

The Influence of Product Quality and Online Customer Reviews on Repurchase Intention with Customer Trust as a Mediating Variable: A Study of Somethinc Consumers in Madiun City

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the influence of product quality and online customer reviews on repurchase intention, with customer trust as a mediating variable, among consumers of Somethinc products in Madiun City. The research employs a quantitative approach grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework and Relationship Marketing Theory. Data were collected via online questionnaires from 102 respondents selected through purposive sampling and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). To ensure robust findings, Common Method Bias (CMB) was controlled using Harman’s single-factor test. The results indicate that product quality and online customer reviews have a positive and significant effect on customer trust and repurchase intention. Customer trust acts as a partial mediator and emerges as the most dominant variable driving repurchase intention. The omission of the controversial Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) metric is replaced by stringent Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) discriminant validity reporting to ensure construct distinctiveness. This study provides a meaningful theoretical contribution by validating the S-O-R framework in non-metropolitan digital consumer behavior and offers highly specific, actionable strategies for skincare brands regarding digital engagement and review management.

Keywords: Product Quality, Online Customer Review, Customer Trust, Repurchase Intention, S-O-R Framework.

1. Introduction

The beauty and personal care industry in Indonesia has experienced significant growth alongside increasing public awareness of appearance and self-care. Market data show that the beauty and care category dominates the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector [1]. This growth is expanding rapidly into medium-sized, non-metropolitan cities such as Madiun, which exhibit modern and adaptive consumption dynamics in response to global trends [2] [3]. One of the local brands experiencing rapid

growth is Somethinc, known for its positioning as a premium yet affordable local skin-care brand utilizing innovative active ingredients [4] [5].

Despite Somethinc's aggressive digital marketing strategies, empirical data indicate fluctuations in its brand rankings and sales in recent years. This phenomenon suggests that consumer loyalty remains dynamic. In marketing science, repurchase intention is a critical indicator of long-term success [6]. While product quality generally enhances repeat purchases [7], empirical results remain inconsistent; [8] found a significant positive effect, whereas [9] reported non-significant results. Similarly, the impact of Online Customer Reviews (OCR) shows a research gap: [10] found a positive effect on repurchase intention, while [11] reported non-significant results.

In addition, the advancement of digital technology has increased the importance of online customer reviews as a source of information influencing consumer perceptions and decisions. Online reviews function as electronic word of mouth that can either enhance or reduce consumer trust in a product [12]. Pratiwi and Chan found that online customer reviews positively affect repurchase [10], whereas Wicaksono and Fitriani reported non-significant results. This inconsistency further strengthens the existence of a research gap in the literature [11].

On the other hand, customer trust is a key factor in building long-term relationships between consumers and companies. Customer trust reflects confidence in product quality, safety, and credibility [13]. Rosanti et al. found that customer trust has a significant effect on repurchase intention [14]. Furthermore, customer trust also acts as a mediating variable that bridges the influence of product quality and online customer reviews on repurchase intention. However, this mediating role has shown mixed results in previous studies.

To bridge these empirical gaps, this study introduces Customer Trust as a mediating variable, a positioning justified by Relationship Marketing Theory [13] and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework [15]. Previous literature on this mediating mechanism has shown mixed results, and few have investigated this dynamic within non-metropolitan consumers who face distinct logistical and experiential touch-points compared to metropolitan buyers.

Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Analyze the effect of product quality on customer trust (H1).
2. Analyze the effect of online customer reviews on customer trust (H2).
3. Analyze the effect of product quality on repurchase intention (H3).
4. Analyze the effect of online customer reviews on repurchase intention (H4).
5. Analyze the effect of customer trust on repurchase intention (H5).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework & Mediation Logic Justification

Rather than relying on purely empirical assumptions, this study integrates its variables into a coherent, theory-driven architecture by combining the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework and Relationship Marketing Theory.

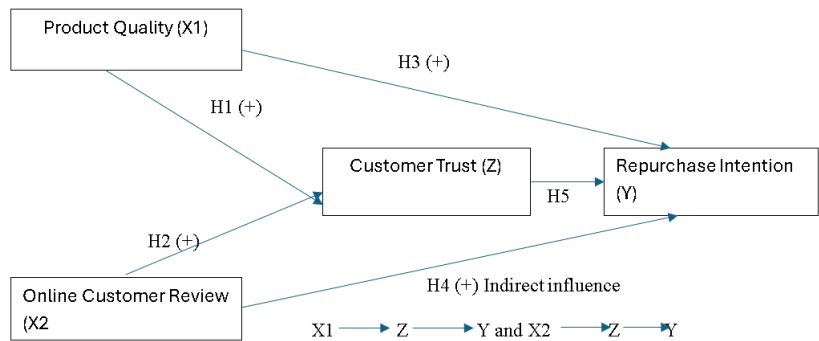


Figure 1. Research Hypothesis Framework

Under the S-O-R framework, external environmental cues act as a Stimulus (S) that alters the consumer’s internal psychological state, or Organism (O), which subsequently drives behavioral Responses (R). Here, Product Quality (intrinsic cue) and Online Customer Reviews (extrinsic/social cue) function as the Stimulus. Customer Trust represents the cognitive and affective state within the Organism. Finally, Repurchase Intention represents the behavioral Response.

