

THE ROLE OF CONSUMER TRUST IN MEDIATING THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE REVIEWS ON BUYING SAMBAL BU SANDRA PRODUCTS ON SHOPEE



Apririya Anggraini¹

Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Jawa Timur, Indonesia
apriyaa@gmail.com

Fatchur Rozci²

Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Jawa Timur, Indonesia
fatchur_rozci.agribis@upnjatim.ac.id

Taufik Setyadi³

Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Jawa Timur, Indonesia
taufiksetyadi.agri@upnjatim.ac.id

Abstract

The increased use of marketplaces encourages online reviews to become one of the main sources of information in shaping consumer purchase decisions. However, in local food products such as ready-to-eat chili sauce, high positive reviews do not necessarily directly increase buying interest because consumers face uncertainty related to taste, quality, and product safety. This study examines the effect of online reviews on consumers' buying interest in Sambal Bu Sandra products on Shopee, with consumer trust as a mediating variable. Using a quantitative survey method involving 100 respondents and SEM-PLS analysis through SmartPLS 4.0, the findings reveal that online reviews positively and significantly influence buying interest ($\beta = 0.215$; $p = 0.017$) and consumer trust ($\beta = 0.591$; $p = 0.000$). Consumer trust also has a positive and significant effect on buying interest ($\beta = 0.641$; $p = 0.000$) and partially mediates the relationship between online reviews and buying interest, with a VAF of 63.8%, indicating partial mediation. This study contributes theoretically by extending Consumer Behavior Theory to the context of local food e-commerce, demonstrating that trust plays a more dominant role for experience goods (food products) compared to search goods.

Keywords: Online Reviews, Buying Interest, Consumer Trust, Shopee, Consumer Behavior Theory

INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought significant technological developments, particularly the internet, which has become an integral part of daily activities (Munte *et al.*, 2020). The rapid internet penetration has shifted consumer behavior patterns, with consumers increasingly relying on digital platforms for shopping activities (Sutrisno *et al.*, 2024). This is supported by information from the Ministry of Trade, which noted a rise in e-commerce users in Indonesia from 38.7 million in 2020 to 73.6 million in 2025. This increase makes e-commerce the main distribution channel for business actors to expand market reach (Dewi *et al.*, 2022). However, this growth has also intensified competition between marketplaces. Based on Semrush data as of March 2026, Shopee is the market leader with 191.4 million visitors.

Shopee's high transaction levels are closely linked to the online review feature, which helps potential buyers access information about product quality, authenticity, and user experiences before purchasing (Mutmainah, 2025). Online reviews serve as information that verifies product quality and authenticity through previous consumer judgments or opinions (Montolalu *et al.*, 2024). Theoretically, positive online reviews should create favorable perceptions and encourage purchase intent (Montolalu *et al.*, 2024). However, because consumers cannot physically examine products, the online shopping decision-making process becomes more complex and may face product mismatch risks (Montolalu *et al.*, 2024).

This situation causes consumers to rely significantly on online reviews for digital information. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such reviews is strongly influenced by the degree of trust consumers place in the available information. Consumer trust is vital in purchasing decisions, as it indicates assurance in the reliability of information and product standards. Consumers with strong trust are typically more receptive to favorable evaluations, subsequently enhancing their purchasing interest. Conversely, consumers with lower trust may remain hesitant despite positive reviews, due to doubts regarding information validity (Kusuma & Murniyati, 2025).

The relevance of online reviews and trust is particularly important for food products such as ready-to-eat chili sauce. Chili sauce is a typical Indonesian food with high consumption rates, consumed regularly in daily life (Mansyur and Hajriani, 2020). Data from the Central Statistics Agency show that chili-based product consumption in Indonesia tends to be stable and high, indicating that chili sauce is an important part of Indonesian consumption patterns. Chili pepper consumption has even shown an increasing trend in recent years (Suryani, 2024). The potential of the ready-to-eat chili sauce market encourages MSMEs to market products through digital platforms.

Sambal Bu Sandra is an MSME that has used the Shopee digital platform since 2016 and has built a strong digital reputation, with a rating of 4.9/5.0 and reviews dominated by positive consumer comments. According to observations in the top-selling chili sauce product category over the past 30 days on Shopee accessed in May 2026, Sambal Bu Sandra recorded sales of 101 products. Meanwhile, a similar chili sauce product, Sambal Naknan, with the same rating of 4.9/5.0, achieved sales of 288 products. This observation suggests that while high ratings and positive reviews are important, they may not be sufficient to drive purchase interest, as other factors such as pricing and consumer trust may also play significant roles in influencing sales outcomes. This condition indicates that consumers not

only consider online reviews as information sources but also require a certain level of trust in product quality, safety, and credibility before forming buying interest.

