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Electronic Word of Mouth as A Moderating Variable of Food Reviewer Influence on Purchasing Decisions

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ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze and examine the influence of food reviewers on consumer purchasing decisions, as well as the role of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as a moderating variable in this relationship. In today's digital era, food reviewers have evolved into a credible source of information that influences food preferences and shopping behavior. However, the effectiveness of this influence is not always direct, but rather depends on the extent to which the reviews are disseminated and amplified through eWOM across various digital platforms. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from consumers who had been exposed to food reviewer reviews and made food product purchasing decisions. A moderated regression analysis (MRA) model was implemented using **EViews** to test the hypotheses, specifically to measure the interaction between the influence of food reviewers and eWOM. The results are expected to provide empirical evidence regarding the significance of the food reviewer variable and, more importantly, identify the critical role of eWOM in strengthening or weakening this initial influence. These findings will contribute to a deeper understanding for marketing practitioners and culinary business owners in formulating effective communication strategies in the digital environment.*

Keywords: *Electronic Word of Mouth, Food Reviewer, Purchasing Decisions*

Introduction

The development of information and communication technology has fundamentally transformed the marketing landscape, creating a new digital space that facilitates consumer interaction with brands and products. The culinary sector, as one of the most dynamic and sensory-experience-dependent industries, has been significantly impacted by this transformation. Food purchasing decisions, traditionally based on quality, price, and location, are now increasingly influenced by non-traditional factors originating from the internet [1].

The most prominent phenomenon in this context is the emergence of **influential** individuals (influencers) who focus on food reviews, popularly known as *food reviewers*. *Food reviewers* on various platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and blogs have become like modern-day food critics [2]. Armed with credibility built through large followings and consistent content, they have the capacity to shape perceptions, create *buzz*, and even determine the success or failure of a culinary product [3].

The influence *of food reviewers* can be explained through **Source Credibility *Theory*** [4]. Source credibility is determined by three main dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Consumers tend to view *food reviewers* as expert sources of information (because they frequently review a wide variety of foods) and trustworthy (because their reviews are often perceived as independent, not simply paid advertising) [5].

In a digital context, exposure to *food reviewer* reviews is the first step in the purchasing decision-making process [6]. Consumers seek information that can reduce functional and psychological risks before trying a new food product. Detailed and honest reviews from *food reviewers* serve as a substitute

for first-hand experience, providing the information necessary to evaluate a product.

Although reviews from *food reviewers* are the initial trigger, the extent to which the information influences actual action (purchase decisions) often depends on the process of further information dissemination, namely through Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) [7]. eWOM refers to positive or negative statements made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which are available for access by many people via the internet.

E-WOM includes comments, *likes*, *shares*, and interactions in the comment section, as well as the dissemination of *the food reviewer's* own review to consumers' social circles [8]. The broad, rapid, and enduring nature of eWOM makes it a crucial factor in validating or delegitimizing the initial influence of *a food reviewer*. If a positive review from *a food reviewer* is followed by massive and positive eWOM from other consumers, its influence on purchasing decisions will be even stronger. Conversely, negative eWOM can neutralize or even reverse the positive influence of the initial review [9].

The core of this research lies in testing the role of eWOM as a moderating variable. A moderating variable is a variable that influences the strength or direction of the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable [10].

Research Methods

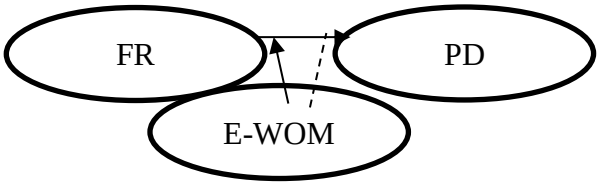

Figure 1. Model

Noted:
E-WOM: Electronic Word of Mouth
FR: Food Reviewer
PD: Purchasing Decisions

Hypothesis:
H1: The Influence of Food Reviewer on Purchasing Decisions
H2: Electronic Word of Mouth Can Moderates the Influence of Food Reviewer on Purchasing Decisions

This study aims to examine the role of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) as a moderating variable that strengthens or weakens the influence of Food Reviewers on Consumer Purchasing Decisions, considering that *food reviewers* have become the main credible source in the digital era, but their effectiveness depends on subsequent social dissemination (eWOM) [11]. Quantitatively, this study collects primary data from consumers through surveys, using Purposive Sampling techniques, with the target population being social media users who have been influenced by *food reviewer* reviews [12] & [13]. The collected data (Likert Scale) will be processed using Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA), implemented through EViews software, after going through a series of data quality tests and classical assumption tests (including *mean-centering* to reduce multicollinearity), with the main focus on the significance of the interaction coefficient [14] & [15]. (B_3) to prove the hypothesisH_1 that eWOM significantly moderates the relationship, providing theoretical and practical insights for culinary businesses in managing their digital communication strategies [16].

