

# Product Quality and Social Media Virality as Predictors of Consumer Purchase Decisions in Culinary SMEs

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> Product Quality, Purchase Decision, SMEs, Social Media Marketing, Word-of-mouth</p> <p><b>DOI:</b> 10.22437/jssh.v10i1.55613</p> <p><b>Received:</b> April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2026</p> <p><b>Reviewed:</b> May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2026</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2026</p>	<p><i>This study investigates how product quality, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth influence consumer purchase decisions among small culinary businesses in Malang, Indonesia. The research employed a quantitative explanatory design with purposive sampling. A total of 120 respondents were selected based on three criteria: being at least 17 years old, having purchased from small culinary enterprises within the previous six months, and having received information about the businesses through social media or personal recommendations. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale. Multiple linear regression was used to analyze the data after conducting validity and reliability assessments as well as classical assumption tests. Hypotheses were tested through t-tests to examine partial effects and an F-test to assess simultaneous effects. The results indicate that product quality, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth each have a positive and statistically significant impact on purchase decisions. Social media marketing was identified as the strongest predictor, followed by product quality and word-of-mouth. Together, these variables accounted for 62.9% of the variance in purchase decisions, demonstrating substantial explanatory power. The findings highlight the importance of maintaining product consistency, implementing engaging social media strategies, and encouraging positive customer recommendations. Future studies are encouraged to include broader samples, additional variables such as price and service quality, and alternative analytical techniques to enhance generalizability.</i></p>

## 1. Introduction

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), particularly in the culinary sector, play a crucial role in fostering local economic development, generating employment, and encouraging entrepreneurship in developing countries (Bekele & Muchie, 2009; Weldeslassie et al., 2019). In Indonesia, the culinary MSME sector represents a significant share of economic activity, contributing substantially to regional income and urban economic dynamics (Oktavilia et al., 2025; Saputra & Darmawan, 2023). Malang City, as one of the rapidly growing urban centers in East Java, has experienced a notable expansion in small-scale culinary businesses that cater to diverse consumer groups, including students, tourists, and local residents. However, this rapid growth has also intensified competition, creating a saturated market in which businesses offering similar products struggle to differentiate themselves (Akin, 2024). As a result, understanding the factors that influence consumer purchase decisions becomes essential for ensuring business sustainability and competitiveness in such an environment.

From an academic perspective, consumer purchase decision-making has been widely discussed through different theoretical approaches (Roy & Datta, 2025; Shams et al., 2024; Stylos, 2022; Yang, 2022). Traditional perspectives emphasize product quality as the primary determinant, highlighting attributes such as taste, consistency, hygiene, and presentation as key drivers of customer satisfaction and repeat purchases (Yılmaz & Balcıoğlu, 2026). In contrast, more recent studies argue that the emergence of digital platforms has shifted the focus toward social media marketing, which enables businesses to engage with consumers, build brand awareness, and influence purchasing behavior through visual and interactive content (Dwivedi et al., 2021). At the same time, another body of literature stresses the importance of word-of-mouth communication, particularly in the form of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), as a credible and influential source of information that reduces perceived risk, especially for experiential products like food (Tj & Widjaja, 2024). These differing perspectives have led to an ongoing academic debate regarding which factor plays the most dominant role in shaping consumer decisions in the contemporary digital marketplace.

Despite the growing body of literature, existing studies tend to examine product quality, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth separately, resulting in fragmented and partial explanations of consumer behavior (Voyer & Fatemi, 2026). Moreover, much of the prior research has been conducted in large-scale business settings or Western contexts, which may not adequately capture the characteristics of small culinary enterprises in developing countries such as Indonesia (Tambunan, 2024). In addition, limited attention has been given to secondary cities like Malang, where the interaction between digital adoption, youth-driven consumption patterns, and collectivist cultural values creates a unique environment for consumer decision-making. These limitations indicate a clear research gap, particularly in understanding how multiple factors interact simultaneously to influence purchasing decisions in small-scale culinary businesses within a localized context.