Previous research on online reviews has produced mixed findings. Sahabuddin et al. (2024) found that product reviews have a positive and significant influence on buying interest both directly and through trust mediation. However, Firdaus et al. (2023) found that online customer reviews had no effect on consumer buying interest. More recently, Sari & Kholifah (2026) stated that online reviews significantly impact purchasing decisions, both directly and through consumer trust. These differences show that the effectiveness of online reviews on purchase interest remains inconsistent and may be influenced by product characteristics and perceived risk levels.

Generally, previous research has focused on fashion, skincare, and electronics products categories with visual evaluation characteristics and product specifications that are easier to assess online. Meanwhile, research on local food products such as chili sauce remains relatively limited. Food products have different characteristics because they involve uncertainty of taste, food safety, and product durability that cannot be evaluated directly through the marketplace. This condition causes consumers to need a higher level of trust before purchasing food products online. Thus, there is a research gap related to online review mechanisms and buying interest in local food products, which have higher consumption uncertainty than other product categories.

The novelty of this study lies in three aspects. First, it extends Consumer Behavior Theory to the context of local food e-commerce by demonstrating that the evaluative stage (trust) plays a more dominant role than the information search stage (reviews) in shaping purchase intentions for experience goods. Second, it provides empirical evidence that for food products with high sensory and safety uncertainty, trust functions as a critical cognitive mechanism that transforms passive information reception into active purchase commitment—a mechanism that is arguably more critical than in product categories with lower uncertainty such as fashion or electronics. Third, unlike previous studies that predominantly examined direct effects, this research quantifies the mediating role of trust through VAF analysis for food products. These contributions provide a nuanced understanding of how consumer decision-making operates in the context of online food purchases, where quality evaluation cannot be conducted prior to consumption.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Consumer behavior theory serves as the foundation for this study. Solomon (2024) defines consumer behavior as "the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires". Similarly, Schiffman and Kanuk (2007) describe consumer behavior as the actions consumers take when they search for, purchase, utilize, review, and discard products and services they believe will meet their needs. Engel *et al.* (1993) further explain that consumer behavior encompasses the study of how individuals, groups, or organizations select, secure, utilize, and dispose of goods, services, experiences, or ideas to fulfill requirements.

According to Engel *et al.* (1993), consumer decision-making occurs through a sequential process consisting of need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase outcomes. This staged approach provides a structured framework for understanding how consumers process information and form purchase

intentions. In the context of this study, online reviews represent the information search stage, consumer trust represents the alternative evaluation stage, and buying interest represents the purchase intention stage. This mapping enables a systematic examination of how online reviews influence consumer trust and subsequently affect buying interest for food products on e-commerce platforms.

Online Reviews

Online reviews are consumer opinions or experiences related to the products or services of a business that are conveyed through online media (Dewi *et al.*, 2022). In situations of large product choices and high quality uncertainty on marketplace platforms, reviews from other consumers are often considered a source of information that is more objective, relevant, and of no particular importance than advertisements or product descriptions made by sellers (Pratama and Widayati, 2025). Consumers generally use online reviews to find out the advantages and disadvantages of the product before making an online purchase. Therefore, the existence of reviews is one of the parts that can drive increased sales. According to research Agesti *et al.* (2021) some of the indicators of online reviews are as follows:

1. Usefulness: Consumers perceive benefits from reviews shared by other users in online shopping activities.
2. Trustworthiness: Consumers ratings of the reviewer's experience and the level of trustworthiness of the product information provided.
3. Argument Quality: The extent to which the review contains strong, persuasive, and informative arguments that can influence consumers.
4. Valance of Online Consumer Reviews: Valance indicates the tendency of the content of a review, whether positive or negative, that can influence a consumer's purchase decision.
5. Volume of online reviews: The number of reviews and testimonials provided by consumers about a particular product.

Buying Interest

Interest can be interpreted as a strong intention or desire to do something you like. In the context of online purchases, when a person begins to get to know a website or online store, there is an interest in carrying out purchasing activities through the internet. This interest then encourages consumers to find out the quality of online stores, build trust in the information obtained, and consider various risks that may occur (Rosdiana *et al.*, 2019). According to Septyadi *et al.*, (2022) Buying interest has the following indicators:

1. Transactional Interest: A consumer's intention or desire to purchase a particular product.
2. Referential Interest: A consumer's tendency to recommend a product to others.
3. Priority Interest: An interest that indicates a consumer's basic preference for a particular product.
4. Exploratory interest: The consumer's tendency to continuously seek additional information related to the desired product and its advantages.

Consumer Trust

Trust is a long-term relationship between buyers and sellers and is one of the determining factors for business success (Zuhdi and Yasya, 2023). Consumer trust can be interpreted as consumer understanding or belief in a product and its attributes and benefits. This trust reflects consumer perception of the quality and benefits of the products offered. In

online transactions, the trust factor is still a major concern because consumers often feel worried if the product they receive does not meet their expectations (Sari and Elsandra, 2022). According to Mayer *et al.* (1995), indicators of consumer confidence are as follows:

1. Ability: Refers to the competence and capability of sellers or organizations in delivering services, providing products, and ensuring transaction security from external interference.
2. Benevolence: Reflects the seller's willingness to establish mutually beneficial relationships with consumers by prioritizing not only profit but also customer satisfaction.
3. Integrity: Relates to the seller's consistency, honesty, and ethical conduct in running the business. The information conveyed to consumers must align with actual conditions, and the quality of the products offered should be reliable and trustworthy.

