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The Influence of WOM, Trust, and Product Quality on Purchase Intention of Maluku Traditional Food Products Moderated by Peers

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of Word of Mouth (WOM), Trust, and Product Quality on students' purchasing intention on traditional Maluku food products, with Peers as a moderating variable. This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method, where data is collected through questionnaires and then analyzed using SmartPLS 4. The results show that Word of Mouth (WOM), Trust, and Product Quality have a positive and significant influence on Purchase Intention, which indicates that product quality, level of trust, and positive information or recommendations play a significant role in increasing students' purchasing intention on traditional Maluku food products. Peers do not directly influence purchase intention. However, in its role as a moderating variable, peers are proven to influence purchase intention. The influence of Word of Mouth on Purchase Intention is moderated, while it is unable to moderate the relationship between Product Quality and Trust on students' Purchase Intention. These findings indicate that students' purchasing intention is more influenced by internal consumer factors and product characteristics, while social influence plays a limited and contextual role. This study is expected to be a consideration in developing marketing strategies for traditional Maluku food products in the future and as a reference for further research.

Keywords: *Word of Mouth, Trust, Product Quality, Peers, Purchase Interest.*

1. Introduction

Sago is a long-standing agricultural commodity in the Indonesian archipelago and is found abundantly in Papua, Maluku, and Sulawesi. Currently, various sago-based food processing industries are growing rapidly [1]. In Maluku Province, public understanding of how to process and utilize sago into food products is quite good. One of the most popular sago products is Bagea. This traditional food, made primarily from sago, has significant potential to increase community income and also serves as a promotional tool for introducing sago-based products. Bagea is readily available in markets and souvenir shops, as it is a typical Maluku snack.

In today's modern era, advances in science and technology are developing rapidly. This development has also driven the pace of business and increased market competition. This situation requires every MSME operating in the goods and services sector to have a more effective and targeted marketing system. To achieve this goal, every business unit strives to produce and deliver goods or services according to market demand. One of the most effective ways to market a product or service is through word of mouth communication using online media.

Word of Mouth (WOM) plays a crucial and highly effective role in a company's sustainability. This is because information conveyed through WOM can spread quickly and is more trusted by potential consumers. The spread of WOM occurs not only through direct word-of-mouth communication but can also be expanded through various social media platforms. Through the internet, WOM can be spread more widely and easily due to its relatively efficient access, such as through YouTube, WhatsApp, Line, Google, Facebook, and various other applications connected to the internet network. Conceptually, WOM is a form of informal communication that includes positive and negative statements in which customers express their opinions about a brand, product, service, or company [2]. WOM is considered a normal practice for consumers. Providing information by word of mouth to other consumers will facilitate the dissemination of information about the product being sold [3]. [4] formulating Word of Mouth Indicators as follows: 1. Consumer willingness to talk positively about the quality of

service and products to others, 2. Recommendations of the company's services and products to others, 3. Encouragement of friends or relations to make purchases of the company's products and services.

Customers who feel satisfied will give a good response. Positive delivery will even make them come back to shop and vice versa if they feel dissatisfied. Customer satisfaction is created because of trust, trust is considered one of the important variables in retaining customers [5]. [6] explains four indicators of trust variables, namely: 1). Reliability, 2). Honesty, 3). Caring and 4). Meanwhile, McKnight et al, as quoted by [5] states that there are three indicators that build trust, namely: 1). Good intentions, 2). Integrity, 3). Competence.

Competence. According to Kotler by [7], Purchase interest is a response that occurs to an object, which encourages consumers to buy the goods or products. Product quality includes all aspects and features of goods and services that affect the ability to meet a person's needs and desires. according to [8], Product quality is a company's strength. In other words, goods or services produced with high quality have their own appeal and encourage consumers to purchase them. According to [9] There are several indicators that can be concluded: 1). Product Form, 2). Work Quality, 3). Quality Conformity, 4). Reliability, 5). Style. Products are the core of marketing activities because products are the output or results of company activities or activities that can be offered to the target market to meet the needs and desires expected by consumers.

