

The Influence of Influencer Marketing, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), and E-Service Quality on Purchase Intention Mediated by E-Trust in Food MSMEs in Bogor Raya

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Abstract: This study examines the effects of Influencer Marketing, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), and E-Service Quality on Purchase Intention through the mediating role of E-Trust among consumers of food MSMEs in Greater Bogor, Indonesia. A quantitative explanatory research design was employed using survey data collected from 350 consumers who had purchased food MSME products online within the previous six months. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling, and the data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The results indicate that Influencer Marketing ($\beta = 0.241$), E-WOM ($\beta = 0.417$), and E-Service Quality ($\beta = 0.293$) significantly and positively influence E-Trust, with E-WOM emerging as the strongest predictor. Furthermore, Influencer Marketing ($\beta = 0.128$), E-WOM ($\beta = 0.181$), E-Service Quality ($\beta = 0.247$), and E-Trust ($\beta = 0.462$) positively affect Purchase Intention, with E-Trust representing the most influential determinant. The structural model explains 68.4% of the variance in E-Trust and 76.1% of the variance in Purchase Intention. In addition, E-Trust significantly mediates the relationships between Influencer Marketing, E-WOM, E-Service Quality, and Purchase Intention, with the E-WOM–E-Trust pathway exhibiting the strongest indirect effect. These findings contribute to the digital marketing literature by confirming the pivotal role of E-Trust as the underlying psychological mechanism connecting digital marketing strategies with consumers' purchase intention. Practically, food MSMEs should prioritize customer review management, continuously improve digital service quality, and collaborate with credible influencers to strengthen consumer trust and stimulate purchase intention.

Keywords: *Influencer Marketing, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), E-Service Quality, E-Trust, Purchase Intention*

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed the way consumers search for information, evaluate alternatives, and make purchasing decisions. The rapid development of internet technologies and social media has encouraged businesses, including Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs), to utilize various digital platforms as effective marketing channels. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media has become a strategic instrument that enables real-time, two-way interactions between companies and consumers. Furthermore, Tuten and Solomon (2017) argue that digital marketing has shifted marketing communication from traditional approaches toward



engagement-based strategies. In Indonesia, SMEs contribute significantly to the national economy and are among the sectors most actively adopting digital marketing strategies to enhance business competitiveness. This trend is particularly evident in Greater Bogor (Bogor Raya), where food MSMEs are a dominant business sector and have increasingly adopted digital platforms such as social media and online food delivery applications to expand market access. The rapid digitalization of food businesses has also intensified challenges related to consumer trust because customers cannot directly assess product freshness, hygiene, taste, or quality before completing online transactions. In the context of digital marketing, consumer decisions are no longer influenced solely by product quality but also by information obtained through social media, influencer recommendations, customer reviews, and the quality of digital services provided by businesses (Hajli, 2014; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

These changes in consumer behavior have made purchase intention a critical indicator for SMEs. Purchase intention reflects consumers' tendency to buy after evaluating the information they receive. According to Ajzen (1991), intention is the primary predictor of actual behavior because it represents an individual's readiness to perform a specific action. In digital marketing contexts, purchase intention serves as an important measure of the effectiveness of marketing strategies implemented by firms (Kim & Ko, 2012). Therefore, understanding the factors that enhance purchase intention is essential for food SMEs operating in an increasingly competitive digital environment. Previous studies have demonstrated that digital marketing activities influence consumer perceptions and purchase intentions through various psychological and social mechanisms (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016).

One of the most widely adopted digital marketing strategies is influencer marketing. Influencers are individuals who can shape their followers' opinions and behaviors through content shared on social media platforms. Freberg et al. (2011) describe influencers as independent third parties who can influence audience attitudes toward brands. Their credibility, expertise, and attractiveness often serve as key factors in consumers' product evaluations (Ohanian, 1990). Lou and Yuan (2019) found that influencer credibility positively affects consumer trust and purchase intention. Similarly, Ki et al. (2020) reported that influencer marketing enhances positive brand perceptions and fosters purchase intention through consumers' identification with and trust in influencers. Furthermore, Venciute et al. (2023) demonstrated that congruence between influencers and the products they promote strengthens the effectiveness of digital marketing communications.

In addition to influencer marketing, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) has become an increasingly important factor in consumer decision-making processes. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) define E-WOM as any positive or negative statement made by actual or potential customers about a product or company via the Internet. Unlike company-generated marketing communications, E-WOM is generally perceived as more objective because it is based on consumers' actual experiences. Cheung and Lee (2012) explain that consumers tend to rely on online reviews as a primary source of information before making purchasing decisions. Numerous studies have shown that the quality, credibility, and usefulness of information contained in E-WOM significantly influence consumer perceptions and purchase intentions (Cheung et al., 2009; Erkan & Evans, 2016). In many cases, consumers trust other users' experiences more than promotional messages delivered by companies (Filieri, 2015). Al-Adwan and Kokash (2019) further

demonstrated that credible E-WOM enhances consumers' confidence in products and encourages purchasing decisions.