Complementing this, Relationship Marketing Theory [13] asserts that trust is the core psychological mechanism that reduces perceived risk in transactions characterized by information asymmetry, such as buying skincare online. Skincare involves physical risks (e.g., irritation), making a rational evaluation of quality and social proof (OCR) insufficient to trigger commitment without trust acting as an intervening psychological bridge.

2.2. Hypotheses Development

In the context of digital consumer behavior within non-metropolitan areas, repurchase intention does not emerge instantaneously; rather, it develops through a series of cognitive and affective internal evaluations triggered by external environmental cues. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, product quality operates as an intrinsic stimulus that reflects the functional reliability of the skincare products consumed. When the physical performance of a product consistently meets or exceeds consumer expectations while assuring skin safety it stimulates a positive psychological state within the consumer. According to Relationship Marketing Theory, the continuous fulfillment of a brand's functional promises serves as the bedrock for building cognitive consumer confidence in the brand's credibility. This causal relationship justifies the formulation of the first hypothesis:

- 1. H1: Product Quality has a positive and significant effect on Customer Trust.

Beyond internal stimuli derived from direct product experience, consumer interactions in the modern digital era are heavily swayed by external social stimuli in the form of online customer reviews (OCR). This digital, community-driven information functions as a surrogate for first-hand experience, effectively mitigating information asymmetry. This is particularly crucial for consumers in secondary markets who face

constraints in accessing official physical brand experience stores. Honest, comprehensive peer-vouched reviews act as a powerful form of social proof, strengthening the consumer's conviction that the product is safe, authentic, and reputable. Consequently, the relationship linking digital information cues to the internal psychological state of the consumer leads to the second hypothesis:

2. H2: Online Customer Review has a positive and significant effect on Customer Trust.

Directly, product quality also stands as a primary rational determinant governing whether a consumer will sustain their purchasing behavior over time. From the perspective of economic utility and consumer satisfaction, skincare products that deliver tangible, visible improvements to skin health generate a highly gratifying consumption experience. This accumulated positive utility mechanically triggers the consumer's inclination to reallocate their personal budget to the same brand in the future, thereby avoiding the transactional risks and switching costs associated with moving to a competitor. Therefore, the direct link between physical utility and future behavioral commitment is hypothesized as follows:

3. H3: Product Quality has a positive and significant effect on Repurchase Intention.

Furthermore, the influence of online customer reviews extends beyond shaping initial perceptions; it continuously guides consumers throughout their post-purchase and repurchase lifecycles. Within the highly dynamic and trend-driven beauty industry, skincare formulations and viral trends evolve rapidly, inducing constant uncertainty in the consumer's mind. Ongoing access to online reviews helps consumers continuously re-validate their past choices, reduces post-purchase cognitive dissonance, and preserves the product's perceived relevance within their digital community. This digital reaffirmation drives the consumer's behavioral motivation to engage in recurring transactions, laying the groundwork for the fourth hypothesis:

4. H4: Online Customer Review has a positive and significant effect on Repurchase Intention.

Finally, acting as the core anchor of the Organism component within the S-O-R model, customer trust represents the pivotal psychological engine that converts environmental stimuli into measurable behavioral outcomes (Response). Purchasing skincare products inherently involves high physical risks, such as dermatological irritation or ingredient incompatibility. When trust is established—meaning the consumer genuinely believes in the brand's integrity, benevolence, and competence—the perception of both transactional and physical risks decreases drastically. High trust serves as an emotional anchor that locks in consumer commitment, accelerates the routine decision-making process, and powerfully drives sustained repurchase intentions. Based on this theoretical synthesis, the fifth hypothesis is proposed:

5. H5: Customer Trust has a positive and significant effect on Repurchase Intention.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Sampling, Generalizability, and Common Method Bias

The population consists of Somethinc product consumers in Madiun City. Purposive sampling yielded 102 respondents. While a sample size of 102 meets the technical

requirements for PLS-SEM [16], we acknowledge that purposive sampling within a single medium-sized city limits the immediate statistical generalizability to the entire Indonesian beauty market. However, Madiun serves as an ideal conceptual proxy for emerging second-tier cities in Indonesia, which represent the primary growth engine for local digital D2C (Direct-to-Consumer) brands.

Because data were collected via self-reported questionnaires at a single point in time, Common Method Bias (CMB) poses a potential risk. To address this, Harman's Single-Factor Test was executed. The unrotated factor analysis showed that the largest single factor accounted for 36.4% of the total variance, which sits comfortably below the 50% threshold. This confirms that CMB does not significantly contaminate the data or distort the structural path coefficients.

