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Determinants of Generation Z's Purchase Decisions for Viral Foods Online Fear of Missing Out as a Mediating Variable

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Abstract: The phenomenon of viral foods spreading through social media has transformed Generation Z's purchasing decision-making patterns; however, the psychological mechanisms that mediate the impact of the digital environment on purchasing decisions still require further study. This study aims to analyze the influence of social media exposure, electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), and social influence on viral food purchasing decisions, with Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) as a mediating variable among Generation Z in Jayapura City. The study employs a quantitative approach using a survey design with 200 respondents selected via purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) via SmartPLS 4. The results indicate that social influence has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions, both directly and through FoMO. Additionally, E-WOM has a positive and significant effect on FoMO and indirectly influences purchasing decisions through FoMO. Conversely, social media exposure does not have a significant effect on either FoMO or purchasing decisions; therefore, FoMO does not mediate this relationship. These findings suggest that Generation Z's purchasing decisions regarding viral food items are more influenced by social and psychological factors than by direct social media exposure. Consequently, marketing strategies based on social interaction and the creation of FoMO have the potential to be more effective in driving purchasing decisions.

Keywords: Purchase Decision, Viral Food, Electronic Word-of-Mouth, Social Influence, Fear of Missing Out.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the way consumers obtain information, interact, and make purchasing decisions. The integration of digital technology with changes in people's culture not only shifts consumption activities from conventional channels to digital platforms, but also shapes consumer mindsets, preferences, and expectations towards a product (Cruz-Cárdenas et al., 2025; Princesa et al., 2024). In this context, consumption is no longer seen solely as an effort to meet functional needs, but also as a means to build self-identity, obtain emotional satisfaction, and show social status in society. Therefore, digital transformation has driven changes in consumer behavior that are more

complex than just shifting the transaction medium, which includes changes in the way consumers evaluate, choose, and decide on the purchase of a product (Santos & Gonçalves, 2021).

One of the sectors that has undergone significant changes due to digital transformation is food consumption. The development of digital media allows consumers to quickly obtain information about food products through various forms of content, such as reviews, recommendations, recipes, and product comparisons, which ultimately affect the evaluation process and purchase decisions (Moghbeli et al., 2023; Rini et al., 2024). Among various digital platforms, visual-based social media such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube have an increasingly dominant role in shaping consumer preferences because they are able to present information in an interesting way while creating social experiences that encourage user engagement. Through the massive dissemination of content, social media not only functions as a communication medium, but also becomes the main driver of the emergence of viral food trends, which is a phenomenon when the popularity of a food product is determined more by the intensity of digital exposure than by the utilitarian value of the product itself (Filippone et al., 2022).

The phenomenon of viral food is growing more rapidly in the Generation Z group, known as the digital generation. The generation born in the period 1997–2012 grew up in an environment that relies heavily on digital technology, making social media an integral part of daily activities (Gomes et al., 2023; Pradanimas et al., 2023). For Generation Z, social media is not only used as a means of entertainment, but also as the main source of information about products, lifestyle references, and a space to build social identity through interaction with other users (Mude & Undale, 2023). This condition causes Generation Z's consumption decisions to be increasingly influenced by information and social dynamics that develop in the digital environment.

In the digital ecosystem, purchasing decisions are not only influenced by the exposure of marketing content delivered by business actors, but also by various forms of communication between consumers that take place online. One form of communication is electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), which is the delivery of consumer experiences, reviews, and recommendations through digital media that can be widely accessed by other users. Compared to conventional marketing communication, E-WOM is often perceived as more credible because it comes from real consumer experience so that it becomes one of the main sources of information before making a purchase, especially on products that are trending (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Filieri & McLeay, 2014). In addition to E-WOM, the digital environment also forms social influence through interactions with peers, influencers, and online communities that provide normative and informational pressure in the decision-making process. In such situations, consumers tend to use other people's behavior as a reference in evaluating a product so that purchase decisions are no longer based entirely on personal preferences, but are also influenced by the desire to follow social norms that develop on social media (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Fu et al., 2020).