Another critical factor contributing to the success of digital marketing is E-Service Quality. Parasuraman et al. (2005) define E-Service Quality as the extent to which a website or digital platform facilitates efficient and effective shopping, purchasing, and product delivery processes. In digital transactions, consumers evaluate not only the products they purchase but also the service experience throughout the stages of information search, ordering, payment, and delivery. High-quality electronic services can enhance convenience, satisfaction, and consumer confidence in service providers (Zeithaml et al., 2002). Conversely, poor service quality may reduce purchase intention and hinder the development of long-term customer relationships. Blut et al. (2015) found that E-Service Quality positively affects customer satisfaction and loyalty. Similarly, Rita et al. (2019) identified electronic service quality as a key determinant of purchase intention across various digital platforms.

Although influencer marketing, E-WOM, and E-Service Quality have been widely examined as determinants of purchase intention, the relationships among these variables are not always direct. In digital transaction environments characterized by uncertainty, trust becomes crucial. Mayer et al. (1995) define trust as an individual's willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations regarding another party's actions. In digital contexts, consumers often cannot physically inspect products and therefore rely on trust in sellers, available information, and other users' experiences. Gefen et al. (2003) argue that trust is a primary determinant of technology acceptance and online purchasing behavior. A meta-analysis by Ismagilova et al. (2020) found that trust strongly and consistently influences purchase intention across various digital commerce settings. Higher levels of consumer trust increase the likelihood of purchase behavior.

In the context of food SMEs, E-Trust becomes even more relevant because food products are highly sensitive to quality, safety, and the accuracy of product information. Consumers purchasing food products online face greater risks than those purchasing non-consumable products because they cannot directly verify product conditions before completing transactions. Pavlou (2003) argued that trust functions as a risk-reduction mechanism in electronic transactions. Likewise, Kim et al. (2008) found that trust reduces perceived risk and enhances consumers' purchase intentions. Therefore, trust is expected to serve as a key mechanism linking influencer marketing, E-WOM, and E-Service Quality to purchase intention.

Numerous studies have confirmed the relationship between influencer marketing and E-Trust. Lou and Yuan (2019) reported that influencer credibility enhances consumer trust in promoted brands. Similarly, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found that intensive interactions between influencers and followers foster emotional relationships that strengthen trust and purchase intention. Furthermore, Ladhari et al. (2020) demonstrated that perceived expertise and authenticity of influencers significantly contribute to the development of consumer trust within social media environments.

The relationship between E-WOM and E-Trust has also been extensively discussed in the digital marketing literature. Cheung et al. (2009) found that argument quality and source credibility in online reviews positively affect consumer trust. Filieri (2015) emphasized that consumers are more likely to trust information perceived as relevant, accurate, and generated by users with genuine experiences. Matute et al. (2016) further

reported that positive E-WOM enhances brand trust while simultaneously strengthening consumers' purchase intentions.

Similarly, E-Service Quality is closely associated with the formation of E-Trust. According to Parasuraman et al. (2005), efficiency, privacy, reliability, and responsiveness are the primary dimensions influencing customer trust in electronic services. Blut et al. (2015) demonstrated that high levels of E-Service Quality improve perceptions of security and reliability within digital platforms. Likewise, Rita et al. (2019) found that E-Service Quality significantly affects both trust and purchase intention among online consumers.

The rapid digitalization of food MSMEs has transformed how culinary businesses interact with consumers and conduct commercial transactions. In Greater Bogor, culinary MSMEs have increasingly adopted digital platforms, particularly Online Food Delivery (OFD) services and social media, to expand market access and enhance business competitiveness. However, despite the growing adoption of digital platforms, many culinary MSMEs still face functional and psychological barriers, including perceived risk, value barriers, and technology-use challenges, which may ultimately affect consumer trust in online transactions (A'yuni et al., 2025). Furthermore, unlike many other e-commerce products, food products cannot be physically inspected before purchase, making consumers more dependent on trustworthy information, online reviews, and reliable digital services when evaluating product quality, freshness, hygiene, and transaction reliability. These contextual characteristics indicate that trust plays a particularly critical role in shaping online purchase decisions within the food MSME sector.

Despite extensive research examining the relationships among influencer marketing, E-WOM, trust, and purchase intention, previous findings remain inconclusive. This issue has become increasingly relevant in the context of food MSMEs, where the rapid expansion of digital commerce has fundamentally changed consumer purchasing behavior. Consumers increasingly rely on online platforms to purchase food products; however, unlike many other e-commerce categories, food products cannot be physically inspected prior to purchase. As a result, consumers often face uncertainty regarding product freshness, hygiene, taste, and overall quality, making trust a critical factor in reducing perceived risk during online transactions.