Addressing this gap, the present study offers a more comprehensive approach by integrating product quality, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth within a single analytical framework. This study adopts the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model to explain how external stimuli, such as marketing activities and product attributes, shape consumers' internal evaluations and ultimately lead to behavioural responses in the form of purchasing decisions. The novelty of this research lies not only in its integrative perspective but also in its empirical focus on small culinary enterprises in Malang, an underexplored yet highly relevant setting. By combining traditional determinants of consumer behaviour with contemporary digital influences, this study contributes to bridging the gap between classical marketing theories and emerging trends in the digital era. Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyse the influence of product quality, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth on consumer purchase decisions in small culinary enterprises in Malang. Through this approach, the study is expected to provide both theoretical contributions to the consumer behaviour literature and practical insights for MSME practitioners in developing effective marketing strategies to enhance competitiveness in an increasingly crowded market.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Foundation: Consumer Behavior and SOR Model**

The literature on consumer behavior highlights that purchasing decisions are shaped by the interaction between external stimuli and internal psychological processes (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). This study is grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model, which explains how environmental stimuli influence individuals' cognitive and emotional states, ultimately leading to behavioral responses. In this context, product quality, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth function as external stimuli that affect consumers' perceptions,

attitudes, and emotions, which then result in purchase decisions (Jacoby, 2002). Previous studies emphasize that consumers, particularly in experiential sectors such as culinary businesses, rely not only on rational evaluation but also on affective responses and social influence (Şahin & Kılıçlar, 2023). As food products cannot be fully evaluated prior to consumption, consumers tend to depend on indirect cues such as visual content, online reviews, and recommendations. Therefore, the SOR model provides a relevant and comprehensive theoretical foundation for explaining how these variables shape consumer purchasing behavior.

## **2.2 Product Quality and Purchase Decisions**

Product quality is widely regarded as a fundamental determinant of consumer purchasing decisions, especially in the culinary sector where sensory and functional attributes play a crucial role (Wells et al., 2011; Zhang & Dong, 2020). It refers to the ability of a product to meet or exceed consumer expectations through elements such as taste, hygiene, consistency, and presentation. Previous studies indicate that improvements in perceived product quality can significantly increase consumer purchase intentions, with reported effects reaching up to 40–60% (Wang et al., 2023). In addition, consistent product quality is essential for building trust and encouraging repeat purchases, particularly for small culinary enterprises that rely heavily on customer retention and local reputation. Conversely, inconsistency in quality often leads to dissatisfaction, negative evaluations, and decreased loyalty. These findings suggest that product quality not only influences initial purchase decisions but also plays a key role in sustaining long-term customer relationships, making it a critical factor in competitive culinary markets.

## **2.3 Social Media Marketing and Purchase Decisions**

Social media marketing has become an increasingly important factor in shaping consumer behavior in the digital era (Evans & McKee, 2010). It involves the strategic use of platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to promote products through visually appealing content, interactive communication, and influencer engagement. Previous research demonstrates that social media marketing significantly enhances brand awareness, consumer engagement, and purchase intention, particularly among younger and digitally active consumers. In the context of small culinary businesses, social media serves as a cost-effective marketing tool that enables firms to reach a wider audience and create emotional connections through storytelling and visual representation (Hanaysha, 2022). Empirical studies further show that engaging content, viral trends, and frequent interaction can stimulate consumer curiosity and encourage impulsive buying behavior. Therefore, social media marketing plays a vital role not only in attracting new customers but also in shaping their purchasing decisions.

## **2.4 Word-of-Mouth (WOM)**

Then, word-of-mouth (WOM) is defined as informal communication between consumers regarding their experiences with products, while electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) refers to its digital form through online reviews, ratings, and social media interactions (Kozinets et al., 2010). The literature consistently identifies WOM as one of the most powerful influences on consumer decision-making, as it is perceived as more credible and trustworthy than traditional advertising. Studies indicate that up to 92% of consumers rely on recommendations from others when making purchasing decisions. In the culinary sector, where products are experiential and cannot be evaluated before consumption, consumers heavily depend on reviews and shared experiences to reduce uncertainty and perceived risk. Positive WOM can increase consumer confidence and accelerate purchase decisions, while negative WOM can deter potential buyers. In collectivist societies such as Indonesia, the influence of WOM is even stronger, as individuals

tend to rely on social networks and peer opinions when making choices. Thus, WOM plays a crucial role in shaping purchasing behavior.

## 2.5 Hypothesis Development

Product quality is considered an important factor influencing consumer purchasing decisions in small culinary businesses. High standards in taste, cleanliness, consistency, and presentation create a positive sensory experience and perceived value, allowing customers to confidently choose local food options amid fierce competition. Empirical studies show that superior product quality leads to higher purchase intent, reduced perceived risk, and increased loyalty among Indonesian MSME consumers, especially for experiential goods such as street food and home-style eateries (Mujiatun et al., 2023). In addition, consistent and superior product quality encourages repeat visits and positive brand associations in the culinary market. Therefore, product quality is expected to have a direct positive impact on purchasing decisions.

