

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF FOOD SAFETY PERCEPTION IN CONSUMER PURCHASING INTEREST

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ABSTRACT

Food safety is a critical concern for modern consumers, influencing purchasing decisions globally. This study examines how food safety perceptions shape consumer buying interest in Indonesia, addressing gaps in localized, qualitative insights. Using a phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight respondents from diverse demographics (students, employees, managers, and business owners) to explore their priorities (safety, price, taste, nutrition) and safety-assessment behaviors (e.g., checking expiry dates, seller cleanliness). Findings reveal that personal health experiences (e.g., food poisoning, chronic conditions) and demographic factors (age, income) significantly influence safety prioritization, with older or health-affected consumers valuing safety most. Key determinants of trust include seller reputation, product physical condition, and hygiene standards. The study highlights practical implications for businesses: enhancing transparency, innovating health-centric products, and maintaining rigorous hygiene to align with consumer expectations. By contextualizing global frameworks within Indonesia's market, this research offers novel insights for policymakers and marketers to tailor strategies that address localized safety concerns and foster consumer trust.

KEY-WORDS

food safety perception, consumer purchasing interest, phenomenology



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Article Info:

Submitted: 20-09-2024

Final Revised:
25-04-2025

Accepted: 27-05-2025

Published: 30-05-2025

INTRODUCTION

Smith defines food safety (2008) as the condition and effort to maintain food quality to prevent contamination and diseases that spread through food. It is not uncommon to hear news about cases related to food products. Be it cases of food poisoning, harmful additives, or so on. This makes consumers, from time to time, more vigilant in selecting the food they will consume (Gidlöf et al., 2017).

How to cite:

E-ISSN:

Published by:

Wijaya, H. (2025). Phenomenological Study on The Contribution of Food Safety Perception in Consumer Purchasing Interest. *Journal Eduvest*. 5(4), 4232-4240.

2775-3727

<https://greenpublisher.id/>

Health awareness is a concern and a concern to be better and motivated to maintain and improve health and improve the quality of life by implementing a healthy lifestyle (Michaelidou N., 2008). Consumer awareness of *food safety* is increasing and has become an important consideration factor for consumers in purchasing food products (Liguori et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2018). With the increasing awareness of consumers regarding food health and safety factors, the food industry also realizes that competition for consumers is not just through price wars.

Consumers who have a high awareness of the importance of health will certainly pay more attention to the quality and safety of the food they consume (Kneafsey et al., 2013; Schröder, 2013). Consumers like this will be careful in choosing the food they consume, so that food safety guarantees will significantly affect purchase intentions and be a determinant in making a purchase decision (Arora et al., 2022; Lazaroiu et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2017).

The relationship between food safety and consumer purchase desire has been the object of much research. Grunert (2005) examined the relationship between consumer perception of food quality and safety and demand and found a positive relationship. This is also seen in the research of Ali and Jabir (2020) in India, where in their study, they found that 44% of consumers are willing to pay 9% higher prices to obtain healthier food.

In the study of Scarpato (2017) More than 75% of the Spanish consumer sample responded that they were worried about or paid attention to food safety. The study examined 19 variables that are of concern to food safety, including additives, nutrients, organics, fat, etc.

Through previous presentations, it can be seen that food safety influences consumers' interest in buying food in several countries. However, the same results will not necessarily be obtained if the research is conducted in Indonesia. Therefore, this study will try to analyze the influence of food safety perception on the buying interest of Indonesian consumers, as well as further analyze what factors affect the perception of food safety for consumers (Purwanto et al., 2021; Purwanto & Sudarini, 2021; Vizano et al., 2021; Widyaningtyas et al., 2022).

The objectives of this research are to determine if food safety perception plays a role in consumer interests/purchasing decisions and analyze and describe factors that can potentially affect consumer perception of food safety. The research is expected to help companies understand food safety factors that concern consumers. With this, it is hoped that the company can implement appropriate strategies based on the research results, for example, how to advertise/promote products or how to design products so that these important factors can be immediately seen by consumers.