Various previous studies have shown that social media is an important determinant in shaping digital consumption behavior. Exposure to food content on social media has been proven to increase food craving and encourage impulse purchases through attractive product visualizations and high intensity of information exposure (Filippone et al., 2022). Other research has also shown that social media characteristics, such as short videos, user interaction, and content sharing features, are able to increase social presence, customer inspiration, and social proof, ultimately accelerating consumer purchase decisions (Gao et al., 2022; Zafar et al., 2021). In the Indonesian context, the phenomenon of viral food on TikTok and Instagram has even become one of the factors influencing changes in the consumption patterns of the younger generation (Rini et al., 2024a).

In addition to social media, research on digital communication also shows that E-WOM plays an important role in shaping consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions. Information obtained through reviews and experiences of other users not only serves as a rational source of information, but also influences consumers' cognitive and affective evaluations of a product (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Ismagilova et al., 2020). This influence becomes even stronger when the information received is seen as having high quality and credibility, increasing information adoption and driving purchasing decisions (Kumar et al., 2023). On the other hand, social influence is also consistently identified as a determinant of digital consumer behavior through social pressure mechanisms, group recommendations, and validation from influencers and social networks that shape preferences and purchasing decisions, especially in products that are popular and socially observable (Fu et al., 2020; Gonçalves et al., 2024).

However, the influence of these various digital stimuli on purchasing decisions does not always occur directly. In the context of trend-based consumption, various studies show that consumer psychological responses have an important role in explaining how social media exposure, E-WOM, and social influence translate into purchasing behavior. One of the psychological mechanisms that has received a lot of attention is Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), which is a condition when individuals feel worried about being left behind from the social experiences that others are experiencing (Przybylski et al., 2013). Various studies show that FoMO increases individuals' tendency to follow trends, make impulse purchases, and pursue popular consumption experiences, especially in the Generation Z group who have a high level of connection with social media (Hussain et al., 2023; Mahmud et al., 2023; Japutra et al., 2025). The findings show that viral food buying behavior is not only influenced by external factors in the form of exposure to digital information, but also by psychological conditions that arise in response to the digital social environment.

To explain the mechanism of purchasing decisions in the digital environment, this study refers to the theory of Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). The S-O-R theory explains that stimuli from the environment do not directly produce behavioral responses, but are first processed through the psychological conditions of individuals (organisms) before producing responses (Jacoby, 2002). In the context of this study, exposure to social media, electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), and social influence was positioned as external stimuli, while Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) acted as a psychological mechanism that bridged the influence of these three stimuli on viral food purchase decisions.

A number of studies have shown that FoMO plays an important role in explaining consumption behavior in the digital age. Individuals with high levels of FoMO tend to be driven to follow trends and make purchases to avoid feeling left behind from the social experiences of others (Hussain et al., 2023; Mahmud et al., 2023; Japutra et al., 2025). However, previous research has generally examined FoMO in the context of brand passion, influencer marketing, or compulsive purchasing behavior, so empirical evidence on its role in viral food purchase decisions is still relatively limited. In addition, research on social media exposure, E-WOM, and social influence is still mostly still carried out partially by examining the influence of each variable on purchase decisions. Thus, an approach that is able to integrate the three stimuli in a single theoretical framework is needed to explain the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer purchasing decisions. The research gap of this research also lies in an empirical context that has not been explored much. Most of the previous research was conducted in the context of e-commerce, fashion products, beauty products, and general purchasing behavior. Meanwhile, studies on viral food purchase decisions, especially in Generation Z in Eastern Indonesia, are still very limited. In fact, the social, cultural, and consumption characteristics of people in the region have the potential to produce different dynamics compared to the context of previous research.

The city of Jayapura was chosen as the location of the study because it shows consumption characteristics that are relevant to the phenomenon. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (2024), Jayapura City has the highest per capita expenditure rate in Papua Province, which is IDR 1,919,441 per month, with spending on food reaching IDR 787,919. This condition shows that public consumption is not only oriented towards meeting basic needs, but is also influenced by lifestyle aspects, social interaction, and the development of digital trends, especially in the Generation Z group who have an intensity of media use high social status.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the influence of social media exposure, electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), and social influence on viral food purchase decisions in Generation Z in Jayapura City, as well as test the mediating role of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) in these relationships. This study adapts the research framework of Japutra et al. (2025) by developing a model that integrates three digital stimuli in the perspective of Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) to explain the mechanism of viral food purchase decisions. Thus, this study is expected to expand the application of S-O-R theory in the context of digital consumer behavior while providing empirical evidence on viral food purchasing behavior in Generation Z in Eastern Indonesia.

