

# The Impact of User-Generated Content on Brand Perception in Food Delivery Services

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, we examine how user-generated content (UGC) influences brand perception in the context of food delivery services. Because online reviews, social media posts and other forms of UGC have become more influential in shaping consumer behaviour, knowing their role in building trust and informing purchase decisions is imperative. This research utilises a mixed-methods approach drawing on quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews and case studies of leading food delivery platforms (e.g., Uber Eats, DoorDash, Grubhub). Results show that user-generated content (UGC) is a key driver of consumer trust, especially when this content is perceived as authentic and credible. Moreover, social media outlets such as Instagram and review websites such as Yelp, were deemed by consumers as the most effective in terms of stimulating engagement and purchase intent. Instead, it points to a compelling need for active management of UGC, as both good and bad content are essential and influential factors in consumer perception and brand allegiance. The study offers valuable implications for food delivery companies leveraging UGC to build consumer trust, enhance brand image and strengthen their competitive positioning in the marketplace.

**Keywords:** User-Generated Content, Consumer Trust, Consumer Perception, Social Media, Competitive Positioning

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the food delivery service has seen growth, as we currently live in a digital world, and convenience is one thing many of us seek (Smith & Lee 2021). Deliveries come from third-party intermediaries like Uber Eats, DoorDash and Grubhub that have grown into key players in light of consumers demanding immediacy and immediate awareness for food orders. With these platforms vying for consumer attention, the function of UGC, especially in the form of reviews, photos and other social media posts, will be an important component of brand strategy (Anderson, 2023). In this scenario, UGC, or user-generated content, is a valuable asset that allows brands to gain credibility, boost engagement and encourage purchases.

Although UGC has a reputation to influence overall brand perception, its effect on brand perception in the domain of food delivery has not been addressed yet. Various researchers have noted that UGC enhances trust in brands that play a role in how a good or service is

provided to the consumer (e.g., retail, hospitality; Berthon et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the food delivery service sector is dicier than the other service sectors as it does not just involve delivering a service but also food that needs to be delivered on time, at a certain level of quality and at a particular price tag wherein everything is also regulated under thousands of norms at the local, state and national level which is why consumers will be able to witness negative comments and feedback about the food delivery service much faster as compared to the other service sectors. Consequently, comprehension of the impact of UGC on trust and decision-making in this field is imperative for companies to remain at the avant-garde.

*Trust: The Need of the Hour in the Food Delivery Industry*  
As research by Choi et al. According to Lim et al. (2020), consumers sometimes base their consumption experience by relying on the peer reviews and users' experiences to determine the quality and trustworthiness of food delivery services!! According to social proof theory, people tend to base their buying decisions on the perceived experiences of others, particularly when these experiences are readily

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available on more accessible digital platforms (Cialdini, 2009). And so the influence of UGC on how brands come across is probably going to be a major influence in consumer behaviour.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

User-generated content (UGC) has revolutionised the way brands engage with consumers, offering an authentic and cost-effective approach to marketing. Anderson (2023) highlights that UGC acts as a bridge between brands and consumers, fostering trust by presenting real experiences rather than polished advertisements. According to Berthon et al. (2019), UGC has surpassed traditional marketing in terms of influence, as consumers are more likely to trust peer reviews and testimonials over branded content. This shift has compelled businesses, especially in service industries like food delivery, to prioritise UGC in their marketing strategies.

Trust is a fundamental factor influencing consumer behaviour, particularly in online services. Choi et al. (2020) argue that UGC significantly impacts trust levels because it is perceived as authentic and unbiased. Social proof theory, as discussed by Cialdini (2009), supports this view, emphasising that individuals are more likely to rely on others' experiences when making decisions. This is especially relevant in the food delivery industry, where timely feedback on service quality directly affects consumer choices.

Furthermore, Smith and Lee (2021) found that positive UGC, such as high ratings and favourable reviews, enhances a brand's reputation, while negative UGC often leads to immediate reputational damage. However, negative feedback can also serve as an opportunity for brands to demonstrate accountability and improve customer relations, as noted by Kim et al. (2022).

