

The Influence of Food Image, Electronic Word of Mouth on Tourist Purchasing Decision at Lalampa Toboli Parigi Culinary Tourism

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ABSTRACT

This study examines whether food image and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) affect on tourists' purchasing decisions. The research model was analyzed from 53 respondents who had tasted lalampa in Parigi, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. The research sample was determined based on the accidental sampling technique. A quantitative approach was used as the data analysis method. Data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis (MRA) and descriptive statistic analysis. The results showed that food image but not significantly and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) significantly influenced tourists' purchasing decisions. Satisfaction level and repurchase intention had the most influence on purchase decision, followed by connection with local culture and source experience.

Keywords: Food Image, eWOM, Tourist Purchasing Decision, Lalampa

1. INTRODUCTION

Toboli is a village located in Parigi Moutong Regency, Central Sulawesi Province. It is 58.1 km away and can be reached in 1 hour and 25 minutes from Palu. Parigi Moutong Regency is known for its specialty food, Lalampa, which they sell a lot in Toboli village so people know it as Lalampa Toboli. Located on the Trans Sulawesi road connecting Palu City and Parigi Moutong Regency, upon entering Toboli Village, motorists will be presented with rows of stalls serving Lalampa. When many people also come to Parigi just to taste Lalampa. According to the (Lisna, n.d.) who interviewed one of the sellers, in a day the seller can spend up to 200 packs of lalampa. According to Sakinah Aljufi, Lalampa Toboli has become an icon that has the potential to support Parigi Moutong's tourism sector, if packaged and developed properly (*jurnas.com*).

Consumers purchasing decisions are based on how they view the brand of a product and how they seem to see it as a crucial component of any good or service (Safitri et al., 2023; Zak & Hasprova, 2020). Interactivity through informativeness and playfulness likely affects purchase decisions in distinct ways (Kang et al., 2020). More specifically, interactions with consumers in digital business platforms that offer some associated activities can boost their loyalties (Rangaswamy et al., 2020). According to Kotler et al. (2022), buyer decision process consists of five stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and postpurchase behavior.

Nowadays, food plays an important role in tourism packages and is a major factor in the attractiveness of a destination (Nguyen et al., 2019; Yanfen, 2021). Promoting local food in the tourism industry contributes to local economic growth by introducing local agricultural activities and engaging locals (Chen & Huang, 2019). The local cuisine has been regarded as a significant element of cultural heritage and local identity, strengthening environmental awareness as well as maintaining traditional lifestyles (Birch & Memery, 2020). Food image can be expressed as the positive formation of a destination-specific gastronomy tourism product (Hsu & Scott, 2020). Key factors in shaping food images include previous culinary experiences and information sources, with marketing strategies leveraged through social media, websites and promotional campaigns to ensure a positive food image for the destination (Ademoğlu & Şahan, 2023). In particular, travelers who hold positive views on destination image and local products are more likely to make repeat visits, recommend destinations and local products to others, and purchase local products (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Chi et al., 2019). A number of studies coincide to assert that destination food image affects visitors' evaluation of destination local food during the on-site experience (Toudert & Bringas-Rábago, 2019).

Interactivity through information and fun can also influence purchasing decisions in different ways (Kang et al., 2020). More specifically, interaction with consumers on digital business platforms that offer several related activities

can increase their loyalty (Rangaswamy et al., 2020). Online platforms have provided sufficient access for consumers to obtain information about products and services, where the online transmission of information about experiences and opinions is called electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Bilal et al., 2020). This information review is becoming an important reference source for customers and is being used to make purchasing decisions in the Internet age (Singh & Slack, 2020). According to Chivandi et al. (2020); Kannan et al. (2024) Consumers are increasingly relying on social media platforms as a primary source to search for product information, including details about the brand, manufacturer background, and available retailers, to aid in their purchasing decisions. These platforms have opened up new opportunities for electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which allows users to engage with their network of followers and friends, and share opinions and experiences (Amin, 2019; Ngo et al., 2024).