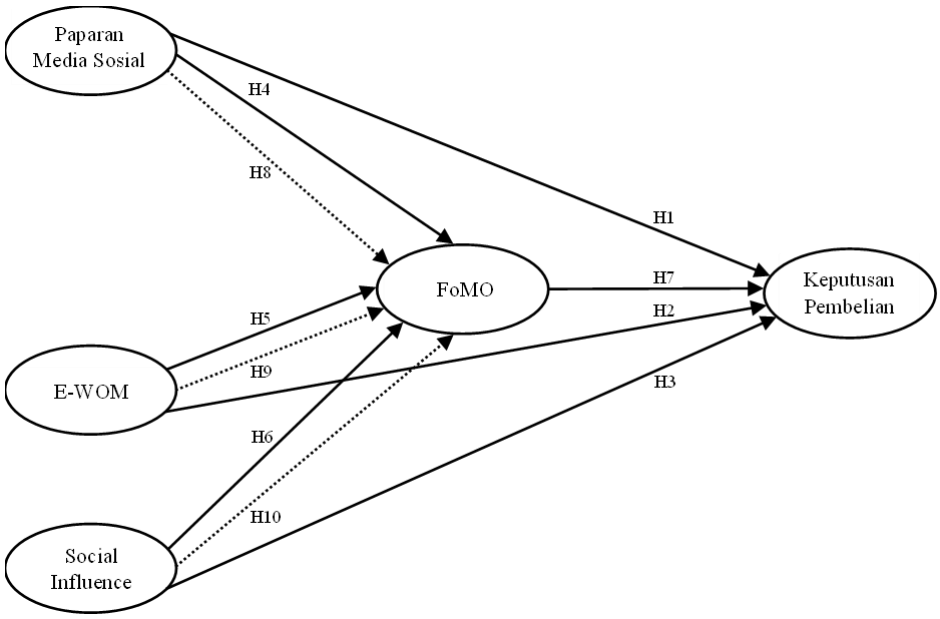

Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to test the causal relationship between variables based on the theory of Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R). In this study, exposure to social media, electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), and social influence were positioned as independent variables (stimulus), Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) as mediating variables (organisms), and viral food purchase decisions as dependent variables (response). This approach was chosen to analyze the direct and indirect influence between variables through hypothesis testing.

The research will be carried out in Jayapura City in April 2026. The research location was chosen because of the high activity of social media use among the younger generation and the development of the phenomenon of viral food consumption. The study population is Generation Z aged 14–27 years who live in Jayapura City and have bought viral food at least once in the last six months. The sample was determined using a purposive sampling technique with the criteria of respondents aged 14-27 years, domiciled in Jayapura City, active in social

media, and had experience buying viral food. Based on the recommendations of the Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) analysis, the minimum sample number was set at 150 respondents to obtain a stable model estimate, but this study set a target of 200 respondents.

The data used is primary data obtained through the distribution of online questionnaires using Google Form. The research instrument was in the form of a closed questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). All variable indicators were adapted from relevant previous research, including social media exposure (Potvin et al., 2024), E-WOM (Goyette et al., 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), social influence (Venkatesh et al., 2003), FoMO (Przybylski et al., 2013), and purchasing decisions (Gao et al., 2022). Before the main data collection, the instrument was first tested through a pilot test on 30 respondents to ensure its validity and reliability.

The operationalization of the research variables consisted of five latent constructs, namely social media exposure, E-WOM, social influence, FoMO, and purchasing decisions, each of which was measured using five indicators. Details of the operational definitions and indicators of each variable are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Operational Definitions of Variables and Indicators