Social media platforms play a critical role in amplifying the reach and impact of UGC. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Yelp have become hubs for user-generated content, where consumers actively share their experiences with brands (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020). Visual content, such as photos and videos, tends to generate higher engagement, making it a powerful tool for shaping consumer perceptions (Berthon et al., 2019).

In the context of food delivery services, consumers often rely on Instagram and Yelp to assess service quality and food presentation. According to Park et al. (2021), the immediacy and accessibility of these platforms enhance UGC's influence, especially for millennials and Gen Z consumers. This trend underscores the importance of selecting the right platform to maximize the effectiveness of UGC.

The relationship between UGC and purchase decisions has been extensively studied, with evidence suggesting a direct correlation between positive UGC and increased sales. Anderson (2023) emphasises that UGC enhances the decision-making process by reducing perceived risks and providing social validation. A study by Chen et al. (2018) demonstrated that customers are more likely to trust and purchase from brands that feature user testimonials and reviews prominently.

Conversely, negative UGC can deter potential customers, although its impact varies depending on the brand's response strategy. For example, Park et al. (2021) found that prompt and empathetic responses to negative feedback can mitigate its adverse effects and even turn dissatisfied customers into loyal advocates.

## PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted to explore the production of UGC (brand user) and its effects on the consumer's perception of food delivery. This paper seeks to begin examining how different forms of UGCs from all around social media affect purchasing behaviour, trust and brand loyalty.

## METHODOLOGY

You decide to adopt a mixed-methods approach for this article, to explore how user-generated content (UGC) affects consumers in the view of major brands and also their trust in food delivery service providers. We will survey 500 frequent users who frequent services like Uber Eats and DoorDash, asking them about the impact various types of UGC have (reviews, pictures and videos, for example) and which online platform is most effective (Instagram? Pinterest? What's up with Yelp?). For data analysis, frequency and cross-tabulations are utilised. Chi-square tests are then conducted in testing hypotheses.

## DISCUSSIONS

**Table 1: Age Group and Frequency of Food Delivery Service Usage**

| Age Group | Daily       | Monthly     | Weekly      |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 18-25     | 45 (34.62%) | 46 (35.38%) | 39 (30.0%)  |
| 26-35     | 45 (34.88%) | 45 (34.88%) | 39 (30.23%) |
| 36-45     | 36 (33.33%) | 36 (33.33%) | 36 (33.33%) |
| 46+       | 52 (39.1%)  | 43 (32.33%) | 38 (28.57%) |

Source: Primary data.

The chi-square test reflects that there is no significant association, between age group and frequency of food delivery service usage (p-value: 0.969). But on the surface, the behavioural trends indicate some slight nuances, with the youngest consumption group (18–25) using delivery apps daily, possibly due to busy lifestyles

and the convenience of food delivery, whereas older groups (46+) opt for once a month, possibly supporting the trend on home-cooked meals or less frequent delivery. All age ranges see weekly usage most frequently, attesting to food delivery becoming part of everyday life. Implications: These results imply that food delivery services are universally appealing to all demographics yet conversations with more specific strategies can improve engagement. For younger consumers, there are potentially app features, gamified experiences and promotional campaigns, while older users may be attracted through trust-building activities, such as health certifications and tailored meal plans. Loyalty programs plus weekly subscription plans would further fidelity plus retention from the frequent user. With its universal appeal and targeted marketing expertise, food delivery services are poised to maximise relevancy and delight across age demographics.

**Table 2: Gender and Food Delivery Services**

| Gender | DoorDash    | Grubhub     | Others      | Uber Eats   |
|--------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Female | 73 (27.34%) | 61 (22.85%) | 73 (27.34%) | 60 (22.47%) |
| Male   | 48 (20.6%)  | 62 (26.61%) | 68 (29.18%) | 55 (23.61%) |

Source: Primary data.