Although previous studies have extensively investigated the relationships among Influencer Marketing, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), E-Service Quality, E-Trust, and Purchase Intention, their findings remain inconsistent. Some studies identify Influencer Marketing as the dominant driver of purchase intention, whereas others report that E-WOM or consumer trust plays a more influential role in shaping purchasing decisions. Moreover, most existing studies have focused on large e-commerce platforms, fashion products, or the beauty industry. At the same time, empirical evidence concerning food MSMEs, particularly within rapidly digitalizing regional markets such as Greater Bogor, remains limited. These conceptual and contextual gaps indicate the need for further investigation to clarify how trust mediates the relationships between digital marketing activities and consumers' purchase intentions in the online food business environment. Some studies suggest that influencer marketing exerts the strongest influence on purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Ki et al., 2020), whereas others indicate that E-WOM and trust are more influential factors in shaping consumers' purchase intentions (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Filieri, 2015). Moreover, most prior studies have focused on beauty products, fashion, and large-scale e-commerce settings, while

research specifically addressing food SMEs remains limited. This limitation highlights a research gap that warrants further investigation, particularly regarding the mediating role of E-Trust in explaining the relationships among influencer marketing, E-WOM, E-Service Quality, and purchase intention within the food SME sector.

Based on the foregoing discussion, an empirical model is needed to explain how influencer marketing, E-WOM, and E-Service Quality influence purchase intention through the mediating role of E-Trust among food SME consumers. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the literature on digital marketing and consumer behavior, particularly concerning the mechanism through which consumer trust shapes purchase intention. Practically, the findings are expected to provide valuable insights for food SME owners by helping them design more effective digital marketing strategies through optimizing influencer marketing, managing positive E-WOM, improving electronic service quality, and strengthening consumer trust in both products and businesses.

Based on the introduction above, this study aims to examine the effects of Influencer Marketing, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), and E-Service Quality on E-Trust among consumers of food SMEs in the Greater Bogor area, to investigate the effects of Influencer Marketing, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), E-Service Quality, and E-Trust on Purchase Intention among consumers of food SMEs in the Greater Bogor area, and to assess the mediating role of E-Trust in the relationships between Influencer Marketing, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), E-Service Quality, and Purchase Intention among consumers of food SMEs in the Greater Bogor area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the causal relationships among Influencer Marketing, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), E-Service Quality, and Purchase Intention, with E-Trust mediating the relationships among consumers of food SMEs in the Greater Bogor area. A quantitative approach was selected because it enables the objective measurement of relationships among variables through statistical analysis. At the same time, the explanatory design facilitates the investigation of both direct and indirect effects among constructs derived from digital marketing and consumer behavior theories. According to Hair et al. (2022), explanatory research based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is particularly appropriate for testing conceptual models involving complex relationships among latent variables, including mediation effects and simultaneous interactions among constructs.

Population and Sample

The target population consisted of all consumers of food SMEs in the Greater Bogor area who had purchased products online through various digital platforms. Since the exact population size was unknown, a non-probability sampling technique using purposive sampling was employed. This sampling method was selected because it allows researchers to recruit respondents with characteristics relevant to the study and direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Sekaran & Bougie, 2021). The eligibility criteria required respondents to: (1) be at least 17 years old, (2) reside in the Greater Bogor area, (3) have purchased food SME products online within the previous six months, and (4) have obtained product information through digital media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Shopee, Tokopedia, Facebook, or WhatsApp. A total of 350

respondents participated in the study. This sample size exceeds the minimum requirements recommended for PLS-SEM analysis and is considered sufficient to generate stable parameter estimates, achieve high estimation accuracy, and enhance the statistical power of structural model testing (Hair et al., 2022; Kock & Hadaya, 2018).

Data Collection Technique

The study utilized primary data collected through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. Before the full-scale survey, a pilot study involving 30 respondents with characteristics similar to the target population was conducted. The pilot study aimed to ensure that all measurement items were clearly understood and demonstrated adequate preliminary validity and reliability (Taherdoost, 2018). All questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Likert scale was considered appropriate because it effectively captures respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral tendencies toward the research constructs while remaining easy to understand (Sekaran & Bougie, 2021).

