Social Media Marketing and Purchase Decisions: The Mediating Role of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) Evidence from Dimsumbite, Ternate City

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ABSTRACT
This study aims to analyze the influence of social media marketing on purchase decisions mediated by Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) among Dimsumbite consumers in Ternate City. A quantitative approach was applied using purposive sampling to obtain respondents who had purchased Dimsumbite products and used Instagram or TikTok. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling–Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS). The results reveal that (1) social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions; (2) social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on Electronic Word of Mouth; (3) Electronic Word of Mouth has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions; and (4) Electronic Word of Mouth partially mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase decisions. These findings indicate that the better the social media marketing strategy implemented by Dimsumbite, the greater the likelihood that consumers will share positive online reviews, which ultimately increases purchase decisions.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the way businesses communicate and interact with consumers. Social media has become one of the most essential marketing platforms, enabling companies to build brand awareness, deliver promotional content, and engage directly with their audiences at relatively low cost. Social media allows brands to shape consumer perceptions through creative content, visual presentation, and interactive communication, making it a crucial tool for increasing consumer interest and driving purchasing behavior. In the highly competitive, experience-based culinary industry, the effectiveness of social media marketing plays an important role in shaping consumers' decision-making processes.

In addition to social media marketing, Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) has emerged as one of the most powerful determinants of consumer behavior in the digital era. Online reviews, testimonials, comments, and recommendations shared by consumers on social networking platforms are perceived as more credible compared to traditional advertisements. Positive E-WOM strengthens consumer trust, reduces uncertainty, and increases confidence in a product, while negative E-WOM may discourage individuals from making a purchase. Therefore, E-WOM acts not only as an information channel but also as a social validation mechanism that guides purchasing decisions.

Dimsumbite, a dim sum business based in Ternate City, actively uses Instagram and TikTok to promote its products. Despite consistent social media marketing, consumer awareness and purchasing decisions have not reached their full potential compared to competitors. This situation suggests that although social

media marketing strategies have been implemented, their effectiveness in stimulating E-WOM and influencing purchasing decisions requires further examination.

Previous empirical studies show mixed results: some find that social media marketing significantly affects purchase decisions both directly and through E-WOM, while others report insignificant effects. These research gaps indicate the need for further investigation, particularly in the context of local culinary businesses. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of social media marketing on purchase decisions, mediated by Electronic Word of Mouth, among Dimsumbite consumers in Ternate City.

Literature Review

1. Social Media Marketing

According to Tuten and Solomon (2015), social media marketing involves creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings through social networking platforms to enhance brand value. Prior studies have shown that effective social media marketing—such as engaging content, consistent posting, and interaction with followers—can build consumer awareness, generate interest, and influence purchasing behavior. Iksyanti and Hidayat (2022) and Sanjaya et al. (2022) found that social media marketing significantly increases consumers' likelihood to make purchase decisions. Therefore, social media marketing is considered a crucial driver in shaping consumer perceptions and stimulating consumer interest in buying.

2. Electronic Word of Mouth

Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) is defined as consumers' online communication that contains evaluations, opinions, or recommendations about a product or service (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Unlike traditional advertising, E-WOM is perceived as more trustworthy because the information comes from real users rather than marketers. Positive E-WOM helps reduce perceived risk, increase confidence in a brand, and motivate consumers to purchase. Conversely, negative E-WOM can discourage purchasing decisions. Previous research (Aulia et al., 2023; Sanjaya et al., 2022) indicates that the greater the intensity of positive online reviews, the stronger their influence on consumer purchasing behavior. Therefore, E-WOM serves as a mediating factor in translating marketing efforts into actual consumer actions.