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicator	Source
Social Media Exposure (X1)	The level of engagement of individuals with visual content that influences attention, perception, and purchasing decisions (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021)	1. Frequency of viewing viral food content 2. Duration of watching food content 3. Interaction (like, comment, share) 4. Exposure from friends/influencers 5. Viral Culinary Ad Exposure	(Potvin et al., 2024)
Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) (X2)	A form of online consumer communication related to the exchange of information, experiences, and opinions about products that can be accessed by many people through digital media (Erkan & Evans, 2016)	1. Consider the content of online reviews before deciding to buy viral food 2. Frequency of talking about products online 3. Provide product recommendations to others through digital media 4. share personal experiences after trying products online 5. Delivering ratings or comments about products on social media	(Goyette et al., 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004)
Social Influence (X3)	The influence of individuals or social groups that influence purchasing decisions through social pressures and environmental opinions	1. Influence of friends/groups 2. Influence of social trends 3. Push follows the majority 4. The influence of figures on social media 5. Social normal in consumption	(Venkatesh et al., 2003)
FoMO (Z)	Fear of falling behind trends or social experiences experienced by others (Przybylski et al., 2013)	1. Concerns of lagging the trend 2. The urge to follow friends 3. checking social media repeatedly. 4. Anxiety when not following trends. 5. Urgent to try food trends	(Przybylski, et al., 2013)
Purchase Decision (Y)	Consumer processes and actions in determining the choice to purchase a product or service (Kotler & Keller, 2012)	1. Purchase intent 2. Priority of choosing viral foods 3. Buying confidence 4. Final Purchase Decision 5. Recommendations	(Gao et al., 2022)

Data analysis was carried out using the SEM-PLS approach with the help of SmartPLS software. The analysis stages include descriptive statistical analysis to describe the

characteristics of respondents, evaluation of external models through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability testing using Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha. Furthermore, the inner model was evaluated using the values of the determination coefficient (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and direct effect and indirect effect testing. Hypothesis testing was carried out through a bootstrapping procedure, with hypothesis criteria accepted when the t-statistical value > 1.96 and the p-value < 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	32	16,0%
Women	168	84,0%
Age		
14 - 17 Years	60	30,0%
17 – 20 Years	20	10,0%
21 – 24 Years	44	22,0%
25 – 29 Years	76	38%
Education		
High School/Equivalent	30	15%
Bachelor (S1)	145	72,5%
Diploma	18	9%
S2/S3	7	3,5
Jobs		
Private Employees	44	22%
Civil Servant	14	7%
Self-employed	11	5,5%
Student/Student	95	47,5%
Miscellaneous	29	14,5%
Not Working	7	3,5%

The characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 2. Respondents are dominated by women (84%) with the majority aged 25–29 years old (38%). Most of the respondents were Bachelor's graduates (72.5%) and students (47.5%). The composition shows that the research sample is dominated by Generation Z with a relatively high level of education and is still in the academic environment and the early stages of the world of work.

SEM-PLS Analysis Results

Data analysis was carried out using the Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) approach with the help of SmartPLS 4. The research model tested consisted of three exogenous variables, namely social media exposure, electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), and social influence, one mediating variable (Fear of Missing Out [FoMO]), and one endogenous variable, namely the decision to purchase viral food. The relationship between variables in the research model is presented in Figure 2.