2. Research Methods

This study uses a quantitative approach to analyze the relationship between hypotheses. Primary data was collected using the technique of purposive sampling. The purposive sampling technique was used considering that many people in the area are engaged in the processing of sago-based bagea cakes and that sago plants are the primary source of raw materials. The survey was created using Google Forms and distributed through Google Forms. The questionnaire was structured into one section that included items related to the five main constructs examined in this study: WOM (Word of Mouth), Trust, Product Quality, Purchase Intention, and Peer Moderation. A total of 202 questionnaires were completed and received, and after screening, 202 data were considered valid for analysis. The subjects in this study were Maluku students who had consumed traditional Maluku food, Bagea. The analytical tool used to determine the research results was SMARTPLS 4 software.

3. Result and Discussion

Validity and Reliability Test

Validity Test Results

Validity testing is carried out to see the ability of the research instrument to reveal the problems that are to be revealed.

Table 1. Convergent Validity and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Results

Varibel	Indicator	Outhor Loading	Average Variance Extracted
X1	Consumer will	0,725	0,730
	Quality of service	0,907	
	Recommendation	0,931	
	Focus	0,839	
X2	Good intentions	0,759	0,700
	Integrity	0,910	
	Credibility	0,933	
	Honesty	0,725	
X3	Performance	0,794	0,969
	Reliability	0,814	
	Aesthetics	0,885	
	Features	0,842	
Z	peer influence	0,928	0,810
	Friend's suggestion	0,882	
	Social pressure	0,911	
	Group habits	0,087	

Y	Interest	0,832	0,693
	The desire to try	0,826	
	Intention to buy in the future	0,847	
	Willingness to buy	0,824	

Source: Primary Data Processed 2025

The results of the measurement model testing indicate that all variables in this study have met the validity criteria. This can be seen from the value *outer loading* indicators that are mostly above 0.70 and the value *Average Variance Extracted (AVE)* greater than 0.50. Thus, the indicators used are able to measure the variables of Word of Mouth, Trust, Product Quality, Peer Influence, and Purchase Intention well.

The AVE values for the Word of Mouth (0.730), Trust (0.700), Product Quality (0.969), and Peer Influence (0.810) variables indicate that each variable has a strong contribution in explaining its construct. Meanwhile, the Purchase Intention variable also shows an adequate AVE value, namely 0.693. These results confirm that the research model is suitable for analyzing the influence of Word of Mouth, Trust, and Product Quality on Purchase Intention by considering the role of Peer Influence as a moderating variable.

Table 2. Results of the Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Test

	WOM	Trust	Product Quality	Purchase Interest	Peers
WOM		0,046	0,069	0,157	0,094
Trust			0,212	0,302	0,118
Product Quality				0,611	
Purchase Interest					
Peers			0,880	0,504	

Source: Primary Data Processed 2025

Based on the Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) test between WOM and other variables, such as trust, Product Quality, Purchase Intention, and Peers is classified as low. This means that WOM is a variable that stands alone and is different from other variables. Likewise, Trust has a low HTMT value with other variables, so it can be said that trust also has a clear difference. Although the HTMT value between Product Quality and Purchase Intention and Peers and Purchase Intention looks higher than the others, the value is still within normal limits. Therefore, it can be concluded that all variables have met Discriminant Validity, so that each variable can measure different concepts according to the research objectives.

Table 3. Reliability Test Results

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)
WOM	0,878	0,916
Trust	0,856	0,888
Product Quality	0,855	0,875
Purchase Interest	0,852	0,856
Peers	0,922	0,929

Source: Primary Data Processed 2025

Reliability test results indicate that all variables in this study had Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70. This indicates that all indicators used for each variable are consistent and reliable in measuring their respective variables.