EWOM is useful in shaping consumers' perceptions of it, including determining which comments are considered useful and helping consumers identify valuable comments among the many comments (Oriade & Schofield, 2019). There are various motives that drive consumers to talk about a particular brand or service, including the level of perceived satisfaction, commitment to the brand or organization, duration of use, as well as its innovative features. (Nair & Radhakrishnan, 2019). Then, several studies conducted also revealed that eWOM has a positive effect on purchase decisions. Several empirical studies have proven the influence of eWOM on consumer decisions to buy (e.g. Charitha et al., 2019; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Ktirattarkarn et al., 2021; Navitha Sulthana & Shanmugam, 2020; Zhang, 2023). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to discuss the role of food image and electronic word of mouth in tourist purchasing decisions. The study wants to emphasize the value of local cuisine to tourists as well as the development and marketing of destination tourism products in Parigi Moutong Regency, Central Sulawesi.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research aims to determine the influence of Food Image and eWOM on purchasing decisions at Lalampa Toboli Parigi Culinary Tourism. The sampling method used in this research is accidental sampling, which is a sampling technique based on chance, meaning anyone who happens to meet the researcher. Based on market test research, the sample size used in this research was 53 respondents. Questionnaire survey items measure the role of Food Image and eWOM on purchasing decisions. All elements of the Food Image and eWOM construction are the result of scale development. Questionnaire items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, namely 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree. The flow of distributing questionnaires online is by creating an online questionnaire using a Google form which is shared via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp.

Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression statistical analysis and descriptive statistics analysis using SPSS. The descriptive method is also used to gain plenty of facts, information, and data resources currently (Sundler et al., 2019). Multiple Linear Analysis Techniques are used to determine the influence of the independent variables (Food Image and eWOM) on the dependent variable (Purchasing Decision). This research plans to distribute 100 questionnaires randomly and collect them via the Google Form platform. Finally, this research effectively collected 53 questionnaires. This study was limited by participants' refusal to participate in the study, but the researchers did their best to cover an appropriate range to improve the study. In an attempt to understand the influence of food image and eWOM on travelers' purchasing decisions, this study aims to explore the possible relationship between the two variables.

Hypothesis 1: Food Image has an impact on purchasing decisions.

Hypothesis 2: e-WOM has an impact on purchasing decisions.

Hypothesis 3: Food Image and e-WOM have a simultaneous impact on purchasing decisions.

3. RESULT

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Food Image (X1)

Indicator	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Connection with local culture (X1.5)	53	4.5849	.066315	Highest
Emotional connection to food (X1.20)	53	3.4151	.94937	Lowest
Valid N (listwise)	53			

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the Emotional connection to food indicator has the lowest mean frequency of 3.4151 and a standard deviation of 0.94937, but this value is still in the good category, which means that the majority of people agree that they remember a moment when eating lalampa. While the connection with the local culture indicator

has a mean frequency that is in the excellent category of 4.5849 and a standard deviation of 0.066315. It can be interpreted that many people agree that lalampa reflects part of local culture.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics eWOM (X2)

Indicator	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Source experience (X2.6)	53	4.2830	.60056	Highest
Background similarity (X2.9)	53	3.9057	.94593	Lowest
Valid N (listwise)	53			

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that the source experience indicator has the highest mean frequency of 4.2830 and a standard deviation of 0.60056 (very good category), which means that the majority of people agree that they are happy when someone wants to share their experience tasting lalampa. Meanwhile, the background similarity indicator has a mean frequency in the good category of 3.9057 and a standard deviation of 0.94593. It can be interpreted that some people agree that they always choose information from people who have the same background.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics Purchasing Decision (Y)

Indicator	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Satisfaction level (Y.22)	53	4.3585	.73627	Highest
Repurchase intention (Y.23)	53	4.3585	.68203	Highest
Sharing experience (Y.25)	53	3.6226	1.07822	Lowest
Valid N (listwise)				

Based on Table 3, it can be seen that the indicator with the highest mean frequency value is the level of satisfaction and repurchase intention of 4.3585 and a standard deviation of 0.73627 and 0.68203 (very good category), which means that the majority of people agree that they are happy when the lalampa purchased is as expected so that it creates a desire to buy again. While the sharing experience indicator has the lowest mean frequency of 3.6226 and a standard deviation of 0.107822. Although this value is the lowest, it is still in the good category, which means that some people agree to share testimonials about lalampa with the wider community.

3.2. Multiple Linear Regression

Table 4. Partial Regression Test Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.801	9.492		.190	.850
Food Image	.356	.134	.264	2.654	.011
eWOM	.952	.143	.663	6.671	.000

Table 4 presents the findings regarding the impact of food image and eWOM on purchasing decisions. Analysis of the results reveals the following insights: the significance value of food image (X1) is 0.011 > 0.05 with a T table value of 2.654 (2.654 > 2.008), so H1 is accepted, meaning that there is an influence on purchasing decisions but it is not significant (Y). The significance value of eWOM (X2) is 0.000 < 0.05 with a T table value of 6,671 (6,671 > 2.008), so H2 is accepted, meaning it influences purchasing decisions (Y).

Table 5. Simultaneous Test Results

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	8452.984	2	4226.492	78.152	.000
Residual	2704.035	50	54.081		
Total	11157.019	52			

The F test results can be seen in table 5. The calculated F value is 78.152 > F table (3.179) with a significance level of 0.000 < 0.05. Because the level of significance is less than 0.05, H3 is accepted, so it can be said that food image and eWOM have a simultaneous (together) effect on purchasing decisions.