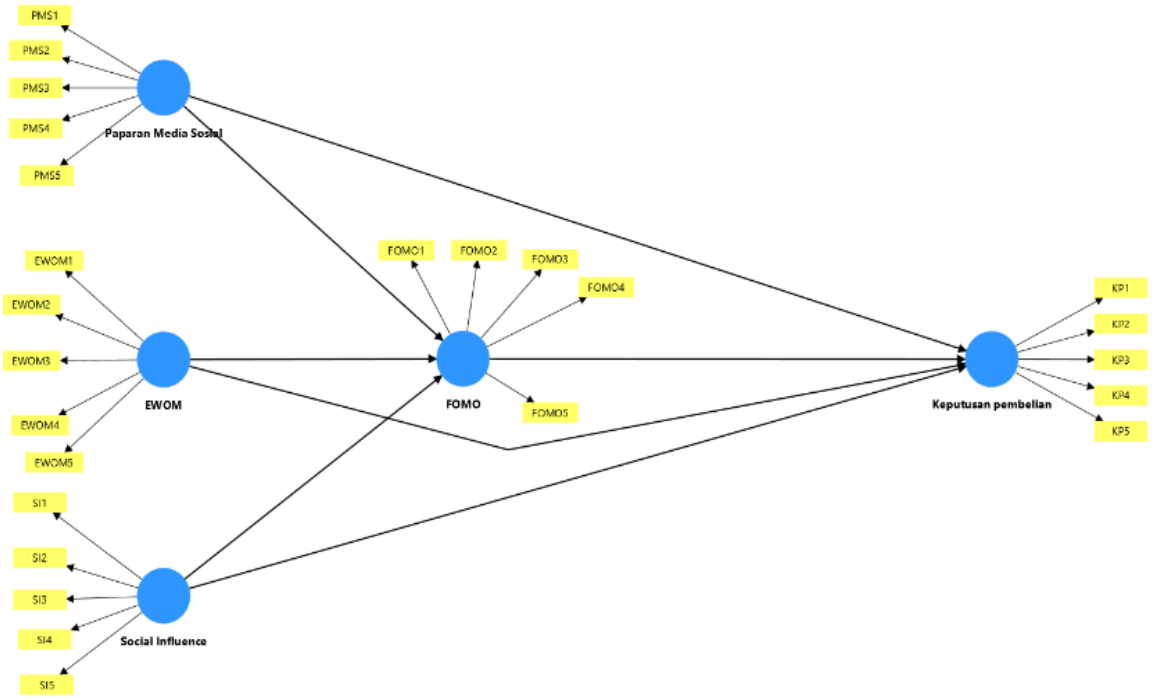

Figure 2. Path Diagram

Before hypothesis testing is carried out, the measurement model (outer model) is evaluated to ensure the validity and reliability of the construct. This is shown by the loading factor value above 0.70, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of the entire construct which is already above 0.50. In addition, the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values of all variables also exceeded the minimum limit of 0.70. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) approach. As presented in Table 3, discriminant validity is evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion by comparing the Average Variance Extracted (√AVE) square root value of each construct against the correlation between constructs. As shown in Table 4, the overall value of √AVE on the main diagonal is higher than the correlation between other constructs. These results show that each construct has a good ability to distinguish the concepts being measured, so that the discriminant validity of the model has been fulfilled and the entire construct is suitable for use in structural model analysis. Overall, the instruments in the study met the criteria of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability so that they were suitable for use in structural analysis (Hair et al., 2017; Setiabudhi et al., 2025).

Table 3. Construct Validity and Reliability Test Results

Construct	Outer Loading	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Social Media Exposure	0,719–0,863	0,587	0,826	0,876
Electronic Word of Mouth	0,726–0,842	0,613	0,843	0,888
Social Influence	0,706–0,823	0,597	0,830	0,881
Fear of Missing Out	0,719–0,863	0,626	0,850	0,893
Purchase Decision	0,715–0,835	0,597	0,830	0,881

Table 4. Results of the Discriminant Validity Test with the Fornell Larcker Criterion

Construct	EWOM	FoMO	CD	PMS	IF
EWOM	0,783				

FoMO	0,441	0,791			
CD	0,439	0,657	0,773		
PMS	0,600	0,449	0,441	0,766	
IF	0,500	0,500	0,668	0,613	0,773

Evaluation of the structural model (Table 5) shows that the model is able to explain 30.8% of the variation of FoMO and 58.9% of the variation of the purchase decision, with Q^2 values of 0.280 and 0.444 respectively indicating good predictive ability. The effect size analysis as shown in table 6 shows that social media exposure and E-WOM have a small contribution to FoMO and purchase decisions. In contrast, social influence (f^2 = 0.295) and FoMO (f^2 = 0.310) contributed moderately to purchasing decisions, making them the most dominant predictors in the research model.

Table 5. Evaluation of the Predictive Ability of Structural Models

Endogenous Variable	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Q^2
FoMO	0,308	0,297	0,280
Purchase Decision	0,589	0,581	0,444

Table 6. Value of Effect Size (f^2) Between Constructs

Relationships Between Constructs	f^2	Interpretation
Social Media Exposure → FoMO	0,013	Small
Social Media Exposure → Purchase Decisions	0,007	Small
E-WOM → FoMO	0,036	Small
E-WOM → Purchase Decision	0,005	Small
Social Influence → FoMO	0,087	Small
Social Influence → Purchase Decisions	0,295	Medium
FoMO → Purchase Decision	0,310	Medium

The results of the hypothesis test show that only part of the relationship between variables is empirically supported (Table 7). Social influence has been proven to have a positive effect on purchase decisions and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), while FoMO also has a positive effect on purchase decisions. In addition, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has a positive effect on FoMO, but does not have a direct effect on purchase decisions. In contrast, social media exposure did not show a significant influence on either FoMO or purchase decisions.