In the context of this study, consumer trust functions as the evaluation stage in the consumer decision-making process. For food products, trust is particularly crucial because consumers face risks related to taste uncertainty, food safety, and product quality that cannot be directly verified online.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research analyzed Sambal Bu Sandra products utilizing a quantitative method via a causal associative survey design to explore the causal links between variables (Rahman & Yanti, 2016). The variables examined in this study consisted of online reviews (X) serving as the independent variable, buying interest (Y) acting as the dependent variable, and consumer trust (Z) functioning as the mediating variable. The population consisted of Shopee users who were familiar with Sambal Bu Sandra products. The sample size was established with 100 respondents, based on the guideline of utilizing 5–10 times the overall number of research indicators. The research utilized a non-probability sampling approach using a purposive sampling technique, whereby participants were chosen based on particular criteria (Machali, 2021). The criteria included individuals who recognized Sambal Bu Sandra chili sauce products on Shopee, had purchased chili sauce through Shopee at least once per month, and had read online reviews available on the platform.

This study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected via an online survey conducted using Google Form, featuring 18 statement items rated on a five-point Likert scale. Concurrently, secondary data were gathered from academic journals and other pertinent literature connected to the research subject. The analytical method used was descriptive statistics to showcase the traits of respondents and the distribution of their questionnaire answers. Additionally, Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) was utilized to examine the connections between latent variables, encompassing both direct and indirect influences. The analytical methods involved assessing the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model), in addition to testing the research hypotheses via the bootstrapping technique utilizing SmartPLS 4.0 software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The characteristics of respondents in this study were categorized based on gender, age, education, occupation, income, and residence. The analyzed data were collected from 100

participants who willingly filled out the online survey. The subsequent table displays a summary of the profiles of the respondents:

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Categories	Sub-Categories	Number of Respondents
Gender	Men	32
	Women	68
Age	< 20 years old	10
	20 – 35 years old	63
	36 – 45 years old	18
	>45 years old	9
Final Education	High School/Vocational School Equivalent	53
	Academic/College	47
Jobs	Student/Student	35
	Civil Servant	17
	Private Employees	25
	Entrepreneurship	12
	Housewives	11
Revenue	< IDR 1,000,000	10
	IDR 1,000,000-IDR 2,000,000	36
	IDR2,000,000-IDR 3,000,000	15
	IDR 3,000,000-IDR 4,000,000	20
	> IDR 4,000,000	19
Domicile	Surabaya	39
	Sidoarjo	11
	Malang	10
	Lamongan	9
	Jombang	4
	Gresik	7
	São Paulo	7
	Yogyakarta	2
	Bekasi	3
	Bandung	4
	Kediri	4

Source: Primary data (2026)

The results concerning respondent distribution show that most respondents were female, comprising 68%, whereas male respondents made up 32%. Regarding age, the majority of respondents fell within the 20–35 years range, making up 63% of the entire sample. This suggests that individuals within the productive age category tend to be more active in online shopping activities. Based on educational background, most respondents had a senior high school/vocational high school education level at 53%, followed by respondents

with a university education at 47%. This condition indicates that respondents generally possessed sufficient capability to understand product-related information available online.

In terms of occupation, the largest proportion of respondents consisted of students at 35%, followed by private employees at 25%. Furthermore, most respondents had an income ranging from IDR 1,000,000 to IDR 2,000,000 (36%), indicating that Sambal Bu Sandra products are widely consumed by individuals within the lower-middle income category. Regarding domicile, the majority of respondents were located in the Surabaya area.

Evaluation of the Outer Model

Convergent Validity Test

The convergent validity test was conducted to determine whether theoretically related indicators demonstrated a strong correlation. These results demonstrate that all indicators utilized in this research met the criteria for convergent validity and were able to represent the assessed constructs effectively (Susanto *et al.*, 2020).

Table 2.
Outer Loading Indicator Value

Variable	Indicator	Loading Factor
Online reviews (X)	X.1	0.735
	X.2	0.808
	X.3	0.775
	X.4	0.749
	X.5	0.769
	X.6	0.804
	X.7	0.774
Buying interest (Y)	Y.1	0.793
	Y.2	0.830
	Y.3	0.787
	Y.4	0.779
	Y.5	0.825
	Y.6	0.761
Consumer confidence (Z)	Z.1	0.764
	Z.2	0.832
	Z.3	0.832
	Z.4	0.848
	Z.5	0.806

Source: Primary data (2026)

The results of the analysis revealed that all indicators associated with the variables of online reviews (X), buying interest (Y), and consumer trust (Z) obtained outer loading values exceeding 0.70. An indicator is deemed valid when it reaches a loading factor value of ≥ 0.70 , signaling that the indicator sufficiently reflects the construct and is suitable for inclusion in subsequent analysis.