This study advances existing research on food safety perceptions by adopting a phenomenological qualitative approach to explore Indonesian consumers' diverse perspectives across four distinct demographic groups (students, employees, managers, and business owners), which has not been extensively examined in prior studies like Grunert (2005) or Ali and Jabir (2020). Unlike Scarpato et al. (2017), who focused on quantitative metrics in Spain, this research uncovers contextual, experience-driven motivations behind food safety prioritization, such as personal health incidents (e.g., Informant 2's hospitalization) or age-related health conditions (e.g., Informant 7's hepatitis). It also identifies unique cultural and socioeconomic factors influencing Indonesian consumers, such as reliance on seller reputation and

cleanliness standards, which differ from findings in Chen (Chen, 2013) or Kim (2009). Additionally, the study bridges gaps in Michaelidou and Hassan (2008) by linking health consciousness directly to purchasing behavior through qualitative narratives, while proposing actionable strategies for local businesses (e.g., transparency, hygiene improvements) tailored to Indonesia's market, a contribution absent in global frameworks like Meziane (2007) or Rödiger and Hamm (2015).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing a phenomenological method to examine consumer buying behavior regarding food safety. Qualitative research is chosen for its ability to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors in depth, rather than relying on numerical data. This method helps answer questions about how and why consumers make certain food choices, providing insights that quantitative methods might miss. The study aims to uncover patterns and motivations behind food purchasing decisions by focusing on narratives and context.

The research involves interviews with four distinct demographic groups to capture diverse perspectives. The first group comprises students aged 18-25, representing younger individuals without fixed incomes. The second group includes employees aged 26-35, who are early-career earners. The third group comprises managers or directors aged 40-55, who are expected to have greater awareness of food health due to their leadership roles. The final group includes business owners aged 56-70, representing older generations with different consumption habits and priorities. These informants broadly understand how different age and income groups perceive food safety in their purchasing decisions.

For data collection, the study employs structured interviews, where researchers ask predetermined questions while allowing flexibility for follow-up discussions. This method ensures that conversations remain focused on the research objectives while capturing spontaneous insights. The study maintains consistency across responses by using structured interviews while enabling more profound exploration of individual experiences.

The data analysis follows Miles and Huberman's framework, which involves three key stages. First, data reduction simplifies and organizes raw interview data by identifying key themes and eliminating irrelevant information. Next, data presentation structures the findings into clear, cohesive narratives to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusion and verification ensure that the findings accurately reflect participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's biases. This approach strengthens the study's validity by grounding conclusions in the actual experiences of the informants.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to explore consumer perceptions of food safety. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with various informants, consisting of several groups. Here are the main findings of the study.

Group 1: Students aged 18-25 years as representatives of the younger generation, not yet earning a fixed income.

Informant 1: Student, 19 years old

As a 19-year-old student who lives with his parents and goes to college in the city, the informant has a fairly regular diet, with breakfast at home, lunch at the cafeteria, and dinner with the family. Sometimes the informant also buys snacks or eats with his friends. In deciding to buy a food product, the informant considers several factors in order of priority: taste, price, health/nutrition, and food safety. Taste is the most important factor for an informant because the informant prioritizes satisfaction from the product they buy. Meanwhile, considering the limited budget, the price is important for a student who gets a monthly allowance from his parents.

The next consideration factor is food safety, where informants are aware of the importance of this, but do not focus too much on it. The informant has never experienced health problems due to food, so he is not too worried about food safety. The food consumed by the informant at home was ensured to be safe by their parents. In maintaining the food's safety, the informant pays attention to the cleanliness of the place of sale, the expiration date, and the physical condition of the food product. Informants feel safer consuming food sold in places where cleanliness is maintained. The expiration date is the first thing informants see when buying packaged food products. The informant also saw

Informant 2: Student, 20 years old

In buying food products, the factors that are considered by the informant in order are food safety, nutrition, price, and taste. Experienced food poisoning in a campus café and needed to be hospitalized. This makes informants pay close attention to food safety, which is a top priority when choosing food. Meanwhile, health/nutrition is also important, considering his educational background in medicine. Food prices are the next consideration because of the limited monthly money from parents. Taste is still included in the purchase consideration so that the informant can be satisfied with the food consumed. In maintaining food safety, informants pay attention to the cleanliness of the place of sale, the reputation/trust of the informant in the product, the expiration date, good product packaging, and the existence of certification from the food supervisory agency. The informant once found insect larvae in a certain chocolate product, and found something similar on social media for that product, so the informant avoided the product.