Variable Operationalization

This study employed five reflective latent constructs: Influencer Marketing, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), E-Service Quality, E-Trust, and Purchase Intention, measured through a total of 30 indicators adapted from well-established and validated measurement scales in previous studies. Influencer Marketing was assessed through the dimensions of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, adapted from the credibility model developed by Ohanian (1990) and subsequently operationalized in social media marketing research by Lou and Yuan (2019). Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) was measured using the dimensions of information quality, credibility, and usefulness, following the measurement scale proposed by Cheung et al. (2008) and further validated by Erkan and Evans (2016). E-Service Quality was evaluated using the E-S-QUAL dimensions of efficiency, fulfillment, and privacy, adapted from Parasuraman et al. (2005). E-Trust was measured through the dimensions of integrity, competence, and benevolence, based on the organizational trust model developed by Mayer et al. (1995) and widely adopted in e-commerce research by Gefen et al. (2003). Finally, Purchase Intention was measured using the validated scale developed by Spears and Singh (2004), which has been extensively applied in consumer behavior and digital marketing research to assess consumers' intention to purchase a product or service. All constructs were specified as reflective constructs because the indicators were considered manifestations of the underlying latent variables being measured.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using SmartPLS version 4 through the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. PLS-SEM was selected because it can analyze complex models, accommodate latent variables with multiple indicators, and operate without the strict multivariate normality assumptions required by covariance-based SEM (Sarstedt et al., 2022). Furthermore, PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for studies focused on theory development and consumer behavior prediction in dynamic digital marketing environments (Hair et al., 2022).

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The measurement model was evaluated to ensure that all indicators measured their respective constructs validly and reliably. Convergent validity was assessed using outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Indicators were considered valid when their loadings exceeded 0.70 and AVE values exceeded 0.50, indicating that the construct explained more than 50% of the variance in its indicators (Hair et al., 2022). Construct reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, with a minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker Criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). HTMT values below 0.90 indicate adequate discriminant validity among constructs (Henseler et al., 2015).

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

After the measurement model met all quality criteria, the structural model was evaluated to examine the strength of relationships among latent constructs. Prior to hypothesis testing, multicollinearity was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with a maximum acceptable threshold of 5.00. The quality of the structural model was subsequently evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). According to Hair et al. (2022), an R^2 value of 0.75 indicates substantial explanatory power, whereas values of 0.50 and 0.25 indicate moderate and weak explanatory power, respectively. Using multiple evaluation metrics provides a comprehensive assessment of model quality.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples, as recommended in the latest PLS-SEM literature (Hair et al., 2022). Bootstrapping enables the empirical estimation of parameter distributions without relying on normality assumptions. Hypotheses were accepted when the t-statistic exceeded 1.96, and the p-value was below 0.05 at the 5% significance level. The results were used to evaluate the direct effects among variables in the proposed research model.

Mediation Effect Testing

The mediating role of E-Trust was examined through indirect effect analysis using bootstrapping. According to Nitzi et al. (2016), bootstrapping represents the most recommended method for mediation analysis in PLS-SEM because it provides more accurate estimates than traditional approaches. To determine the type of mediation, the Variance Accounted For (VAF) value was also calculated. A VAF value below 20% indicates no mediation, values between 20% and 80% indicate partial mediation, and values above 80% indicate full mediation.

Common Method Bias Assessment

Because all data were collected using the same instrument at a single point in time, we implemented procedures to control for potential Common Method Bias (CMB). Procedural remedies included respondent anonymity, randomization of questionnaire items, and logical separation among constructs. In addition, we performed a full collinearity assessment using the approach recommended by Kock (2020). The model was considered free from common method bias when all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below the threshold of 3.3.

Predictive Model Assessment

In addition to evaluating the model's explanatory power, this study assessed its predictive capability using the PLSpredict procedure. According to Shmueli et al. (2019), predictive assessment represents a major advancement in modern PLS-SEM methodology because it allows researchers to evaluate a model's ability to predict new observations. A model is considered to possess satisfactory predictive relevance when the Q^2 predict values are greater than zero, and the prediction errors are lower than those generated by the benchmark linear model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

Respondent characteristics were analyzed to provide an overview of the profile of food SME consumers included in this study. A total of 350 respondents met the established research criteria. The distribution of respondent characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics (n = 350)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	139	39.7
	Female	211	60.3
Age	17–25 years	161	46.0
	26–35 years	103	29.4
	36–45 years	58	16.6
	>45 years	28	8.0

As shown in Table 1, most respondents were female (60.3% of the sample), while male respondents represented 39.7%. This finding suggests that women tend to be more active in purchasing food SME products through digital platforms. In terms of age distribution, respondents aged 17–25 years constituted the largest group (46.0%), followed by those aged 26–35 years (29.4%). The dominance of younger consumers indicates that individuals with high levels of digital literacy and intensive social media usage primarily drive the digital food SME market.