Table 3.
Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Value

Variable	AVE	Remarks
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X	0.599	Valid
Y	0.634	Valid
Z	0.667	Valid

Source: Primary data (2026)

Convergent validity was additionally assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) standard, with a construct deemed valid if it attains an AVE value exceeding 0.50. The findings showed that every variable in this study yielded AVE values greater than 0.50, indicating that each construct could account for over 50% of the variance of its indicators.

Construct Reliability Test

The reliability test for the construct was performed to evaluate the consistency and trustworthiness of the research tool in assessing latent variables. A construct is considered trustworthy when the Composite Reliability (CR) value is greater than 0.70, and the Cronbach's Alpha value is at least between 0.60 and 0.70 (Susanto et al., 2020).

Table 4.

Value Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha

	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Composite Reliability</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
X	0.888	0.913	Reliable
Y	0.884	0.912	Reliable
Z	0.875	0.909	Reliable

Source: Primary data (2026)

According to the testing outcomes, all constructs in the research model attained Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.70. This suggests that every indicator applied in the research was dependable and able to consistently measure the intended constructs. Furthermore, Composite Reliability values greater than 0.70 indicate that the research tool has robust internal consistency and a sufficient degree of reliability.

Discriminating Validity Test

The discriminant validity assessment was performed employing the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) methods to verify that every construct in the research framework was empirically separate and did not coincide with other constructs. The Fornell-Larcker Criterion assesses discriminant validity by contrasting the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct against the correlation values between constructs. Discriminant validity is deemed adequate when the square root of a construct's value surpasses its correlation with different constructs (Phang & Tunjungsari, 2025). Furthermore, the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) method was utilized to assess the ratio of correlations among indicators from different constructs (heterotrait) compared to correlations among indicators within the same construct (monotrait). An HTMT value less than 0.90, or more cautiously below 0.85, signifies that discriminant validity has been accomplished (Phang & Tunjungsari, 2025). By employing these methods, the research sought to guarantee that every latent construct had a distinct empirical separation from the others.

Table 5.

Fornell-Larcker Criterion

<i>Variable</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Z</i>
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X	0.774		
Y	0.594	0.796	
Z	0.591	0.768	0.817

Source: Primary data (2026)

The findings of the Fornell-Larcker analysis indicated that the square root of the AVE for each variable exceeded the correlation values among the variables. For the online reviews variable (X), the square root AVE value of 0.774 exceeded its correlation with buying interest (0.594) and consumer trust (0.591). Similarly, the buying interest variable (Y) obtained a square root AVE value of 0.796, which was greater than its correlations with online reviews (0.594) and consumer trust (0.768). Furthermore, the consumer trust variable (Z) produced a square root AVE value of 0.817, surpassing its correlation with online reviews (0.591) and buying interest (0.768). These findings indicate that each construct was more capable of explaining its own indicators than those associated with other constructs.

Table 6.

Value Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Variable	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)
Y <-> X	0.661
Z <-> X	0.662
Z <-> Y	0.869

Source: Primary data (2026)

Based on the HTMT analysis results, the correlation value between buying interest (Y) and online reviews (X) was 0.661, between consumer trust (Z) and online reviews (X) was 0.662, and between consumer trust (Z) and buying interest (Y) was 0.869. All HTMT values were beneath the threshold of 0.90, indicating that the discriminant validity criteria were met. Thus, it can be inferred that the research model showed no problems with discriminant validity.

Inner Model Evaluation

R-Square

R square is a value to show how much of an independent (exogenous) variable is capable of explaining dependent (endogenous) variables in a research model. R-Square provides a variation of endogenous targets, where R-Square has certain limits that vary depending on its value (Hidayat *et al.*, 2024). This value reflects the predictive strength of the structural model (inner model); a value nearing 1 signifies a superior model with greater predictive capability. The groupings are divided into three categories: 0.75 (strong), 0.50 (moderate), and 0.25 (weak).

Table 7.

R-Square Value

Variable	R-square	R-square adjusted	Categories
Y	0.621	0.613	Moderate-strong
Z	0.349	0.343	Moderate

Source: Primary data (2026)

According to the test outcomes, the buying interest variable (Y) achieved an R-square value of 0.621 and an adjusted R-square value of 0.613. These results show that online reviews and consumer trust accounted for 62.1% of the changes in purchasing interest, whereas the other 37.9% was affected by variables not included in the research model. The R-square value obtained is in the moderate to strong range, suggesting that the model is reasonably effective at explaining the buying interest variable.

In the meantime, the consumer trust variable (Z) generated an R-square value of 0.349 and an adjusted R-square value of 0.343. This finding shows that online reviews accounted for 34.9% of the differences in consumer trust, while the other 65.1% was affected by additional factors not considered in the model. The value is categorized as moderate, suggesting that online reviews contribute sufficiently to the formation of consumer trust, although additional factors also play an important role in influencing consumer trust toward products.