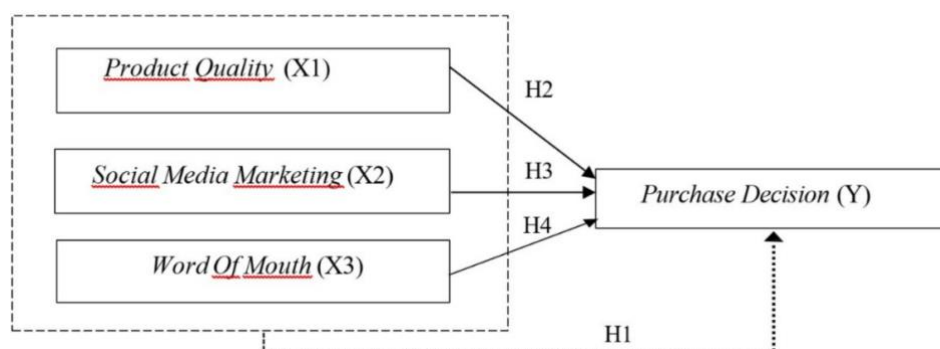
*H1 Product quality have a positive effect on purchasing decisions*

Social media marketing plays an important role in shaping consumer awareness and engagement with small culinary businesses, going beyond mere visibility. When MSMEs effectively utilize platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, customers feel an increase in accessibility, authenticity, and appeal, which tips the balance toward trying products from competitors. Previous research indicates that social media marketing significantly boosts purchasing decisions through interactive content and viral reach, particularly in local markets like Malang where digital discovery drives direct customer visits (Sarkis et al., 2025). Thus, stronger social media marketing efforts are expected to positively influence purchasing decisions.

*H2 Social media marketing have a positive effect on purchasing decisions*

Word-of-mouth (WOM) expands its influence on purchasing decisions by building trust through authentic support from fellow consumers in the culinary context (Allsop et al., 2007). When consumers share positive experiences through recommendations or reviews, potential buyers value social validation more than formal advertising, thereby strengthening their confidence in their choices (Wang et al., 2023). Empirical evidence confirms that WOM, including e-WOM, drives purchasing behavior by increasing credibility and urgency in small food businesses in Indonesia (Bawana et al., 2025). Therefore, word-of-mouth (WOM) is expected to have a direct positive influence on purchasing decisions (Beyari & Garamoun, 2024).

*H3 Word-of-mouth (WOM) have a positive effect on purchasing decisions*



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design (Baskerville & Pries-Heje, 2010) to investigate the causal relationships between product quality, social media marketing, word-of-mouth, and consumer purchase decisions in small culinary enterprises in Malang, Indonesia. The explanatory design was chosen to test the proposed hypotheses and examine the extent to which independent variables influence the dependent variable. Furthermore, this study is grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, which explains how external stimuli, namely product quality, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth, affect consumers' internal evaluations and perceptions, ultimately leading to behavioral responses in the form of purchase decisions.

#### **3.2 Population and Sample**

The population of this study consisted of all consumers who have purchased products from small culinary enterprises in Malang City. Since the exact number of consumers could not be determined, the sample size was calculated using the Lemeshow formula (Levy & Lemeshow, 2008) for unknown populations. By applying a 95% confidence level ( $Z = 1.96$ ), an estimated population proportion ( $p = 0.5$ ), and a margin of error ( $d = 0.09$ ), the minimum required sample size was determined to be 119 respondents. To enhance the robustness and reliability of the data, a total of 120 respondents were ultimately included in this study.

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{d^2}$$

Furthermore, this study applied a purposive sampling technique (Etikan, 2016) to ensure that only relevant respondents were selected. The criteria used in selecting the sample included individuals who were at least 17 years old, had purchased products from small culinary enterprises in Malang within the last six months, and had obtained information about these businesses through social media platforms or word-of-mouth recommendations. This sampling method was considered appropriate as it allowed the researcher to focus on respondents who possessed direct experience and were capable of providing meaningful insights related to the variables under investigation.

#### **3.3 Data Sources and Data Collection Methods**

The study relied on primary data collected directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire. Data collection was carried out using both online and offline methods to maximize response rates and ensure diverse participation. Online data were gathered using Google Forms, while offline data were collected by directly approaching consumers at selected culinary business locations in Malang. The questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert scale (Allen & Seaman, 2007), ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to measure respondents' perceptions of the variables examined in this study.