These findings support the assumption that younger consumers represent the primary target market for digital food SME marketing, as they are generally more receptive to information conveyed through influencers, online reviews, and various forms of social media-based marketing communication.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Research Variables

Before testing the structural model, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to provide an overview of respondents' perceptions of each research construct. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Influencer Marketing	3.96	0.61
E-WOM	4.08	0.58
E-Service Quality	3.89	0.64
E-Trust	3.98	0.59
Purchase Intention	4.05	0.57

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that all variables achieved mean scores above 3.80, suggesting positive respondent perceptions of the digital marketing activities implemented by food SMEs. E-WOM received the highest mean score (4.08), indicating that consumers place substantial importance on online reviews and other users' experiences before purchasing food products online.

Meanwhile, E-Service Quality recorded the lowest mean score among the variables (3.89). Nevertheless, this value still falls within the high category. This finding suggests that consumers generally perceive the digital service quality provided by food SMEs positively, although there remains room for improvement, particularly in responsiveness and service accuracy.

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The measurement model was evaluated to ensure that all indicators adequately represented their respective latent constructs in terms of validity and reliability.

Convergent Validity

The convergent validity assessment showed that all indicators achieved outer loading values above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022). Table 3 presents the complete results.

Table 3. Outer Loadings and AVE

Variable	Lowest Loading	Highest Loading	AVE
Influencer Marketing	0.724	0.892	0.653
E-WOM	0.761	0.901	0.681
E-Service Quality	0.733	0.884	0.642
E-Trust	0.772	0.896	0.694
Purchase Intention	0.781	0.908	0.701

Furthermore, all constructs achieved AVE values exceeding 0.50. Therefore, all constructs demonstrated strong convergent validity, as they explained more than 50% of the variance in their respective indicators.

Construct Reliability

In addition to validity assessment, construct reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability.

Table 4. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Influencer Marketing	0.894	0.918
E-WOM	0.901	0.927
E-Service Quality	0.887	0.915
E-Trust	0.912	0.934
Purchase Intention	0.916	0.936

As shown in Table 4, all constructs achieved Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above the recommended threshold of 0.70. These findings indicate that the research instrument exhibits a high level of internal consistency and is therefore suitable for structural model analysis.

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination was examined to assess the explanatory power of the independent variables on the endogenous constructs.



Table 5. R² Values

Endogenous Variable	R ²
E-Trust	0.684
Purchase Intention	0.761

The results indicate that Influencer Marketing, E-WOM, and E-Service Quality collectively explain 68.4% of the variance in E-Trust. Furthermore, Influencer Marketing, E-WOM, E-Service Quality, and E-Trust collectively explain 76.1% of the variance in Purchase Intention.

These findings demonstrate that the proposed model possesses substantial predictive capability. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that consumers' intentions to purchase food SME products online are largely determined by the factors incorporated into the research model.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples. Table 6 summarises the results.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results

Path	Beta	t-statistic	p-value
IM	0.241	4.781	<0.001
EWOM	0.417	7.225	<0.001
ESQ	0.293	5.631	<0.001
IM	0.128	2.512	0.012
EWOM	0.181	2.891	0.004
ESQ	0.247	4.728	<0.001
ET	0.462	8.514	<0.001

The results presented in Table 6 indicate that all proposed hypotheses were supported. E-WOM was the strongest predictor of E-Trust ($\beta = 0.417$), followed by E-Service Quality ($\beta = 0.293$) and Influencer Marketing ($\beta = 0.241$).

These findings suggest that consumers of food SMEs place greater trust in the actual experiences shared by other consumers than in promotional messages delivered by influencers. In the context of online food purchases, customer reviews are perceived as a more objective source of information and therefore possess greater capacity to foster consumer trust. This finding is consistent with Filieri (2015) and Erkan and Evans (2016), who emphasized the critical role of credible online reviews in shaping consumer trust and purchase decisions in digital environments.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Influencer Marketing has a positive and significant effect on E-Trust among consumers of food SMEs in the Greater Bogor area. This result suggests that influencer credibility, reflected in expertise, trustworthiness, and personal attractiveness, enhances consumers' confidence in the promoted products. In the context of digital marketing, consumers often face information limitations regarding product quality and therefore rely on influencers as alternative sources of information that are perceived as more relatable and authentic than company-generated marketing communications. This mechanism is particularly relevant in online food purchasing, where consumers cannot directly evaluate product freshness, taste, hygiene, or overall quality before completing a transaction. Under such conditions, credible influencers serve as external quality cues that help reduce consumers' uncertainty and perceived risk regarding the products being offered. Rather than relying solely on promotional content,

consumers tend to develop trust when influencers are perceived as knowledgeable, honest, and experienced in reviewing food products. Consequently, influencer credibility functions as an important trust-building mechanism that facilitates consumers' confidence in online food purchasing decisions. This finding supports the Source Credibility Theory proposed by Ohanian (1990), which posits that trustworthiness and expertise are key determinants of marketing communication effectiveness. The result is also consistent with previous studies by Lou and Yuan (2019), Ki et al. (2020), Sokolova and Kefi (2020), and Venciute et al. (2023), all of which found that influencer credibility contributes significantly to the development of consumer trust in social media environments.