Table 7. *Direct Effect Test Results*

Research Variables	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Value	Remarks
Social Media Exposure -> Purchase Decisions	-0,077	-0,076	0,066	1,155	0,248	Negative is insignificant
Electronic Word of Mouth -> Purchase Decision	0,061	0,059	0,063	0,970	0,332	Insignificant
Social Influence-> Purchase Decisions	0,470	0,469	0,070	6,151	0,000	Significant Positives
Social Media Exposure -> FoMO	0,132	0,135	0,074	1,792	0,073	Insignificant

Electronic Word of Mouth -> FoMO	0,202	0,207	0,079	2,571	0,010	Significant Positives
Social Influence-> FoMO	0,318	0317	0,078	4,081	0,000	Significant Positives
FoMo -> Purchase decision	0,429	0,432	0,070	6,151	0,000	Significant Positives

The findings indicate that the decision to buy viral food in Generation Z in Jayapura City is more influenced by social pressure and psychological conditions in the form of FoMO than the intensity of exposure to social media content itself. In other words, the existence of content on social media does not necessarily encourage purchase decisions if it is not accompanied by social encouragement or a fear of falling behind trends.

Table 8. Indirect Effect *Test Results*

Research Variables	Original Sample	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistic	P-Value	Remarks
Social media exposure -> FoMO -> Purchase Decision	0,057	0,059	0,034	1,686	0,092	Insignificant
Electronic Word of Mouth -> FoMo -> Purchase Decision	0,087	0,091	0,040	2,183	0,029	Significant positives
Social Influence -> FoMo -> Purchase Decision	0,137	0,137	0,040	3,384	0,001	Significant Positives

Furthermore, mediation effect testing showed that FoMO successfully mediated the relationship between e-WOM and social influence on purchase decisions, but did not mediate the relationship between social media exposure and purchase decisions (Table 8). These results show that recommendations and social interactions that develop in the digital environment are able to improve purchasing decisions through the formation of FoMO, while exposure to social media alone is not enough to give rise to these psychological mechanisms.

The Influence of Social Media Exposure on Purchase Decisions

Based on the results of the hypothesis test, social media exposure has a coefficient value of -0.077 with a t-statistic value of 1.155 and a p-value of 0.248. The p-value is greater than 0.05, indicating that social media exposure does not have a significant effect on the purchase decision of viral food by Generation Z in Jayapura City. Thus H1 was rejected. The results of this study show that the intensity of exposure to social media content does not necessarily directly drive consumer purchase decisions. Although Generation Z is often exposed to viral food content on social media such as Tiktok and Instagram, the exposure is not strong enough to drive purchase decisions without other psychological or social factors. This indicates that consumers not only consider the visual aspects or virality of the content, but also consider the needs, preferences, and influences of the social environment before making a purchase.

These findings are not in line with research (Filippone et al., 2022), (Zafar et al., 2021), (Gao et al., 2022), and (Rini et al., 2024) which states that social media exposure can improve purchasing decisions through *social presence*, customer inspiration, and impulsive behavior. However, the results of this study show that in the context of Generation Z in Jayapura City, social media exposure has not been able to become the dominant factor that directly determines the decision to purchase viral food. In the perspective of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory, exposure to social media as an external stimulus has not been able to produce a

direct behavioral response because it still requires internal psychological processes in consumers.

The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on Purchase Decisions

The results of the test showed that *electronic word of mouth (E-WOM)* has a coefficient value of 0.061 with a t-statistic value of 0.970 and *p-value* by 0.332. This value shows that E-WOM does not have a significant effect on the decision to buy viral food by Generation Z in Jayapura City, so H2 is rejected. These results indicate that reviews, comments, and other users' experiences on social media have not been able to directly influence respondents' purchasing decisions. Generation Z consumers tend not to immediately trust the digital information circulating and need other emotional and social encouragement before deciding to buy viral food products. The findings of this study are not in line with the research (Kumar et al., 2023), (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021), and (Ismagilova et al., 2020) which states that E-WOM has a significant effect on consumer purchase decisions. The difference in results can occur due to the characteristics of respondents who are more selective towards digital information and are not easily influenced only through online reviews. Based on the S-O-R theory, e-WOM as a digital stimulus has not directly generated a response in the form of a purchase decision, but rather needs to go through certain psychological conditions that affect consumers emotionally.