Then, the variables in this study were categorized into independent and dependent variables. The independent variables consisted of product quality, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth, while the dependent variable was purchasing decision. Product quality was operationalized through indicators such as taste consistency, food hygiene, presentation, and overall satisfaction. Social media marketing was measured based on content attractiveness, posting frequency, promotional activities, and interaction with consumers. Word-of-mouth was assessed through indicators including recommendations, positive reviews, and willingness to share experiences. Meanwhile, purchase decision was measured through purchase intention, repeat purchase behavior, and consumer confidence in choosing products. All measurement

items were adapted from previously validated instruments and adjusted to suit the context of small culinary enterprises.

To ensure the quality of the research instrument, validity and reliability tests were conducted prior to hypothesis testing. Validity was assessed using Pearson correlation analysis by comparing the calculated correlation coefficients with the critical R-value at a 5% significance level, where items with R-count greater than R-table were considered valid. Reliability testing was performed using Cronbach's Alpha (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011), with a threshold value of 0.6 indicating acceptable internal consistency. The results confirmed that all measurement items were both valid and reliable, making them suitable for further analysis.

### **3.4 Data Analysis Procedures**

The data collected in this study were analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis (Uyanık & Güler, 2013) to examine the influence of product quality, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth on purchase decisions. The data analysis was using SPSS to analyze the data which already found in the data collection. Furthermore, the analysis process began with descriptive statistics, followed by validity and reliability testing, and classical assumption tests including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. Hypothesis testing was conducted using partial tests (t-tests) to determine the individual effect of each independent variable and simultaneous testing (F-test) to evaluate the overall significance of the model. Additionally, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was used to assess the explanatory power of the model. All statistical analyses were carried out using appropriate statistical software.

## **4. Findings**

This study reveals that product quality, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth have positive and statistically significant effects on consumer purchase decisions in small culinary enterprises in Malang. Among these variables, social media marketing emerges as the most dominant factor, followed by product quality and word-of-mouth. Collectively, these three variables explain 62.9% of the variance in purchase decisions (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.629$ ), indicating strong explanatory power of the model. These findings confirm that both experiential factors (product quality) and communication-based factors (digital marketing and social influence) play a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior in the culinary MSME sector.

### **4.1 Profile of Research Object**

The object of this research consists of small culinary enterprises in Malang City, Indonesia, which primarily offer ready-to-eat food products. These businesses operate on a micro and small scale and rely heavily on consumer perception, digital exposure, and peer recommendations. Most enterprises face intense competition and limited financial resources, making marketing strategies and product consistency critical for sustainability. A total of 120 respondents participated in this study.

The majority were aged between 18–25 years, representing students and young consumers. This group is highly relevant as they are digitally active and frequently use platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

Most respondents reported:

1. Purchasing culinary products at least once within the last six months
2. Obtaining information primarily through social media and word-of-mouth

These characteristics indicate that the sample strongly reflects modern consumer behavior in urban culinary markets.

### 4.2 Instrument Testing Results

Based on the correlation analysis, all questionnaire items show r-count values greater than r-table (0.179).

**Table 1. Validity Test**

Variable	Items	R-count	R-table	Annotation
Y	Y.1	0,479	0,179	Valid
	Y.2	0,478	0,179	Valid
	Y.3	0,455	0,179	Valid
	Y.4	0,512	0,179	Valid
X1	X1.1	0,762	0,179	Valid
	X1.2	0,734	0,179	Valid
	X1.3	0,752	0,179	Valid
	X1.4	0,736	0,179	Valid
X2	X2.1	0,819	0,179	Valid
	X2.2	0,720	0,179	Valid
	X2.3	0,730	0,179	Valid
	X2.4	0,694	0,179	Valid
X3	X3.1	0,761	0,179	Valid
	X3.2	0,772	0,179	Valid
	X3.3	0,779	0,179	Valid
	X3.4	0,768	0,179	Valid

This indicates that all measurement items are valid and accurately capture the intended constructs. Furthermore, the Cronbach's Alpha values for all variables exceed 0.6, confirming that the instruments are reliable. These results demonstrate strong internal consistency across all variables.