The present study demonstrates that Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) exerts the strongest influence on E-Trust among all antecedent variables, indicating that consumers of food MSMEs rely more heavily on peer-generated experiential information than on marketer-controlled promotional communications when forming trust. This finding can be explained by the distinctive characteristics of food products, which are characterized by high quality uncertainty because consumers cannot directly evaluate freshness, taste, hygiene, ingredient quality, or food safety before completing an online purchase. This uncertainty increases perceived transaction risk and motivates consumers to seek credible external information that reduces ambiguity about product quality. In this context, customer reviews serve not merely as additional information but as experiential evidence that enables prospective buyers to infer product quality based on the actual consumption experiences of previous customers. Consequently, E-WOM functions as a trust-building and risk-reduction mechanism, allowing consumers to make purchasing decisions with greater confidence under conditions of imperfect information. This interpretation is consistent with the Information Adoption Model, which argues that consumers are more likely to adopt information perceived as credible, useful, and diagnostic when making decisions under uncertainty (Cheung et al., 2009; Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Furthermore, the findings support previous studies demonstrating that online reviews are particularly influential in food-related purchasing because they provide authentic experiential information that cannot be obtained through product descriptions or promotional messages alone (Filiari & McLeay, 2014; Ismagilova et al., 2020). Therefore, the dominance of E-WOM observed in this study suggests that consumer trust in online food commerce is established primarily through shared consumption experiences rather than firm-generated marketing communications, highlighting the increasingly important role of peer-generated information in contemporary digital food purchasing. This finding also reflects a broader shift in contemporary digital consumer behavior, in which consumers increasingly prioritize authentic user-generated experiences over professionally curated promotional content when evaluating products related to health, taste, and consumption safety.

The strong influence of E-WOM on E-Trust in this study can be explained by the characteristics of food products, which are associated with relatively high levels of perceived risk. Consumers cannot verify product taste, ingredient quality, or freshness prior to purchase. Consequently, customer reviews become an essential source of information during the product evaluation process. The more positive reviews available, the more confident consumers are that the product will meet their expectations. More importantly, this finding reflects a broader shift in contemporary digital consumer

behavior, in which consumers increasingly prioritize peer-generated experiential information over marketer-controlled promotional communications when evaluating products characterized by high uncertainty, such as food products purchased online. Rather than relying solely on persuasive promotional messages, consumers seek authentic consumption experiences shared by previous buyers to reduce uncertainty and strengthen confidence in their purchasing decisions. This suggests that E-WOM has evolved beyond a communication tool into a central trust-building mechanism in digital food commerce, reinforcing the strategic importance of customer-generated content for food MSMEs operating in increasingly competitive online marketplaces. This finding reinforces Filieri and McLeay (2014) that online reviews function as a risk-reduction mechanism in digital transactions and play a vital role in building trust in both products and sellers.

The results also demonstrate that E-Service Quality has a positive and significant effect on E-Trust. This finding suggests that high-quality digital services create a sense of security and confidence among consumers toward food SMEs. Consumers who find it easy to obtain product information, place orders, receive prompt responses, and complete secure transactions tend to exhibit higher levels of trust. In the context of online food purchases, efficient digital services are particularly important because consumers expect timely order processing, accurate product information, secure payment systems, and reliable delivery to preserve product freshness and quality. Service failures such as delayed deliveries, inaccurate order fulfillment, or poor communication may not only reduce satisfaction but also weaken consumers' trust, given the perishable nature of food products. This result is consistent with the E-S-QUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. (2005) and supported by the studies of Blut et al. (2015), Rita et al. (2019), and Amin et al. (2014), which identified electronic service quality as a fundamental factor in trust formation within digital business environments.

Beyond its influence on E-Trust, Influencer Marketing was also found to have a direct positive effect on Purchase Intention. Although its coefficient was relatively smaller than that of E-Trust, the result indicates that influencers remain effective in stimulating consumers' purchase intentions. This influence occurs because influencers not only provide product information but also shape consumer perceptions, preferences, and attitudes toward products. In the context of online food purchasing, influencer recommendations may also reduce consumers' hesitation when evaluating products whose quality cannot be directly verified before purchase. By demonstrating product appearance, consumption experiences, preparation processes, or taste evaluations through digital content, credible influencers provide additional cues that help consumers form favorable purchase intentions despite the inherent uncertainty associated with food products. This finding supports previous studies by Freberg et al. (2011), Kim and Ko (2012), Lou and Yuan (2019), and Schouten et al. (2020), which concluded that influencer recommendations can increase purchase intention through social identification and message internalization.