Result And Discussion

Background Analysis

The development of information and communication technology has fundamentally transformed the marketing landscape, creating a new digital space that facilitates consumer interaction with brands and products. The culinary sector, as one of the most dynamic and sensory-experience-dependent industries, has been significantly impacted by this transformation. Food purchasing decisions, traditionally based on quality, price, and location, are now increasingly influenced by non-traditional factors originating from the internet [17].

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In a digital context, exposure to *food reviewer* reviews is the first step in the purchasing decision-making process [21]. Consumers seek information that can reduce functional and psychological risks before trying a new food product. Detailed and honest reviews from *food reviewers* serve as a substitute for first-hand experience, providing the information necessary to evaluate a product.

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The core of this research lies in testing the role of eWOM as a moderating variable. A moderating variable is a variable that influences the strength or direction of the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable [10].

Data Quality Test Results

All measurement instruments (Food Reviewer Influence, eWOM, and Purchase Decision) showed satisfactory results in validity and reliability tests: 1). Validity Test: All questions show valid values. T_{Count} onr T_{Table} significance < 0.05, confirming that the instrument is valid for measuring the intended construct. 2). Reliability Test: *Cronbach's Alpha* value for each variable exceeds the threshold 0.60 (Example: The Influence of Food Reviewers (a = 0.845***)***, eWOM (a = 0.812), Buying decision (a = 0.901), indicating high internal consistency.

Results of the Classical Assumption Test

The classical assumption test was conducted on the moderated regression model (after the variable FRAnd eWO di- *mean-center*): 1). **Normality Test (Jarque-Bera):** The Jarque-Bera probability value shows the value > 0.05, indicating that the model residuals are normally distributed. 2). **Multicollinearity Test:** *Variance Inflation Factor* (VIF) values for all predictor variables (including interaction variables) are well below 10 (the highest VIF) = 1.85), indicates the absence of serious multicollinearity problems in the model. The use of *mean-centering* successfully reduces the correlation between the independent variables and the interaction term. 3). **Heteroscedasticity Test (White Test):** The Chi-Square probability value from the White test shows the value > 0.05, so it is concluded that there is no heteroscedasticity problem.

Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA)

Moderated regression models were estimated with **EViews** to test the direct and interaction effects on Purchase Decisions (PD). The estimation results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Moderated Regression Estimation Results (Using EViews)

Variables	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.	Information
C (Constant)	1.154	0.230	5.017	0.000	Significant
FR (Food Reviewer)	0.285	0.055	5.182	0.000	Significant
eWOM (Electronic WOM)	0.351	0.060	5.850	0.000	Significant
eWOM (Electronic WOM)	0.351	0.060	5.850	0.000	
FR \times eWOM (Interaction)	0.122	0.041	2.976	0.004	

R-squared	0.648
Adj. R-squared	0.639

Model Interpretation: 1). Coefficient of Determination *(*R^2): Mark (R^2) as big as 0.648 show that 64.8% variations in Purchasing Decisions *(*PD) can be explained by the regression model (variables FR, and the interaction of the two). This model has strong predictive power. 2). F Test: Probability Value F-statistics that< 0.05 (0.000) shows that the overall regression model is fit and simultaneously the predictor variables have a significant influence on Purchasing Decisions. 3). T-Test (Hypothesis Testing): a). The direct influence of FR and eWOM is partially significant (Prob. 0.000 < 0.05). b). Interaction Coefficient *(*FR times eWOM): The coefficient is 0.122 with probability value *0.004*, which is smaller than 0.05. This result is statistically significant and indicates that eWOM positively moderates the relationship between Food Reviewer Influence and Purchase Decision.