Group 2: Employees aged 26-35 years as representatives of the early income group

Informant 3: Factory employee, 30 years old.

An informant who has a family said that price is the top priority in choosing food products because it is important to manage the family budget, followed by taste, food safety, and health/nutrition. Price is the top priority in maintaining the family budget, while taste is important so that all family members enjoy the food. Informants prefer to buy fresh groceries and cook at home to ensure food hygiene and safety. Despite having never experienced health problems due to food, the informant is aware of the importance of food safety, especially since he has young children susceptible to disease. Things that informants in food safety consider are the cleanliness of the place of sale, good packaging, and expiration dates.

Informant 4: Doctor, working in a hospital, 29 years old.

In choosing food products, informants consider health/nutrition as the top priority, followed by food safety, taste, price, and ease of obtaining products. Health and nutrition are very important for informants to maintain stamina and health

during work. Food safety is also a priority to prevent diseases and infections. The food that suits the taste of the informant is a factor in meeting consumer satisfaction. Although they have never experienced health problems due to food, informants are always careful in choosing food to ensure their safety and health. The cleanliness of the place of sale, the product's physical condition, the expiration date, the existence of certification from the food control agency, and the product's reputation. In buying food products, the informant chooses quality raw materials and chooses food in good condition. Informants try to avoid food products with a bad reputation, for example, various types of fast food or food products that have received negative news, such as being refused entry abroad.

Group 3: managers or directors aged 40-55 as leadership representatives who should start paying more attention to food health.

Informant 5: Manager of the contractor company, 53 years old.

As a person with diabetes, the informant has a specially regulated diet to control his diabetes. Health and nutrition are top priorities in choosing food products, followed by food safety, taste, price, and ease of obtaining products. Given the diabetic condition, informants need to maintain their health through the food they consume. Food safety is also important to avoid health complications. The thing that is considered in the food safety criteria by the informant is the content of food ingredients. Informants must choose foods that do not contain ingredients that can worsen health conditions and choose foods with age-appropriate content recommended by doctors.

Informant 6: Electrical factory manager, 50 years old.

In choosing food products, taste is the top priority, followed by the ease of obtaining products, price, food safety, and health/nutrition. Taste is the top priority for informants so that food consumption meets the level of satisfaction. Even though they have never experienced health problems due to food, the informant still checks the cleanliness of the dining area and ensures that the food purchased does not look spoiled or stale to maintain the safety of the food consumed.

Group 4: business owners aged 56-70 years as representatives of the older generation.

Informant 7: Contractor business owner, 70 years old.

When considering buying food products, consumers think of food safety, followed by health/nutrition, taste, and price. The experience of getting hepatitis because of buying food at a tent stall made the informant very concerned about food safety. This experience made the informant very careful, and she preferred safe food. The informant chooses nutrition as the second priority because at an advanced age, the informant needs to maintain a healthy condition, which at the current age of the informant is very easily affected by food consumption. Mistakes in consuming food can affect the condition of the informant, including blood pressure, cholesterol, and sugar levels. Taste and price are low priorities for informants because the taste is not proportional to health and To maintain food safety, informants often consume food cooked by family at home and only buy food from places that are trusted to be clean, as well as check the cleanliness of the place of sale, product packaging, expiration date, and reputation of the seller.

Informant 8: The owner of a building goods store, 68 years old.

Nutrition is the top priority in choosing food products, followed by food safety, price, and taste. Nutrition is a top priority for informants because they must

maintain their health conditions in old age. The informant said that the patient must maintain a diet so that the results of the routine check-up will show good results. Although aware of the importance of food safety, the informant admitted that he never paid attention to food safety in detail because he felt that the food products available and consumed daily by the informant were safe enough. Price and taste are low priorities because the informant no longer has family dependents, and the feeling is not proportional to the informant's health. The things that informants pay attention to in food safety are the place of sale's cleanliness and the product's physical condition.

Discussion

Consumer Consideration Factors in Buying Food Products

From the results of the interviews, it can be seen that there is diversity regarding the priorities of the informants in consuming food products. The difference between the factors they pay attention to when buying food products is caused by the personal condition of each informant.