3. Purcahse Decision

Kotler and Keller (2016) explain that consumers typically identify needs, search for information, evaluate alternatives, select the product to purchase, and evaluate their experience afterward. Previous studies emphasize that consumer decisions are not solely shaped by internal motivations but are also influenced by external factors such as social interactions, brand communication, and digital promotion. Research by Hidayati & Khuzaini (2024) and Romansyah et al. (2023) concludes that consumer purchasing decisions are strongly affected by perceptions of confidence, satisfaction, recommendation tendencies, and willingness to repurchase.
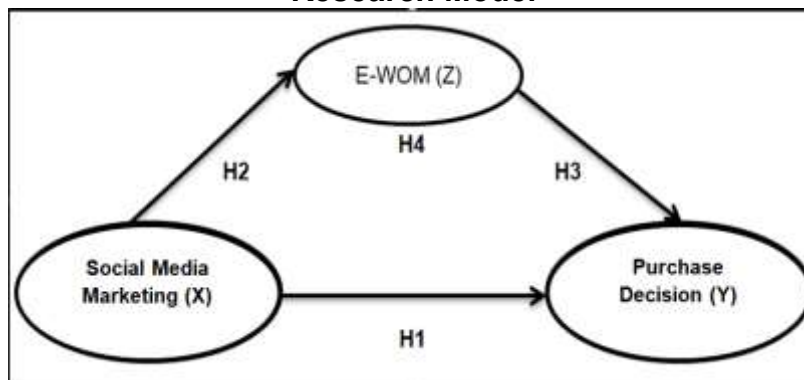
Research Model

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

The model illustrates that social media marketing directly influences consumer purchase decisions and also indirectly affects them through E-WOM. When marketing messages delivered via Instagram or TikTok successfully generate positive consumer engagement—such as reviews, testimonials, and recommendations—E-WOM amplifies consumer confidence and strengthens the likelihood of purchasing. Thus, E-WOM partially mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase decisions.

Hypotheses

In this research model, social media marketing is proposed to have a direct effect on purchase decisions and an indirect effect through Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) as a mediating variable. This relationship forms the basis for the development of the following hypotheses: (1) H1: Social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions. (2) H2: Social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on Electronic Word of Mouth. (3) H3: Electronic Word of Mouth has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions. (4) H4: Electronic Word of Mouth mediates the effect of social media marketing on purchase decisions.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design to analyze the influence of social media marketing on purchase decisions with Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) as a mediating variable. The population consists of consumers who have purchased products from Dimsumbite in Ternate City and are active Instagram or TikTok users. A total of 120 respondents were selected through purposive sampling, based on having purchased Dimsumbite products at least once and having accessed the brand's social media.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire containing items previously validated in earlier studies to ensure construct validity, and reliability testing was conducted to confirm internal consistency. The variables of social media marketing, Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), and purchase decisions were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

To test the hypotheses, data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling – Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS. This approach enabled the assessment of both the direct effects of social media marketing on purchase

decisions and the indirect effect through E-WOM as a mediating variable. The mediation test was carried out using the bootstrapping procedure by examining indirect effect significance. All statistical decisions were made at a significance level of 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Descriptive Analysis of Variables

The descriptive results show that respondents' perceptions of all research variables fall into the high category. Social media marketing received a mean score of 4.34 (very high), indicating that consumers perceive Dimsumbite's social media promotional activities as very attractive and engaging. Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) recorded a mean score of 4.19 (high), showing that consumers are willing to share information, experiences, and recommendations about Dimsumbite through social media. Meanwhile, the purchase decision variable had a mean score of 4.26 (very high), indicating strong interest in purchasing and repurchasing Dimsumbite products.

2. Evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The measurement model demonstrates adequate reliability and validity. All indicators meet the convergent validity requirement with factor loadings greater than 0.70. Discriminant validity is supported, as each indicator shows higher cross-loadings on its respective construct. Internal consistency reliability is confirmed by Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70, while AVE values exceed 0.50. These results indicate that the constructs used in this study are statistically valid and reliable.

3. Evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model)

The structural model shows that the R-Square value for purchase decision is 0.513, indicating that 51.3% of the variance in purchase decision is explained by social media marketing and E-WOM. Meanwhile, the R-Square value for E-WOM is 0.483, meaning that 48.3% of its variance is explained by social media marketing. Both values fall into the moderate predictive accuracy category.

Table 1. Patch Coefficient

Variable	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Social media marketing -> Purchase decision	0.365	0.369	0.110	4.132	0.001
Social media marketing -> E-Wom	0.695	0.703	0.050	14.034	0.000
E-Wom -> Purchase decision	0.413	0.419	0.100	3.329	0.000

The structural model analysis shows that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchase decision, with a path coefficient of 0.365 and a significance value of 0.001 (< 0.05). This result indicates that higher levels of social media marketing directly lead to increased consumer purchasing. Furthermore, social media marketing also exerts a strong, positive, and significant influence on electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), as reflected by a path coefficient of 0.695 and a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05). This finding demonstrates that effective social media content substantially enhances consumers' willingness to

share information and recommendations. In addition, E-WOM has a positive and significant effect on purchase decision, with a path coefficient of 0.413 and a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05), confirming that stronger digital recommendations and online reviews contribute to higher consumer purchase decisions.

Table 2. Specific Indirect Effect

Variabel	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Social media marketing -> E-WOM -> Purchase decision	0.287	0.294	0.072	4.004	0.000

The mediation test further shows that social media marketing has a significant indirect effect on purchase decision through E-WOM (t-value = 4.004; p-value = 0.000). The VAF value of 29.2% indicates partial mediation.

Discussion

The findings confirm that social media marketing positively influences purchase decision. Attractive visuals, informative content, and consistent posting on Instagram and TikTok captured consumers' attention and encouraged them to purchase. This aligns with Tuten & Solomon (2015), who state that social media enables persuasive two-way communication, thereby increasing consumer engagement and purchase intention. The result also supports the SOR theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), in which social media content acts as a stimulus that shapes internal consumer responses and leads to purchase behavior. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Iksyanti et al., 2022; Sanjaya et al., 2022) confirming that social media marketing significantly increases consumer purchase decisions.

The study also reveals that social media marketing strongly affects E-WOM. Engaging visual content, approachable caption styles, and prompt interactions on social media encourage consumers to share opinions, recommendations, and purchase experiences with others. This supports Kotler & Keller (2016), who emphasize that effective marketing communication triggers consumer participation in digital conversations. The result is aligned with prior studies demonstrating that social media marketing enhances E-WOM activities (Iksyanti et al., 2022; Sanjaya et al., 2022).

E-WOM significantly influences purchase decisions, proving that consumer recommendations and online reviews create trust and perceived credibility. Consumers rely more on real user experiences than brand-generated messages, making E-WOM a persuasive determinant of purchase behavior. This validates the SOR mechanism, in which positive online messages function as stimuli that shape consumer attitudes and ultimately trigger purchasing responses. The result is also consistent with findings from Dewi et al. (2021) and Sanjaya et al. (2022).

The mediation test shows that E-WOM partially mediates the effect of social media marketing on purchase decision. This implies that social media marketing directly affects purchase behavior, and this influence becomes stronger when consumers share positive experiences and recommendations through digital platforms. Although E-WOM plays a meaningful mediating role, social media marketing remains a strong driver of purchasing decisions in its own right. This

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highlights the importance of maintaining both persuasive digital content and consumer-initiated conversations to maximize purchase intention.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that social media marketing plays an important role in encouraging consumer purchase decisions at Dimsumbite. Effective social media content not only directly influences consumer purchase decisions but also stimulates electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). e-WOM was also shown to influence purchase decisions, indicating that recommendations and positive online reviews are trusted and considered in consumers' buying behavior.

The mediation test indicates that e-WOM partially mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase decisions, meaning that social media marketing remains influential both directly and through e-WOM. Overall, these findings highlight that strengthening social media content and encouraging consumer interaction are strategic efforts to enhance purchase decisions.

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