The positive effect of E-WOM on Purchase Intention indicates that online reviews have become one of the primary information sources in consumer decision-making processes. Consumers tend to seek additional information through customer reviews before deciding to purchase a product. In the context of food SMEs, customer reviews serve as social proof that helps consumers evaluate product quality. Beyond providing product-related information, positive customer reviews also generate social proof,

signaling that many previous customers have consumed the product satisfactorily. Such collective evaluations increase consumers' confidence that the product is likely to meet their expectations, thereby reducing hesitation during purchase decisions. This mechanism is particularly relevant for food products because consumers often rely on others' experiences to compensate for their inability to verify product quality before purchase directly. This finding is consistent with the studies of Cheung and Lee (2012), Matute et al. (2016), Erkan and Evans (2016), and Ismagilova et al. (2020), all of which demonstrated that E-WOM quality significantly influences purchase intention across various digital platforms.

The findings further reveal that E-Service Quality positively affects Purchase Intention. This suggests that consumers evaluate not only the quality of the products they intend to purchase but also the quality of the service experience throughout the transaction process. In highly competitive digital environments, a positive user experience becomes a crucial factor that increases the likelihood of purchase. This relationship is particularly relevant in the online food market, where service quality extends beyond website functionality to include timely order processing, accurate order fulfillment, responsive communication, and reliable delivery. Because food products are highly time-sensitive and perishable, consumers are more likely to develop purchase intentions when digital services provide confidence that products will be delivered accurately, safely, and in good condition. This result supports the findings of Zeithaml et al. (2002), Parasuraman et al. (2005), Blut et al. (2015), and Rita et al. (2019), who concluded that electronic service quality contributes directly to purchase intention and customer loyalty.

The most important finding of this study is that E-Trust exerts the strongest influence on Purchase Intention, indicating that trust represents the central psychological mechanism underlying consumers' online purchasing decisions for food MSMEs. Rather than functioning merely as an outcome of digital marketing activities, trust serves as a decision-making heuristic that enables consumers to make purchase decisions under conditions of uncertainty. This role becomes particularly important in online food commerce because consumers cannot directly evaluate product freshness, hygiene, taste, ingredient quality, or food safety before purchase. Consequently, consumers rely on trust as a cognitive shortcut to infer whether the seller, product information, and overall transaction process are sufficiently reliable to justify a purchase. In this sense, trust does not simply reduce perceived risk; it transforms uncertainty into purchase confidence by enabling consumers to proceed with transactions despite incomplete product information. This interpretation aligns with the trust-based consumer behavior framework proposed by Pavlou (2003), Gefen et al. (2003), and Kim et al. (2008), which argues that trust is the principal mechanism through which perceived uncertainty is converted into behavioral intention. Therefore, the dominant effect of E-Trust observed in this study reinforces the proposition that successful digital marketing strategies for food MSMEs ultimately depend not only on attracting consumer attention but, more importantly, on establishing sufficient confidence to support purchase decisions.

The mediation analysis demonstrates that E-Trust mediates the relationship between Influencer Marketing and Purchase Intention. This finding suggests that influencers' effectiveness in stimulating purchase intention depends not only on their ability to attract audience attention but also on their capacity to build consumer trust in the products they endorse. In other words, consumers do not purchase products merely

because influencers recommend them; rather, they do so because they trust the information those influencers provide. This mediating process is particularly evident in online food purchasing, where influencer exposure alone is often insufficient to drive purchase decisions because consumers remain uncertain about product freshness, hygiene, and overall quality. Instead, influencer recommendations become effective only when they successfully strengthen consumers' trust that the promoted products are safe, reliable, and consistent with the information presented. These findings suggest that trust is the psychological bridge through which influencer credibility is transformed into purchase intention in digital food commerce. This result reinforces the findings of Lou and Yuan (2019), Sokolova and Kefi (2020), and Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), which emphasize trust as a psychological mechanism underlying influencer marketing effectiveness.

The study also finds that E-Trust mediates the relationship between E-WOM and Purchase Intention, with this indirect effect representing the strongest mediation pathway in the model. This finding indicates that high-quality and credible online reviews foster consumer trust, which subsequently enhances purchase intention. In the context of food SMEs, other customers' experiences are perceived as the most objective and trustworthy source of information. This mediating relationship indicates that customer reviews do not automatically translate into purchase intention. Rather, online reviews become influential only when the information they provide is sufficiently credible to strengthen consumers' trust in both the product and the seller. In the context of online food purchasing, consumers often face uncertainty about freshness, hygiene, taste, and food safety, making trust an essential psychological mechanism that transforms peer-generated information into behavioral intention. Therefore, the findings suggest that E-Trust acts as the critical psychological bridge that converts credible electronic word-of-mouth into consumers' willingness to purchase food products online. This result supports the findings of Filieri (2015), Ismagilova et al. (2020), and Cheung and Thadani (2012), who argued that trust is a primary outcome of high-quality electronic information. This finding extends previous digital marketing research by showing that, in the context of food MSMEs, the effectiveness of customer-generated information depends not only on its availability but also on its ability to cultivate consumer trust under conditions of product uncertainty.