F-Square

The F-square (f^2) analysis was performed to assess the strength of the effect size of exogenous variables on endogenous variables. The f-square value indicates how much one variable contributes to explaining another variable in the research model (Hidayat *et al.*, 2024). Based on the effect size criteria, f-square values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent small, medium, and large effects, respectively.

Table 8.
F-Square Value

Relationships	F-square	Categories
X -> Y	0.079	Small
X -> Z	0.537	Large
Z -> Y	0.706	Large

Source: Primary data (2026)

The results showed that the effect of online reviews (X) on buying interest (Y) generated an f-square value of 0.079, which is classified as a small effect size. This finding indicates that although online reviews significantly influence buying interest, their direct contribution remains relatively limited. This condition may occur because consumers' buying interest in chili sauce products is not determined solely by online reviews, but is also influenced by factors such as taste preferences, level of spiciness, price, product quality, consumption habits, and recommendations from relatives or close acquaintances.

Furthermore, the effect of online reviews (X) on consumer trust (Z) produced an f-square value of 0.537, which falls into the large effect category. This result demonstrates that online reviews have a substantial role in building consumer trust. Positive, informative, and credible reviews are able to strengthen consumers' confidence in product quality before making purchasing decisions.

The influence of consumer trust (Z) on buying interest (Y) obtained an f-square value of 0.706, which is also categorized as a large effect. These findings indicate that consumer trust is a highly influential factor in encouraging buying interest. Consumers who possess higher levels of trust toward a product are generally more confident and motivated to make purchases. Therefore, the results of this study suggest that online reviews do not exert a strong direct influence on buying interest; however, they significantly contribute to the formation

of consumer trust, which subsequently has a substantial impact on increasing consumers' buying interest.

Q² (Q-Square)

Q-square (Q²) is a measure of predictive relevance used to evaluate the extent to which a research model is capable of predicting observed values and estimating model parameters (Septiyaningtyas & Irmawati, 2025). The model is declared to have predictive relevance both if $Q\ square > 0$. The calculation of Q-Square is calculated by the formula:

$$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - R^2Y)(1 - R^2Z)$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - 0.621)(1 - 0.349)$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - (0.379)(0.651)$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - 0.2467$$

$$Q^2 = \mathbf{0.7532\ (0.753)}$$

Based on the calculation results, the Q² value obtained in this study was 0.753. This result indicates that the research model possesses strong predictive relevance, meaning that the variables included in the model are capable of explaining and predicting the relationships among research variables effectively. It is important to note that Q² indicates predictive relevance, not predictive accuracy. While the model demonstrates strong predictive relevance, this should not be interpreted as evidence of precise prediction. Future research could supplement Q² with PLSpredict analysis for out-of-sample prediction evaluation.

Model Fit Assessment

Model fit was assessed to determine how well the proposed model fits the observed data. The following model fit indices were calculated using SmartPLS 4.0:

Table 9.

Model Fit Indices

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.069	0.069
d_ULS	0.812	0.812
d_G	0.400	0.400
Chi-square	208.122	208.122
NFI	0.816	0.816

Source: Primary data (2026)

The SRMR value of 0.069 is below the recommended threshold of 0.10, indicating good model fit. This suggests that the model adequately represents the observed data. The NFI value of 0.816 is below the preferred threshold of 0.90, indicating an acceptable but not excellent fit (Narimawati dan Sarwono, 2022). This suggests that while the model fits reasonably well, there is room for improvement in future research. These are discrepancy measures used for model comparison. Lower values indicate a better fit. The chi-square value of 208.122 is significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the model does not perfectly fit the data. However, chi-square is sensitive to sample size and is often significant even when the model fits adequately. Overall, the model fit indices indicate that the model has good fit (SRMR) and an acceptable fit (NFI), supporting the validity of the research model.

Common Method Bias Assessment

To address the potential risk of common method bias arising from single-source, single-time data collection, procedural and statistical remedies were applied. Procedural

measures included psychological separation of scales, anonymity assurance, and clear response instructions. Statistically, the Full Collinearity Test was performed using SmartPLS 4.0, as recommended by Kock and Lynn (2012), with inner VIF values below 3.3 indicating freedom from significant common method bias.

Tabel 10.
Full Collinearity Test (Inner VIF Values)

Variable	VIF	Assessment
X (Online Reviews)	1.537	VIF < 3.3
Z (Consumer Trust)	2.432	VIF < 3.3
Y (Buying Interest)	-	-

Source: Primary data (2026)

The results presented all inner VIF values for the latent variables are well below the conservative threshold of 3.3. Specifically, the VIF value for online reviews (X) was 1.537, while the VIF value for consumer trust (Z) was 2.432. These findings confirm that common method bias does not pose a substantial threat to the validity of the structural relationships examined in this study. Consequently, the observed significant path coefficients, including both direct and indirect effects, can be interpreted with greater confidence, as they are less likely to have been artificially inflated or deflated by the single-source, single-time data collection method. This statistical verification reinforces the robustness of the research findings and provides additional assurance that the conclusions drawn from the hypothesis testing reflect genuine relationships among the constructs rather than measurement artifacts.