The WOM, Trust, Product Quality, and Purchase Intention variables have good reliability values, so the questionnaire items used can provide stable results. Meanwhile, the Peer variable has the highest reliability value, indicating that the indicators in this variable are very consistent in measuring the construct studied. Thus, it can be concluded that all variables in this study have met the reliability criteria, so the resulting data is suitable for further analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

Figure 1. Bootstrapping Path Model

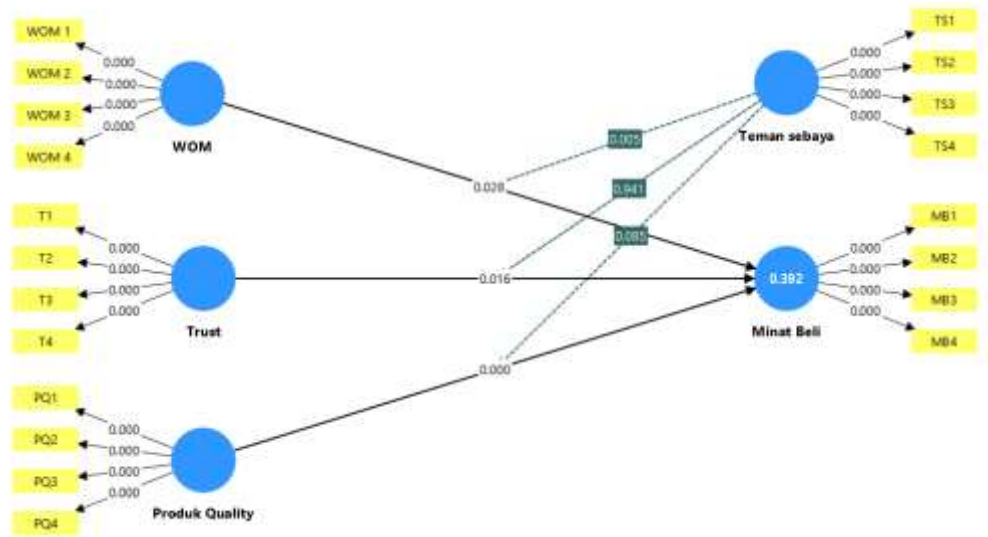


Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results

Variabel	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T-statistics	P values
Product Quality -> Buying Interest	0,469	0,476	0,125	3,751	0,000
WOM -> Buying Interest	0,167	0,166	0,076	2,193	0,028
Trust -> Buying Interest	0,187	0,192	0,078	2,414	0,016
Peers x WOM -> Buying Interest	-0,230	-0,214	0,082	2,812	0,005
Peers x Trust -> Buying Interest	-0,005	-0,003	0,071	0,074	0,941
Peers x Product Quality -> Buying Interest	0,102	0,107	0,059	1,721	0,085

Source: Primary Data Processed 2025

Based on the data in Table 4, it can be explained that the hypothesis regarding the influence of Product Quality, Trust, and Word of Mouth on Purchase Interest and Peer Moderation on the relationship between Word of Mouth and Purchase Interest accepted, while the hypothesis of the direct influence of peers on purchase intention and the moderation of peers on the relationship between product quality and trust on purchase intention was rejected because it did not show a significant influence.

The Influence of WOM on Purchasing Intention

The Word of Mouth (WOM) variable has been proven to have a positive and significant influence on Purchase Interest. A coefficient value of 0.167 with a p-value of 0.028 indicates that recommendations, reviews, and positive conversations from others can increase students' interest in purchasing a product. Thus, WOM is an effective promotional tool in influencing purchase intention. The communication that occurs is word of mouth,

or what is known as word of mouth communication. This communication occurs between consumers and other consumers. A good brand image will create positive word of mouth. [10]–[14]. During this communication process, consumers will share their positive experiences when purchasing Bagea food products and recommend them to others. In other words, consumers have a significant opportunity to spread word of mouth about their personal satisfaction with their Bagea food purchases.