E-Trust also mediated the relationship between E-Service Quality and Purchase Intention. This finding suggests that digital service quality influences purchase intention not only directly but also indirectly through the development of consumer trust. When consumers experience transaction convenience, prompt service, secure payment systems, and reliable delivery, they are more likely to trust the seller and become willing to make purchases. This mediating relationship suggests that superior digital services do not automatically encourage consumers to purchase food products online. Instead, high-quality electronic services are effective when they strengthen consumers' confidence in the seller's reliability, the accuracy of product information, and the security of the transaction process. In the context of food MSMEs, where consumers cannot directly verify product quality before purchase, efficient service delivery, responsive communication, and reliable order fulfillment contribute to purchase intention primarily by fostering trust in the overall online purchasing experience. This result is consistent with the studies of Amin et al. (2014), Rita et al. (2019), and Blut et al. (2015), which

identified trust as an important mechanism linking electronic service quality to consumer behavior.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the digital marketing literature by integrating Influencer Marketing, E-WOM, E-Service Quality, E-Trust, and Purchase Intention into a single empirical framework and by demonstrating the distinct mechanisms through which these digital marketing activities influence consumer behavior in the context of food MSMEs. More specifically, the findings reveal that E-WOM is the most influential antecedent of E-Trust, suggesting that consumers purchasing food products increasingly prioritize peer-generated experiential information over marketer-controlled promotional communications when evaluating products characterized by high uncertainty. Furthermore, this study provides empirical evidence that E-Trust functions not simply as a statistical mediator but as the central psychological mechanism through which digital marketing activities are transformed into purchase intention under conditions of limited product inspection and perceived transaction risk. These findings extend existing trust-based digital marketing theories by showing that the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies depends not only on communication effectiveness but also on their capacity to build consumer confidence in product quality, transaction reliability, and seller credibility in online food commerce.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer important implications for food SME operators. Effective digital marketing strategies should not rely solely on influencer use but should also emphasize managing positive customer reviews and enhancing digital service quality. Given that E-WOM exerts the strongest influence on E-Trust, food SMEs should encourage customers to leave honest, positive reviews after purchase. Furthermore, improving digital service quality through prompt responses, secure transactions, and reliable delivery services can strengthen consumer trust, which in turn enhances purchase intention. Therefore, consumer trust should be regarded as a strategic asset that determines the long-term success of digital marketing initiatives among food SMEs. The findings also suggest that food MSME managers should prioritize strategic investments based on the relative importance of each determinant identified in this study. Because E-WOM emerged as the strongest antecedent of E-Trust, efforts to encourage authentic customer reviews and effectively manage online customer feedback should receive greater managerial attention than promotional activities alone. Influencer collaborations and digital service improvements remain important; however, their effectiveness is likely to be maximized when integrated into a broader trust-building strategy that consistently reinforces consumers' confidence throughout the online purchasing process.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that Influencer Marketing, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), and E-Service Quality have positive and significant effects on E-Trust among consumers of food SMEs in the Greater Bogor area. Among these variables, E-WOM exerts the strongest influence on the development of consumer trust. Furthermore, Influencer Marketing, E-WOM, E-Service Quality, and E-Trust were found to have positive and significant effects on Purchase Intention. The results indicate that the proposed research model possesses strong predictive power, as the examined variables explain a substantial proportion of the variance in both E-Trust and Purchase Intention within the context of online food SME purchases.

The findings also reveal that E-Trust is the most influential determinant of Purchase Intention and serves as a significant mediator in the relationships between Influencer Marketing, E-WOM, E-Service Quality, and Purchase Intention. The mediation pathway of E-WOM through E-Trust emerged as the strongest indirect effect within the research model. Theoretically, this study contributes to the digital marketing literature by confirming the central role of trust in linking digital marketing activities to consumer behavior. Practically, the findings suggest that the success of digital marketing initiatives among food SMEs largely depends on their ability to establish and maintain consumer trust through credible marketing strategies, positive customer reviews, and high-quality digital services.

Based on the findings, food SME owners are encouraged to prioritize strategies that strengthen consumer trust as a core component of their digital marketing efforts. This can be achieved by encouraging customers to leave honest, positive reviews, collaborating with credible and relevant influencers, and continuously improving digital service quality through prompt responses, secure transactions, user-friendly ordering systems, and reliable product delivery. For future research, it is recommended to expand the study's geographical scope, incorporate additional variables such as perceived risk, customer satisfaction, and brand image, and employ longitudinal research designs to gain a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior dynamics in digital marketing environments.

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