**Table 2. Reliability Test**

Variable	Cronbach Alpha	Threshold	Annotation
Y	0,783	>0,6	Reliable
X1	0,766		Reliable
X2	0,711		Reliable
X3	0,782		Reliable

### 4.3 Inner Model Test and Mediation Test

Based on Table 4, the R-Square Values adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value shows that product quality, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth explain 0.629 or 62.9% of the variance in purchasing decisions. The remaining 37.1% is explained by other independent variables that were not examined. This adjusted R<sup>2</sup> result, which is consistent with the standard R<sup>2</sup> value, indicates model stability without overestimation effects. Overall, the structural model shows strong explanatory power, based on criteria that classify an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.67 as substantial, 0.33 as moderate, and 0.19 as weak, confirming that the independent variables substantially contribute to explaining consumer purchasing behavior in Malang's culinary MSMEs.

**Table 3. R-Square Values**

Model Summary						
Mo del	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	of the	
1	,799 <sup>a</sup>	,638	,629	,660		

a. Predictors: (Constant), X3 Total, X1 Total, X2 Total.

Based on Table 5, the f-square to determine the extent to which the independent variables (X) used in this study have an effect on the dependent variable (Y). The independent variables

in this study are customer experience, electronic word of mouth, product quality, and marketing strategy simultaneously on the dependent variable, namely purchase intention, and whether the model is appropriate or not.

**Table 4. F-Test Testing**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	88,952	3	29,651	68,119	,000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	50,492	116	,435		
	Total	139,444	119			
a. Dependent Variable: Y1 Total						
b. Predictors: (Constant), X3 Total, X1 Total, X2 Total						

The results of the F test (Simultaneous) obtained in this study are based on Table, which shows a Sig. value of  $0.000 < 0.05$  (5%). This means that the variables of customer experience, electronic word of mouth, product quality, and marketing strategy have a simultaneous effect on the dependent variable of purchase intention. The results of the t-test analysis indicate that all independent variables have a positive and statistically significant effect on purchase intention.

**Table 5. T-Test Testing**

Model		Unstandardized	Standardized	t	Sig.	
		Coefficients	Coefficients			
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	10,121	,465		21,760	,000
	X1 Total	,085	,031	,193	2,711	,008
	X2 Total	,220	,033	,508	6,639	,000
	X3 Total	,091	,028	,228	3,272	,001

First, the customer experience variable (X1) obtained a t-value of 2.711 with a significance level of 0.008 ( $< 0.05$ ), indicating that customer experience has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention. Second, the electronic word-of-mouth variable (X2) showed a t-value of 6.639 with a significance level of 0.000 ( $< 0.05$ ), demonstrating that electronic word-of-mouth exerts a strong positive and significant effect on purchase intention. Third, the product quality variable (X3) yielded a t-value of 3.272 with a significance level of 0.001 ( $< 0.05$ ), confirming that product quality also has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention. Collectively, these findings suggest that improvements in customer experience, electronic word-of-mouth, and product quality significantly enhance consumers' intention to purchase.

## 5. Discussion

This study provides empirical evidence that product quality, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth (WOM) significantly influence consumer purchase decisions in small culinary enterprises in Malang. By integrating these variables within a single framework, the findings not only confirm prior research but also offer a more nuanced understanding of how traditional and digital determinants interact in shaping contemporary consumer behavior.

From a theoretical perspective, the results strongly support the SOR model, where product quality, social media marketing, and WOM function as external stimuli that shape consumers'

internal evaluations and behavioral responses. The relatively high explanatory power (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.629$ ) indicates that the model effectively captures the complexity of purchase decision-making in the culinary MSME context. This finding extends earlier studies that often applied the SOR model in more controlled or large-scale environments, demonstrating its applicability in small business settings within developing economies.

The significant effect of product quality reaffirms its role as a core determinant of consumer decisions, consistent with prior studies (Kumar et al., 2025; Zafar & Jafar, 2026). In the culinary sector, where consumption is inherently experiential, attributes such as taste, hygiene, and presentation remain essential in shaping perceived value and satisfaction. However, this study also reveals a critical shift: although product quality is important, it is not the most dominant factor. This suggests that in highly competitive and saturated markets like Malang, product quality has become a threshold attribute, a necessary condition for market entry rather than a sufficient condition for differentiation. These findings challenge earlier product-centric models of consumer behavior, which positioned quality as the primary driver of purchasing decisions.