Notice the difference in preference of food delivery services when gender carries cross-tabulation. For female respondents, DoorDash and “Others” (non-major platforms) are tied at 27.34%, followed by Grubhub (22.85%) and Uber Eats (22.47%). For male respondents, there is a bit of variation with Others (29.18%), followed by Grubhub (26.61%), then Uber Eats (23.61%) and finally DoorDash (20.6%). These hints at the possibility that males are using different alternative (or local) platforms more than females are, while females are more evenly spread across the major services. This variation suggests possible gender-based preferences that food delivery platforms might tap into by personalising marketing strategies and service functionalities to these trends.

**Table 3: Food Delivery Services and the Most Frequently Used Platforms**

| Primary Reason   | DoorDash    | Grubhub     | Others      | Uber Eats   |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Convenience      | 32 (27.35%) | 25 (21.37%) | 28 (23.93%) | 32 (27.35%) |
| Discounts/Others | 32 (25.2%)  | 23 (18.11%) | 44 (34.65%) | 28 (22.05%) |
| Other            | 29 (23.02%) | 33 (26.19%) | 34 (26.98%) | 30 (23.81%) |
| Variety          | 28 (21.54%) | 42 (32.31%) | 35 (26.92%) | 25 (19.23%) |

Source: Primary data.

Compared with primary causes for using food delivery services, users of all platforms discuss differences in these 2 tables. Respondents who said their primary reason was convenience; preferred DoorDash (27.35%) and Uber Eats (27.35%), followed by Other (23.93%) and Grubhub (21.37%). Those choose discounts/offers will like Other (34.65%), DoorDash (25.2%) and Uber Eats (22.05%) users are also favoured. Among these seeking variety, site Grubhub comes out on top (32.31%), followed by

Other (26.92%) and DoorDash (21.54%). Respondents selecting her primary cause show a steadier distribution, with Grubhub (26.19%) and Other (26.98%) leading. That means sites like Grubhub and Other are seen as the crankiest. While DoorDash and Uber Eats choices for taking out appear to be only occasionally disruptive or changing. In other words, there is an opportunity for sites or applications on these platforms to develop promotions and features tailored towards certain consumer concerns.

**Table 4: UGC Type Influence vs UGC Platforms**

| UGC Type Influence | Facebook    | Instagram   | Twitter     | Yelp        |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Photos             | 25 (21.74%) | 23 (20.0%)  | 29 (25.22%) | 38 (33.04%) |
| Reviews            | 29 (25.89%) | 27 (24.11%) | 27 (24.11%) | 29 (25.89%) |
| Social Media Posts | 44 (30.99%) | 36 (25.35%) | 30 (21.13%) | 32 (22.54%) |
| Videos             | 35 (26.72%) | 29 (22.14%) | 31 (23.66%) | 36 (27.48%) |

Source: Primary data.

Trends to better understand perceptions, we cross-tabulated by types of UGC influencing perceptions with platforms on which UGC is encountered. When it comes to photos, Yelp (33.04%) and Twitter (25.22%) are the leading platforms, but Facebook (21.74%) and Instagram (20.0%) are not too far behind. Sequentially, reviews indicate a proportional impact through Yelp (25.89%), Facebook (25.89%), Instagram (24.11%) and Twitter (24.11%) which demonstrates their inherent availability. Facebook (30.99%) and Instagram (25.35%) are where social media posts are most frequently encountered, which aligns with the fact that they are predominantly visual, highly interactive platforms. For videos, Yelp (27.48%) and Facebook (26.72%) lead with Twitter (23.66%) and Instagram (22.14%) following. This indicates that Yelp performs best with reviews and review-based content, Facebook has a lot of versatility with all UGC types, while Instagram and Twitter provide more social and visual UGC types. This combination underscores the importance of brands carefully influencing UGC campaigns with platform strengths to maximise consumer engagement.

### Trust and Purchase Intent

This indicates a correlation between positive UGC literature and consumer trust in food delivery. Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that positive UGC improves their trust in food delivery services, thus demonstrating high importance in credibility building. So how likely are consumers to trial a new food delivery service that leverages UGC — here, a far greater share say they would likely or very likely do so, rebuilding the classic marketing saying of the consumer as a trial within the UGC category. On the other hand, negative UGC has an explicit power over trust, where the substantiality of respondents says that its impact is at best moderate or high. And that shows just how aware consumers are

negative news, so brands have to pay attention and manage UGC in advance.