Table 6. Results of the Coefficient of Determination Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.870	.758	.748	7.35396

Based on table 6, it is known that the R Square value is 0.758. This shows that food image (X1) and eWOM (X2) influence purchasing decisions (Y) by 75.8%. Meanwhile, the remaining 24.2% is explained by other factors not examined in this study.

4. DISCUSSION

The regression coefficient of food image (X1) indicates that the variable affects purchasing decisions with a calculated t-value of $2.654 > t\text{-table } 2.008$ and a significance level of $0.011 > 0.05$. The results clearly show that food image influences tourists' purchasing decisions, but not significantly. Attributes of food image such as uniqueness in taste and presentation, use of local ingredients and connection with local culture contribute most to tourists' purchasing decisions. This finding is supported by the findings of (Yasami et al., 2021) emphasized that the dimension "taste and popularity of food" is the most important determinant of tourist satisfaction. Their findings elucidate that tourists' discerning taste preferences and their perceptions regarding the popularity of food items serve as primary determinants in influencing satisfaction levels. As tourists engage with culinary offerings during their travels, their experiences are intricately intertwined with the sensory delight derived from flavors and the allure associated with popular food items. Consequently, these factors play a pivotal role in not only shaping tourists' overall satisfaction but also influencing their subsequent purchasing behavior. By prioritizing taste preferences and acknowledging the appeal of popular culinary choices, destinations can effectively cater to tourists' expectations and enhance their overall satisfaction, thereby fostering positive experiences and encouraging repeat visitation.

On the basis of the data analysis conducted, a significant result of 0.000 was obtained with a t count of $6.671 > t\text{ table } 2.008$ for the eWOM variable. This means that statistically the eWOM variable has a significant effect on tourists' purchasing decisions. According to the results of descriptive statistics, source experience most influences tourists' purchasing decisions. These findings highlight that information originating from firsthand experiences holds considerable sway over tourists' decision-making processes. Particularly, details regarding the quality, price, and taste of culinary offerings, gleaned from individuals who have sampled lalampa, emerge as crucial factors influencing tourists' choices. The research by (Büyükdağ, 2021; Romadhoni et al., 2023; Tien et al., 2019) indicates that e-WOM influences purchasing decisions. In contrast, Gultom et al. (2023) discovered that electronic word of mouth does not impact purchasing decisions. This disparity in findings underscores the complexity of consumer behavior and the multifaceted nature of influences that contribute to purchasing decisions. Despite these varying perspectives, it is evident that the role of information dissemination, whether through firsthand experiences or electronic channels, remains a crucial determinant in tourists' purchasing behaviors, highlighting the need for further research to elucidate the intricacies of consumer decision-making in the tourism context.

Through the analysis of the data, the results showed that food image and eWOM simultaneously influence the purchasing decisions of tourists. With a significance level of 0.000 which means less than 0.05, and has an f value of $78.15 > f\text{ table } (3.179)$. The identified relationship between food image and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) underscores their combined impact on tourists' purchasing decisions. A positive perception of food image not only influences individual purchasing decisions but also stimulates customers' inclination to share their experiences with a broader audience. This aligns with prior research by Khan (2023), which highlights the significant role of customer reviews in shaping consumer decision-making processes. When customers perceive a favorable food image, they are more likely to endorse the product through positive reviews, thereby influencing potential buyers. Consequently, the quality of food image not only enhances individual purchasing decisions but also cultivates a positive reputation through word of mouth, fostering a cycle of positive feedback and customer satisfaction.

5. CONCLUSION

The research findings underscore the significance of both food image and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in shaping tourists' purchasing decisions. A positive food image, characterized by its unique taste, utilization of local ingredients, and cultural resonance, emerges as a pivotal factor influencing tourists' choices. These attributes not only contribute to the overall appeal of culinary offerings but also reflect the authenticity and cultural richness of the destination. Similarly, the influence of eWOM highlights the growing importance of online reviews and recommendations from fellow consumers in shaping purchasing behaviors. As tourists increasingly rely on digital platforms for information and guidance, positive eWOM can significantly impact their decision-making processes.

The simultaneous influence of food image and eWOM underscores their interconnected nature in influencing tourists' perceptions and preferences. Businesses in the tourism industry must recognize the synergistic relationship between these factors and strategically leverage them to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. By cultivating a positive food image and actively managing eWOM channels, businesses can effectively engage with their target

audience and differentiate themselves in a competitive market landscape. Moreover, fostering authentic and positive experiences that align with tourists' expectations can strengthen destination appeal and contribute to long-term success in the tourism sector.

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