The Influence of Trust on Buying Interest

Based on the data, it can be explained that trust has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention, with a coefficient value of 0.187 and a p-value of 0.016 (<0.05). This means that the higher the level of trust students have in a product, whether in terms of safety, seller honesty, or quality consistency, the greater their interest in making a purchase. In the research [15] proves that the trust variable has a significant influence on satisfaction. Trust can be realized if a product or service fulfills customer needs and desires, which can attract repeat customer interest under certain conditions. Trust occurs because customers have used or consumed the product and the results felt can be satisfying [16].

The Influence of Product Quality on Buying Interest

The analysis results show that product quality has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. The path coefficient value of 0.469 with a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05) indicates that product quality is the main factor driving student purchase intention. This means that the better the perceived product quality, such as taste, appearance, and consistency, the higher the student's desire to purchase the product. Product quality encompasses all characteristic features of goods and services that influence the ability of MSMEs to meet customer needs and desires. [17] This is achieved through direct interaction between the seller and prospective buyers, the seller provides good information to prospective customers through the communication process that occurs [18].

The influence of WOM on students' purchasing interest moderated by peers

In this study, peers were shown to significantly moderate the influence of word of mouth on purchase intention. A coefficient of -0.230 with a p-value of 0.005 (<0.05) indicates that the influence of word of mouth on purchase intention can change depending on the strength or weakness of peer influence. This indicates that in certain contexts, peer opinions and influence can weaken or change the impact of word of mouth on student purchasing decisions.

The Influence of Trust on Students' Purchase Intention Moderated by Peers

Based on the data in the table, it shows that peers do not play a role as a moderating variable in the relationship between Trust and Purchase Interest.. This is indicated by the interaction coefficient value of -0.005 with a p-value of 0.941, which is well above the significance limit of 0.05. This value indicates that the presence or influence of peers neither strengthens nor weakens the influence of trust on purchasing intention.. In other words, the influence of Trust on Purchase Interest is stable., both when peer influence is high and low.

The Influence of Product Quality on Students' Purchase Intention Moderated by Peers

The test results show that peers do not play a role as a moderating variable in the relationship between Trust and Purchase Intention.. This is indicated by the interaction coefficient value of -0.005 with a p-value of 0.941, which is well above the significance limit of 0.05. This value indicates that the presence or influence of peers neither strengthens nor weakens the influence of trust on purchasing intention.. In other words, the influence of Trust on Purchase Intention is stable, whether peer influence is high or low.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis and hypothesis testing that have been conducted, it can be concluded that Product Quality, Trust, and Word of Mouth (WOM) are proven to have a positive and significant influence on students' Purchase Intention towards traditional Maluku food products. This finding indicates that the better the perceived product quality, the higher the level of consumer trust, and the more positive the information and recommendations received, the greater the students' interest in making a purchase. Of the three variables, Product Quality is the most dominant factor in influencing purchase intention, so that product quality plays an important role in attracting consumer attention and decisions. Peers do not have a direct influence on Purchase Intention, which indicates that students' purchasing decisions are based more on personal assessments of the product than pressure or encouragement from their friends. However, the role of Peers becomes significant when associated with Word of Mouth, where Peers are proven to moderate The influence of WOM on Buying Interest is significant. This suggests that the influence of information or recommendations from others can change

depending on the strength of peer influence within a student's environment, thus the social context still plays a role in the purchasing decision-making process. On the other hand, peer influence was unable to moderate the relationship between Product Quality and Trust on Purchase Intention. This finding confirms that both product quality and consumer trust are strong and stable factors, so their influence on purchase intention is not easily influenced by external factors such as peers. Thus, consumers tend to maintain their assessments of quality and trust even in different social environments. Overall, this study confirms that students' purchase intention for traditional Maluku food products is more influenced by internal consumer factors and product characteristics, particularly quality and trust, and is reinforced by WOM communication in certain social contexts. This finding provides practical implications for business actors to focus their marketing strategies more on improving product quality, building consumer trust, and managing positive WOM, without relying too much on direct peer influence.

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