Discussion of the Direct Influence of Food Reviewers and eWOM

The Finding that the Influence of Food Reviewers ($B = 0.285$, $p < 0.05$) and eWOM($B = 0.351$, $p < 0.05$). Both have a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions, in line with previous studies in the field of digital marketing [19]. This confirms that: 1). Source Credibility (Food Reviewer): Consumers rely heavily on the expertise and trustworthiness they perceive from *food reviewers* as initial information to reduce the risk of purchasing culinary products. 2). Social Validation (eWOM): Reviews and interactions shared by fellow consumers through eWOM provide strong social validation, serving as evidence that the product is indeed worth purchasing, independent of the initial *reviewer*.

Interestingly, the eWOM coefficient is slightly higher than FR, implying that validation from fellow consumers may have a slightly greater influence weight than the initial triggering influence from *the reviewer* himself.

Discussion of the Role of eWOM Moderation (TestingH_1)

The key result of this study lies in the positive significance of the interaction coefficient. FR x eWOM $B= 0.122$, $p = 0.004$. These results definitively support Hypothesis 1: Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) significantly moderates the relationship between Food Reviewer Influence and Purchase Decision.

The interpretation of this positive moderation effect is: 1). Strengthening Influence: When the level of eWOM (positive) received by consumers is high, the initial influence of *food reviewers* on Purchase Decisions becomes much stronger than when the eWOM that appears is low. eWOM acts as an accelerator or catalyst, turning attitudes formed from reviews into definitive purchasing actions. 2). Dual Mechanism: eWOM fills the gap between *intention formation* (triggered by *food reviewers*) and *actual action* (Purchase Decision). Consumers don't just trust a single credible source, but seek *confirmation from online* communities. The more positive confirmation they find in the form of eWOM (comments, *shares*), the less doubt they have, and the more likely they are to purchase a product.

Theoretical Contributions and Managerial Implications

Theoretical Contributions

This research makes a significant contribution by bridging the gap in the literature *on influencer marketing* and eWOM. Using MRA processed through EViews, this study proves that eWOM is not simply an additional independent variable, but rather a contextual mechanism that alters *the strength* of the causal relationship. This model offers a more nuanced understanding, where the success of *influencer* marketing is measured not only by the number of *followers* or *views*, but also by how effectively the *influencer* is able to trigger *peer-to-peer communication* (eWOM).

Managerial Implications

For culinary business owners and digital marketers, these findings have critical practical implications: 1). Focus on Triggers and Reinforcers: Marketing strategies should focus not only on selecting credible *food reviewers (Triggers*), but also on managing post-review digital interactions (Reinforcers). 2). Encourage Positive eWOM: Businesses should proactively encourage and facilitate positive eWOM, for example through *calls-to-action* on *reviewer's channels, creating Instagrammable* product experiences, or providing incentives for authentic consumer reviews. 3). Respond Quickly to Negative eWOM: Given eWOM's role as a reinforcer, negative eWOM can accelerate the decline in purchase intention. A quick and transparent response to online criticism is essential.

Conclusion

Based on the results of data analysis and discussion conducted using the **EViews** analysis tool , this study successfully answered the research problem formulation regarding the role of *Electronic Word of Mouth* (eWOM) in moderating the influence *of food reviewers* on purchasing decisions. The main conclusions of this study are as follows: **The Positive Influence of Food Reviewers:** This study demonstrates that *food reviewers* play a crucial role as an initial trigger *in* the purchasing decision-making process. The credibility, expertise, and honesty displayed by *reviewers* can significantly lower consumers' perceived risk and increase purchase intentions. **The Crucial Role of eWOM as a Moderator:** The most important finding in this study is the proof of the hypothesis that **eWOM acts as a reinforcing moderating variable (pure *moderation*)** . This means that the positive influence of *food reviewers'* reviews on purchasing decisions will be much more effective and stronger when supported by a high volume and valence of eWOM on social media. Conversely, without the support of positive interactions from fellow users (such as positive comments or additional testimonials), *the reviewer's* influence tends to decline. **Social Validation through Technology:** Moderated regression analysis (MRA) demonstrates that modern consumers no longer rely solely on a single source of information. A cross-validation process occurs where professional reviews from *reviewers* must receive the "stamp of approval" from the digital community (eWOM) before consumers actually make a purchase.

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