Hypothesis Testing

Path Coefficients

The route coefficient, referred to as path coefficients, is a value indicating whether the connection between the variables in the research model is positive or negative. Path coefficients range from -1 to 1. Values close to 1 indicate stronger positive relationships, while values near -1 signify negative relationships (Septiyaningtyas & Irmawati, 2025).

Table 11.
Value Path Coefficient (Direct Effect)

	Original sample (O)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Remarks
X -> Y	0.215	2.398	0.017	Significant
X -> Z	0.591	8.322	0.000	Significant
Z -> Y	0.641	8.560	0.000	Significant

Source: Primary data (2026)

The direct influence test results show that internet reviews (X) significantly and positively affect purchase interest (Y), with coefficient value of 0.215, t-statistical value of 2.398 (>1.96), and p-value of 0.017 (<0.05). Online reviews (X) had a positive and significant effect on consumer confidence (Z), evidenced by coefficient of 0.591, t-statistic of 8.322, and p-value of 0.000. Furthermore, consumer confidence (Z) had a positive and significant

effect on buying interest (Y), reflected by coefficient of 0.641, t-statistic of 8.560, and p-value of 0.000.

Table 12.
Value Path Coefficient (Indirect Effect)

	Original sample (O)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Remarks
X -> Z -> Y	0.379	5.285	0.000	Significant

Source: Primary data (2026)

Having a coefficient of 0.379, a t-statistic of 5.285 (>1.96), and a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05), the outcomes of indirect testing suggest that consumer trust can significantly influence the relationship between online reviews and purchase intention. These findings demonstrate that internet reviews are more successful in raising consumer interest in purchasing by first building consumer trust.

Mediation Analysis: Variance Accounted For (VAF)

To determine the type and strength of mediation, the Variance Accounted For (VAF) was calculated:

$$VAF = \frac{\text{Indirect Effect}}{(\text{Indirect Effect} + \text{Direct Effect})} \times 100\%$$

$$VAF = \frac{0.379}{(0.379 + 0.215)} \times 100\%$$

$$VAF = \frac{0.379}{0.594} \times 100\%$$

$$VAF = 0.638 \text{ (638\%)}$$

According to Hair et al. (2014), VAF values between 20% and 80% indicate partial mediation. The VAF value of 63.8% indicates that consumer trust partially mediates the relationship between online reviews and buying interest. This means that approximately 63.8% of the total effect of online reviews on buying interest is transmitted through consumer trust, while the remaining 36.2% is direct. This partial mediation suggests that while trust is the dominant pathway, online reviews also have some direct influence on buying interest

The Effect of Online Reviews on Buying Interest (H1)

The results show that online reviews have a positive and significant effect on buying interest ($\beta = 0.215$; $p = 0.017$). This finding indicates that more positive and informative online reviews can increase consumers' interest in making purchases. Online shoppers are unable to physically examine products before purchasing, making online reviews a valuable information source that helps customers form preliminary opinions and assessments (Saehu et al., 2025).

According to Consumer Behavior Theory, online reviews represent the information search stage of the consumer decision-making process. During this stage, consumers gather information from various sources to reduce uncertainty about product quality. The significant effect of online reviews on buying interest demonstrates that the information search stage is influential in shaping consumer intentions. However, the relatively small coefficient value (0.215) indicates that the direct contribution of online reviews to buying interest is not dominant. This finding can be explained through the concept of *experience goods*. Chili sauce products fall into the category of experience goods (Nelson, 1970) products whose quality can only be evaluated after direct consumption. Consumers of chili sauce face uncertainty

regarding taste, spiciness, aroma, and compatibility with personal preferences. Therefore, even though online reviews provide positive information, consumers still need additional confidence before forming a real buying interest. This is where the evaluation stage of Consumer Behavior Theory becomes crucial.

The relatively small effect size ($f^2 = 0.079$) further supports this interpretation. While statistically significant, the practical significance of this direct relationship is limited. This finding helps explain the sales phenomenon observed in the introduction: Sambal Bu Sandra had positive reviews (4.9/5.0) but lower sales compared to competitors. The presence of positive reviews alone does not guarantee purchase interest consumers require additional confidence mechanisms, which leads to the evaluation stage (consumer trust).

These findings further support previous studies, which reported that online reviews have a positive and significant influence on buying interest. The results are consistent with the studies conducted by Sari & Kholifah (2026), Soekotjo (2022) and Sahabuddin et al. (2024), which concluded that online reviews positively affect consumers' buying interest. However, the relatively weak effect size in this study extends previous research by showing that for experience goods, the direct effect is less dominant than for search goods a contribution of this study.