Food Safety

Some informants give high priority to food safety when considering purchasing food products. The tendency to choose food safety as a high priority is seen in informants who are elderly, have special health conditions, or have experienced experiences that make them aware of the importance of food safety. Elderly informants, such as Informants 7 and 8, give high priority because informants pay attention to the health impact of the food they consume. Then Informant 5, who has diabetes, also offers a fairly high priority to food safety when buying food products. Informant 5 must choose foods with ingredients that will not worsen his disease. Informants 2 and 7, who had experienced severe health problems due to food consumption, also prioritized food safety when purchasing food products. The two informants became more selective in choosing food products to avoid the same incident.

Price

Informants who need to manage their expenses carefully are more likely to include price as a high priority when buying food. This can be seen from Informant 1, who is still in college and has not yet earned an income, puts food prices as a second priority. Informants get a limited amount of monthly money allotment, so informants need to choose food products with these considerations. Likewise, Informant 3, who has a family, puts price as the top priority in buying food products. Informants need to manage expenses for various needs, so they need to allocate the correct amount, including the consumption of food products.

Taste

Rasa is a high priority in buying food products for informants who have enough income, do not need to tighten spending, and do not have health problems or experience related to food safety. This finding can be seen from Informant 1, a student still living with his parents. Informants often consume food that is cooked/bought by their families, so they do not buy food products with their own money, even though they have limited monthly cash from their parents. The informant gives a sense of being a high consideration factor to obtain a high level of satisfaction. This can also be seen in Informant 6. As a manager who has worked for many years and all children have worked independently, the informant has a modest income to meet his needs. Therefore, informants prefer to prioritize the level of satisfaction in food consumption.

Nutritional Value

Informants who prioritize nutrition when buying food products are informants who have high health awareness or certain health conditions. Informant 4, who works as a doctor, has a high health awareness and gives high priority to nutrition. Then Informant 5, who has diabetes, needs to reduce certain types of food and increase the consumption of food that suits the needs of their health condition.

Perception of Food Safety and Consumer Buying Interest

In general, all informants are aware of the importance of food safety, but the effect on the buying interest of these informants varies according to the personal condition of each informant. Informants who have experienced health problems or have special health conditions tend to prioritize food safety. Meanwhile, other informants can place other factors such as price, nutrition, and taste. Some of the things that shape the perception of food safety from the informants are:

- Cleanliness of the place of sale: through the level of cleanliness of sales, it can form informants' perception of whether a food product is safe. Clean places increase consumer buying interest and vice versa; consumers tend to trust food safety less from products sold in dirty places
- Reputation/trust in sellers/producers: Informants are more interested in buying food products from sellers/producers they trust or have a good reputation. Informants are also more interested in products produced by well-known factories than by factories they are less familiar with.
- Reputation/trust in a type of product: A product with a poor reputation will reduce consumer confidence in buying it. Some informants avoid certain types of food, such as fast food, which is notoriously unhealthy. Experience has also influenced informants to avoid a certain product, even though the informant still consumes other products from the same manufacturer.
- Physical condition of the product: The informant considers good physical condition an important criterion for proving the safety of a food product. Poorly conditioned raw materials or damaged packaging make consumers feel that the product is not safe for consumption. Expiration date information is also the main concern of informants when buying food.
- Food content is a concern, especially for informants with special health conditions. Informants who have diabetes will avoid foods that have ingredients that can aggravate their condition.

Elderly informants also avoid foods that contain certain ingredients because these can affect cholesterol levels or blood pressure.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that food safety perceptions significantly influence consumer purchasing decisions, with variations based on personal health experiences and priorities. Consumers who have faced food-related health issues prioritize safety, while others focus on taste and price. Key factors shaping safety perceptions include cleanliness of sales points, trust in producers, product reputation, physical condition (packaging/expiry dates), and ingredient content. The research highlights practical applications for food businesses, emphasizing transparency, hygiene standards, health-focused innovation, and reputation management. Future research could explore cross-cultural differences, long-term trust impacts after food scandals, digital

platform influences, generational priorities, labeling effectiveness, psychological drivers, policy impacts, and sustainability-safety tradeoffs, providing valuable insights for industry strategies and regulatory frameworks in the evolving food market.

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