### Response to UGC

The highest-rated item in our study covered the value of responding to negative UGC, and participants responded strongly that doing so is important or very important. Consumers preferred the following five strategies to what they believe the response strategies should be: responding quickly with an apology (swift, empathic response!) Offering compensation or discounts (spot on!) Clarifying also placed very high on the list, suggesting people want brands to be upfront. By contrast, failing to respond to negative feedback also scored the lowest, which again suggests that consumers expect brands to reach out to unhappy customers.

### Additional Feedback

Qualitative feedback helped identify opportunities for brands looking to maximise their reach with UGC. Frequent recommendations were to use personalisation, boost social media interaction and prominently display user endorsements on marketing efforts. Qualitative analysis showed that many of the demographics cited personal experiences, detailing how they found authentic reviews and visual content, like photos or videos, helped them trust and ultimately convert. On the other hand, negative UGC that brands did not engage with resulted in less trust and lost loyalty. These insights reinforce the idea that UGC is both an opportunity and a risk (if brands don't manage their digital presence and consumer interactions effectively).

### FINDINGS

- An overwhelming number of respondents concurred, that favourable user-generated content (UGC)—

including reviews, pictures and social media postings—positions them to trust a food delivery service much more.

- Many respondents indicated that UGC strongly impacts consumer decisions, with UGC making it more likely they would try a new service.
- Consumer trust is highly influenced by negative UGC and the effects on their perception on food delivery service, medium to high effects were reported across the respondents.
- Negative feedback could not be ignored and slow apologies and compensation were regarded as less preferred response strategies.
- For review-based UGC, platforms like Yelp were popular, while visually focused UGC was popular on Instagram.
- Facebook and Twitter was more flexible and featured varying degrees of reviews, photography, or video.
- However, when it comes to bad UGC, the overwhelming majority consider their responds by the brands as important or even extremely important.
- Consumers valued responsiveness as well as transparency and accountability, which meant that they appreciated hearing from a company quickly and knowing exactly what the company would do to address the issue.
- Personal interactions, positive social media interaction and user testimonials in campaigns were all highlighted by respondents as areas needing improvement.
- For consumer satisfaction and retention, you should implement features like gamification and loyalty rewards.

## SUGGESTIONS

- Brands need to keep an eye on UGC on popular platforms, respond to feedback — whether praise or complaint — as quickly as possible.
- Using AI-based tools for sentiment analysis will help the brands easily target negative feedback.

- Trust can be owned by altering negative UGC to positive by apologising empathetically, clarifying and compensatory offers [19].
- This builds trust with customers but you can leverage for user acquisition by showcasing this in your campaigns.
- Create Content Strategies around Platforms e.g. Review Campaigns on Yelp + Visual Story on Instagram skill up.
- Harness the power of micro-influencers and customer advocates to expand the reach of your UGC on social.
- Continually examine and use user feedback to make service improvements and marketing app features.
- To boost engagement for repeat customers, introduce gamified loyalty programs and personalised offers

## CONCLUSION

UGC is a critical driver of consumer trust and purchase intention in the food delivery service sector: Evidence from the effect of valence and volume of reviews on purchase intention in Turkey Full name, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Izmir University of Economics, Turkey Abstract predicted and moderated by the valence and volume of online reviews. Positive UGC acts as a form of trust within a vital social connection, while negative UGC shows a need for proactivity and fast response in conflict reconciliation. Targeted strategies by platform, as well as transparency and responsiveness are critical to unlocking UGC rewards and limiting risks. This will allow food delivery brands, with the aid of consumer insights, to better its strength digitally, retain loyalty and face competition in a dynamic scenario. Effectively, if managed well, UGC plays a vital role in conforming to consumer behaviour and ensuring the growth remains sustainable.

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