The Influence of Online Reviews on Consumer Trust (H2)

The test results show that online reviews have a positive and significant effect on consumer trust ($\beta = 0.591$; $p = 0.000$). The relatively high coefficient value indicates that online reviews play a strong role in building consumer trust. Consumers tend to rely on the experiences of other buyers and consider reviews as real experiences from previous users, making them more objective than seller-provided information. The number of positive reviews and comments can increase confidence in the product, while informative comments give consumers assurance about product quality (Mutmainah, 2025).

From Consumer Behavior Theory, online reviews contribute to the evaluation stage of the decision-making process. During this stage, consumers assess the credibility and quality of the information they have gathered. When consumers find online reviews that are useful, trustworthy, and contain strong arguments, these reviews contribute to building consumer trust in the product and seller. Trust emerges as consumers perceive that the reviews are honest and representative of actual product quality.

In ready-to-eat chili sauce products, trust is a crucial factor because the product relates to direct consumption and involves risks related to taste, quality, and safety. The f-square value of 0.537 (large effect) confirms that online reviews substantially contribute to building consumer trust. This finding is theoretically significant because it demonstrates that for experience goods, the primary function of online reviews may be trust-building rather than direct persuasion. In other words, the information search stage (online reviews) strongly influences the evaluation stage (trust), which then influences purchase intention.

The high coefficient (0.591) indicates that consumers are receptive to online review signals, and these signals effectively reduce uncertainty about product quality. This finding is consistent with the Consumer Behavior Theory proposition that consumers use information gathered during the search stage to evaluate alternatives and form trust in the product. These findings are consistent with Montolalu et al. (2024), Sahabuddin et al. (2024), and Rohmatulloh & Sari (2021), which state that online reviews positively and significantly affect consumer trust. The contribution of this study is extending these findings to local food

products and demonstrating the strength of this relationship even with a relatively small sample.

The Influence of Consumer Confidence (Z) on Buying Interest (Y)

Consumer trust positively and significantly influences buying interest ($\beta = 0.641$; $p = 0.000$). This result indicates that increased consumer trust correlates with heightened purchase enthusiasm for Sambal Bu Sandra products on Shopee. Trust is essential in online transactions as buyers cannot directly assess product quality before purchasing, leading to greater uncertainty and perceived risk than in offline shopping. Consequently, consumers tend to rely on trust in sellers, product information, and transaction security before deciding to purchase (Ridhaningsih and Besra, 2022).

From Consumer Behavior Theory, trust represents the evaluation stage of the decision-making process. When consumers have evaluated a product positively (through trust), they are ready to form purchase intentions, which represents the purchase intention stage. Trust operates as a cognitive mechanism that allows consumers to overcome information processing limitations and make decisions efficiently.

The very high coefficient (0.641) and large effect size ($f^2 = 0.706$) indicate that trust is the dominant driver of buying interest for food products. This finding can be explained through the concept of perceived risk. Food products carry higher perceived risk than fashion or electronics because: consumption involves direct bodily effects, taste preferences are highly subjective, and food safety concerns are paramount. Trust reduces these multiple forms of perceived risk, enabling consumers to form purchase intentions. In the food product context, consumers often exercise greater caution when buying food items online because of worries about flavor compatibility, safety, and product quality (Rosdiana *et al.*, 2019).

High consumer trust can reduce doubts regarding product quality and transaction reliability, encouraging consumers to develop purchase intentions. Conversely, low trust may weaken buying interest even when online reviews are positive. This finding supports the Consumer Behavior Theory proposition that the evaluation stage (trust) is crucial for determining whether the information search stage (online reviews) leads to the purchase intention stage (buying interest). The results align with Montolalu *et al.* (2024), Sari & Kholifah (2026), Soekotjo (2022) and Sahabuddin *et al.* (2024), which found that buying interest is positively and significantly impacted by customer trust. This study's contribution is demonstrating that this effect is particularly strong for food products, where trust plays a more dominant role than in other product categories.

The Mediating Role of Consumer Trust (H4)

The indirect effect test reveals that online reviews significantly influence buying interest through consumer trust, evidenced by a coefficient of 0.379, a t-statistic of 5.285 (>1.96), and a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05). This finding confirms that consumer trust serves as a significant mediating mechanism in the relationship between online reviews and buying interest. According to the established criteria by Hair *et al.* (2014), VAF values between 20% and 80% indicate partial mediation, confirming that consumer trust partially, yet substantially, mediates the relationship between online reviews and buying interest. This implies that approximately 63.8% of the total influence of online reviews on buying interest is channeled through consumer trust, while the remaining 36.2% constitutes the direct informational influence of reviews on consumer intentions. The finding that the indirect effect (0.379) exceeds the direct effect (0.215) is particularly significant, as it demonstrates

that the primary pathway through which online reviews influence buying interest is not through direct persuasion, but through the gradual cultivation of consumer trust.

