trust.

This research is also in line with research (Santoso & Mahargiono, 2023) which explains that consumer trust influences repeat purchase intention. Consumers who are satisfied with product quality and service are more likely to make repeat purchases and recommend the product to others. This demonstrates that consumer trust plays a crucial role in maintaining the sustainability of MSME businesses amidst increasingly fierce business competition.

Therefore, the results of this study indicate that the success of MSMEs in building consumer trust is influenced by their ability to balance the rational and emotional dimensions. Consumer trust is built not only through product quality but also through social interactions, communication, and the positive experiences consumers experience during their relationships with businesses.

Conclusion

According to this study, consumer trust is a key component that directly influences MSMEs' purchasing intentions. This trust is built through three main components: product quality that meets expectations, friendly and responsive service, and a commitment to adhering to business standards. Furthermore, the study results show that MSMEs employ two main strategies: an emotional approach through personal relationships to build relationships with consumers; and a rational approach through good quality management and business systems. Both strategies have been shown to increase repeat purchases, purchase volume, and customer loyalty. Digital marketing, particularly active use of social media, plays a supporting role in both strategies by widening customer reach, sustaining personal engagement with consumers, and reinforcing the emotional approach to trust-building outside face-to-face interactions. However, MSMEs still face challenges such as limited facilities, poorer service quality during peak periods, and seasonal product instability, which can impact customer perceptions. Effective capacity management, such as anticipating order surges during peak periods and securing alternative supplies for seasonal raw materials, is therefore essential to sustaining the trust that has been built. Theoretically, these findings extend the Commitment-Trust Theory and the concept of cognition-based and affect-based trust by demonstrating how MSME owners, rather than only consumers, actively construct trust through the deliberate combination of rational and emotional strategies, offering a business-owner perspective that complements the largely consumer-centered focus of prior research. Therefore, the success of MSMEs in increasing purchasing intentions depends heavily on their ability to consistently and sustainably maintain customer trust through quality, service, digital engagement, capacity management, and customer relationships.

Declarations

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