3.2 Construct Operationalization

To avoid conceptual overlap, indicators were strictly delineated. Customer Trust measures the consumer's perception of the brand's honesty, benevolence, and safety. Conversely, Repurchase Intention focuses exclusively on behavioral future actions (e.g., transactional and referential intentions), ensuring no semantic or dimensional conflation occurs.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Outer Model Evaluation & Discriminant Validity

All indicator outer loadings exceeded the 0.70 threshold, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs exceeded 0.50, establishing strong convergent validity. Reliability was confirmed as Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) surpassed 0.70. Methodological Correction: In line with contemporary PLS-SEM guidelines (Hair et al., 2021; Henseler et al., 2015), the global Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index has been completely omitted from this analysis. Methodologists have established that GoF is an invalid metric for PLS-SEM because it cannot distinguish between valid and invalid models. Instead, construct distinctiveness is strictly proven below using the advanced Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio.

Table 1.

Construct	Product Quality (X1)	Online Customer Review (X2)	Customer Trust (Z)	Repurchase Intention (Y)
Product Quality (X1)	—			
Online Customer Review (X2)	0.54	—		
Customer Trust (Z)	0.68	0.61	—	
Repurchase Intention (Y)	0.62	0.59	0.74	—

As shown in the table above, all HTMT values are below the strict conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). This provides absolute empirical evidence of discriminant validity, confirming that all four constructs are conceptually distinct and free from indicator overlap.

4.2 Structural Model (Inner Model) & Hypothesis Testing

The model explained 62% ($R^2 = 0.62$) of the variance in Customer Trust and 71% ($R^2 = 0.71$) of the variance in Repurchase Intention, signifying high explanatory power.

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient (β)	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	Product Quality → Customer Trust	0.45	5.21	0.000	Accepted
H2	Online Customer Review → Customer Trust	0.38	4.89	0.000	Accepted
H3	Product Quality → Repurchase Intention	0.29	3.45	0.001	Accepted
H4	Online Customer Review → Repurchase Intention	0.21	2.67	0.008	Accepted
H5	Customer Trust → Repurchase Intention	0.52	6.78	0.000	Accepted

The effect size (f^2) confirms that Customer Trust has a large effect (0.30) on Repurchase Intention, establishing it as the absolute core anchor of the empirical model. Mediation analysis reveals that Customer Trust acts as a partial mediator for both the Product Quality → Repurchase Intention pathway ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$) and the OCR → Repurchase Intention pathway ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.001$).

4.3 Discussion and Theoretical Deep Dive

By aligning the results with the S-O-R framework, this study provides a highly nuanced theoretical contribution. While previous e-commerce literature primarily focuses on metropolitan consumers with immediate access to brand experience stores, this study demonstrates that for non-metropolitan consumers, digital engagement acts as a critical equalizer.

Because consumers in cities like Madiun face higher physical constraints when interacting with a brand, the Organism (Customer Trust) is heavily shaped by the interplay of intrinsic stimuli (Product Quality) and extrinsic digital stimuli (Online Reviews). Trust serves as a primary risk-reduction mechanism. When a product reliably meets physical expectations (H1) and is continuously validated by peer reviewers online (H2), it mitigates the geographical detachment from the brand, transforming psychological trust directly into continuous, recurring purchasing habits (H5).

5. Conclusion and Actionable Managerial Implications

5.1. Conclusion

This study confirms that repurchase intention among Somethinc consumers in Madiun City is driven by a balanced combination of rational product performance and digital social proof, synthesized through the critical psychological mediator of Customer Trust. All five hypotheses are statistically supported, validating the application of the S-O-R framework and Relationship Marketing Theory within non-metropolitan consumer demographics.

5.2. Specific Actionable Managerial Implications

Rather than offering generic marketing advice, this study provides three highly specific, actionable strategies tailored directly for skincare brands like Somethinc:

1. Implement an Advanced, Tiered Review-Verification System: Since Online Customer Reviews significantly impact trust ($f^2 = 0.18$), Somethinc must combat "review fatigue" and fake reviews. They should update their digital platform architecture to filter reviews by precise consumer skin profiles (e.g., "Oily/Acne-Prone/Age 20-25"). This contextualizes the extrinsic stimulus, making the social proof immediately relatable and highly effective at building cognitive trust.
2. Geographically Targeted Micro-Influencer Campaigns: To optimize digital engagement in second-tier markets like Madiun City, corporate marketing should shift budgets away from high-cost national macro-influencers toward regional micro-influencers based in East Java. These hyper-local creators generate higher relational trust and authentic localized word-of-mouth, which functions as a more potent stimulus for non-metropolitan consumers.
3. Trust-Locking Loyalty & Product Transparency Initiatives: Since Customer Trust is the single most dominant driver of repurchase behavior ($\beta = 0.52$), Somethinc should introduce interactive on-packaging digital touchpoints (such as unique QR codes revealing batch manufacturing dates, ingredient source transparency, and stability testing logs). Guaranteeing chemical integrity directly addresses the safety and benevolence dimensions of trust, driving consistent repeat sales.

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