The framework of Consumer Behavior Theory, this mediation mechanism finds a robust theoretical explanation through the staged consumer decision-making process. According to this perspective, consumer decisions unfold through a sequential progression from information search to alternative evaluation and finally to purchase intention (Engel et al, 1993). In this framework, online reviews supply the informational inputs during the search stage, yet these inputs cannot be directly translated into behavioral intentions without passing through an evaluative stage, which in this study is represented by consumer trust. This staged process explains why the indirect effect through trust is more dominant than the direct effect of reviews on buying interest. Consumers do not merely receive information and immediately form purchase intentions; instead, they must first evaluate the credibility, reliability, and quality of the information received before they are willing to commit to a purchase. For experience goods such as ready-to-eat chili sauce, this evaluative stage becomes particularly indispensable because the core attributes of the product including taste, spiciness, aroma, and food safety remain entirely unverifiable prior to direct consumption. Consequently, consumers face significant sensory and health-related uncertainties that cannot be resolved by textual information alone, compelling them to rely on trust as a cognitive mechanism to reduce perceived risk and bridge the gap between information acquisition and behavioral commitment (Jati *et al.*, 2026).

The finding that indirect effects exceed direct effects indicates that for food products, online reviews function less as direct persuasive tools and more as credibility-building signals that enable consumers to form trust, which subsequently serves as the decisive factor in shaping purchase intentions. In the absence of trust, positive online reviews may remain merely passive information that consumers acknowledge but do not act upon. This condition was clearly observed in this study's context, where Sambal Bu Sandra products possessed positive reviews and a high rating of 4.9/5.0, yet did not achieve sales volumes comparable to competitors with similar ratings. This phenomenon indicates that consumers may read and recognize the positive reviews yet remain hesitant to purchase because the evaluative mechanism trust has not been sufficiently established to overcome the perceived risks associated with taste compatibility, product consistency, and food safety. The partial mediation nature revealed by the VAF analysis further suggests a dual-route influence, where online reviews simultaneously exert a moderate direct effect on buying interest while primarily operating through the more dominant trust-mediated route. This dual mechanism implies that while consumers do derive some direct informational value from reviews, the more substantial impact occurs when reviews successfully build trust, thereby transforming information into conviction.

The practical implications of this mediation finding are substantial for online food MSME actors. The results reinforce that a review-based marketing strategy needs to be accompanied by a more comprehensive strategy in building consumer trust, meaning that not only the quantity of reviews needs to be improved, but also the quality of reviews, including the consistency of information provided, the seller's active and responsive engagement with customer reviews, and ongoing efforts to maintain the conformity of the product with the expectations formed through the reviews. Sellers should recognize that building trust requires consistent product quality, transparent communication, and responsiveness to consumer

feedback. The theoretical contribution of this finding lies in extending Consumer Behavior Theory to the context of local food e-commerce by demonstrating that the evaluative stage (trust) plays a more dominant role than the information search stage (reviews) in shaping purchase intentions for products with high sensory and quality uncertainty. This extends the existing literature by providing empirical evidence that the staged decision-making model is particularly relevant for experience goods, where the evaluation stage functions as a critical gatekeeper that determines whether information ultimately translates into action.

The findings are consistent with previous studies by Montolalu et al. (2024), Sari & Kholifah (2026), and Sahabuddin et al. (2024) which similarly found that consumer trust significantly mediates the relationship between online reviews and buying interest. However, the present study contributes a deeper contextual nuance by demonstrating that for food-based products, trust functions as a pivotal gatekeeper that translates passive information reception into active purchase commitment, a mechanism that is arguably more critical than in product categories with lower sensory and safety uncertainty. This deeper understanding reinforces that marketing strategies for online food MSMEs should prioritize trust-building as the primary objective of review management, as trust ultimately determines whether positive reviews materialize into actual purchase behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that online reviews positively and significantly influence both consumer trust and buying interest for Sambal Bu Sandra products on Shopee, with consumer trust partially mediating this relationship. The findings confirm that for food products categorized as experience goods, the direct effect of online reviews on buying interest is substantially weaker than the indirect effect through consumer trust, demonstrating that trust plays a more dominant role in shaping purchase intentions.

Theoretically, this extends Consumer Behavior Theory to the context of local food e-commerce by empirically validating the staged decision-making process from information search (online reviews) to evaluation (consumer trust) to purchase intention and revealing that the evaluation stage functions as a critical gatekeeper for products with high sensory and safety uncertainty. Practically, online food MSMEs should prioritize trust-building strategies over merely increasing review quantity by maintaining consistent product quality, ensuring transparent and responsive communication, and actively engaging with consumer feedback to reinforce credibility.

Despite these contributions, the study acknowledges limitations including a sample size of respondents, reliance on self-reported eligibility, and a cross-sectional design. Future research should employ larger samples, independent verification of purchase history, and explore additional variables such as perceived risk, price sensitivity, and product involvement to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in online food purchasing.

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