In contrast, social media marketing emerges as the most influential factor, indicating a significant transformation in consumer decision-making processes. This result aligns with recent studies (Lim et al., 2024) that highlight the growing role of digital platforms in influencing consumer behavior, particularly among younger, digitally native populations. The high standardized coefficient ( $\beta = 0.508$ ) suggests that visual storytelling, interactive engagement, and algorithm-driven exposure substantially shape consumer perceptions and preferences. From an SOR perspective, social media content not only provides information but also stimulates emotional and psychological responses, such as curiosity, excitement, and desire which accelerate purchase decisions.

Critically, this finding reflects a broader structural shift from information-based decision-making to experience-driven and digitally mediated consumption. Unlike traditional marketing channels, social media enables businesses to create immersive and continuous interactions with consumers, thereby blurring the boundaries between promotion, communication, and consumption experience. This reinforces the argument that in the digital era, value is increasingly co-created through engagement rather than solely delivered through product attributes.

The positive and significant effect of WOM further supports its well-established role in reducing uncertainty and enhancing trust (Bushara et al., 2023; ShabbirHusain & Varshney, 2022). In line with prior research, WOM serves as a credible and influential source of information, particularly in the culinary sector where product evaluation prior to consumption is limited. However, the relatively lower impact of WOM compared to social media marketing suggests an important transformation: WOM is no longer purely interpersonal but has increasingly evolved into e-WOM embedded within digital platforms.

This finding implies that the distinction between social media marketing and WOM is becoming less clear, as both are often intertwined in practice. For instance, user-generated content, online reviews, and influencer endorsements simultaneously function as marketing tools and social recommendations. Therefore, rather than operating independently, social media and WOM may act as mutually reinforcing mechanisms, amplifying their combined influence on consumer behavior (Osorio-Andrade et al., 2025). This integrative perspective extends previous studies that treated these variables as separate constructs.

Another key contribution of this study lies in its contextual specificity. Unlike much of the existing literature conducted in Western or large-scale business contexts, this research focuses on small culinary enterprises in a secondary Indonesian city. The findings reveal that digital transformation is not limited to large firms but is equally relevant and perhaps even more critical for MSMEs with limited resources. Furthermore, Islam and Sheikh (2024) stated that social

media marketing, in particular, offers a cost-effective and accessible strategy for reaching wider audiences and competing in saturated markets. At the same time, the continued significance of product quality and WOM underscores that digital strategies must be supported by authentic product experiences and customer satisfaction.

Nevertheless, the findings also highlight certain limitations and areas for further inquiry. The remaining 37.1% of unexplained variance suggests that other factors, such as price, service quality, brand image, and location, may also play important roles in shaping purchase decisions. Additionally, the dominance of young respondents (aged 18–25) may limit the generalizability of the findings to other demographic groups with different consumption patterns and digital engagement levels.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study aimed to examine the influence of product quality, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth (WOM) on consumer purchase decisions in small culinary enterprises in Malang. The findings clearly demonstrate that all proposed hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3) are accepted, as each independent variable has a positive and statistically significant effect on purchase decisions. Among these variables, social media marketing emerges as the most dominant factor, followed by product quality and word-of-mouth, indicating a shift in consumer behavior toward digitally driven decision-making. While product quality remains a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring customer satisfaction and repeat purchases, it is no longer sufficient as the primary competitive advantage in a saturated market. Instead, the integration of engaging digital marketing strategies and credible social influence plays a crucial role in shaping consumer preferences.

These results also confirm the relevance of the SOR model in explaining how external stimuli namely product attributes, digital exposure, and social recommendations affect internal evaluations and ultimately drive purchasing behavior. From a policy perspective, this study highlights the urgent need to strengthen digital capabilities among MSMEs. Policymakers and relevant institutions are encouraged to implement structured training programs focused on social media marketing, content creation, and digital branding to enhance the competitiveness of small culinary businesses. In addition, expanding access to digital infrastructure and facilitating MSME integration into online platforms and social commerce ecosystems are essential to amplify market reach and consumer engagement. Encouraging the use of customer reviews and digital feedback mechanisms is also recommended to maximize the impact of electronic word-of-mouth. For practitioners, maintaining consistent product quality while simultaneously optimizing social media presence and encouraging customer interaction is critical for sustaining business growth.

Furthermore, future research is suggested to incorporate additional variables such as price, service quality, and brand image, as well as to involve more diverse samples and methodological approaches, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in the evolving digital marketplace. Then, future research should adopt a more diverse sample and explore moderating variables such as age, income, or digital literacy to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior.

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