The Influence of Social Influence on Purchase Decisions

The test results show that *Social Influence* It has a coefficient value of 0.470 with a T-Statistic value of 6.151 and a P-value of 0.000. This value shows that social influence has a positive and significant effect on viral food purchase decisions by Generation Z in Jayapura City. Thus, H3 is accepted. The results of this study show that social influences from friends, reference groups, influencers, and the social environment have an important role in shaping consumer purchasing decisions. The higher the social impulse that an individual receives, the higher the tendency of Generation Z to buy viral food. These findings support research (Bhukya & Paul, 2023) which states that *Social Influence* is an important part of consumer purchasing behavior. In addition, these results are also in line with research (Gonçalves et al., 2024) who found that influencers and social networks are the main reference for consumers in making online purchases. In the context of viral food, social recommendations and trends that are developing in the surrounding environment make Generation Z encouraged to follow their group's consumption behavior to remain socially relevant. This shows that social pressure has a strong influence on the consumption behavior of the younger generation.

The Effect of Social Media Exposure on Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

The test results showed that social media exposure had a coefficient value of 0.132 with a t-statistic value of 1.792 and a p-value of 0.073. This value shows that social media exposure does not have a significant effect on *Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)* until H4 is rejected. These results show that the intensity of social media exposure has not been able to significantly increase the fear of being left behind the trend in Generation Z in Jayapura City. Although respondents often see viral food content on social media, it is not enough to give rise to psychological pressure in the form of FoMO. These findings are not entirely in line with research (Przybylski, Murayama, Dehaan, et al., 2013) and (Tandon et al., 2021) which states that high social media usage can increase FoMO. This difference can be influenced by the respondent's ability to control media use as well as differences in cultural characteristics and consumption behavior.

The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

The test results showed that E-WOM had a coefficient value of 0.202 with a value of *t-statistic* of 2,571 and *p-value* by 0.010. This value shows that E-WOM has a positive and significant effect on *fear of missing out (FoMO),* until H5 is accepted. These results show that the higher the intensity, reviews, comments, and positive experiences of other consumers on social media, the higher the fear of being left behind in Generation Z. The number of testimonials and other user experiences makes individuals feel encouraged to try products that are currently viral. These findings support research (Hussain et al., 2023) which states that E-WOM can improve FoMO as consumers feel left behind from social experiences shared online. In the context of viral food, E-WOM creates the perception that the product is popular and a must-try, thus triggering psychological pressure to follow the trend.

The Influence of Social Influence on Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

The test results show that *Social Influence* has a coefficient value of 0.318 with a value of *t-statistic* of 4,081 and *p-value* by 0.000. This shows that *Social Influence* have a positive and significant effect on *fear of missing out (FoMO),* until H6 is accepted. The results of this study show that the greater the social influence that individuals receive from the surrounding environment, the higher the fear of being left behind the trend felt. Generation Z tends to feel left behind if they do not follow the consumption behavior of their social group. These findings are in line with research (Mahmud et al., 2023; Tandon et al., 2021) which states that social pressure from influencers and reference groups can increase FoMO in young consumers. In the context of viral food, social recommendations and the popularity of products in the surrounding environment give rise to the emotional urge to try trending products.

The Effect of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) on Purchase Decisions

The test results showed that FoMO had a coefficient value of 0.429 with a value of *t-statistic* 6,151 and *p-value* by 0.000. This value shows that FoMO has a positive and significant effect on the decision to purchase viral food by Generation Z in Jayapura City so that H7 is accepted. These results show that the higher the fear of lagging behind trends that consumers feel, the higher their tendency to make viral food purchase decisions. FoMO makes individuals encouraged to buy products immediately in order to stay up to date with emerging social trends. These findings support research (Hussain et al., 2023) (Tandon et al., 2021), (Japutra et al., 2025), and (Mahmud et al., 2023) which states that FoMO is a psychological factor that drives impulsive consumption behavior and purchasing decisions in the younger generation. In the S-O-R theory, FoMO acts as an organism or psychological internal condition that bridges, a digital stimulus with a behavioral response in the form of a purchase decision.

The Role of Fear of Missing Out in Mediating the Influence of Social Media Exposure on Purchase Decisions

The test results showed that the indirect influence of social media exposure on purchase decisions through FoMO had a coefficient value of 0.057 with *a t-statistic* value of 1.686 and *a p-value* of 0.092. This value shows that FoMO was unable to significantly mediate the relationship between social media exposure to purchasing decisions, so H8 was rejected. These results show that social media exposure has not been strong enough to form a FoMO that then drives viral food purchase decisions. In other words, even if consumers are exposed to social media content, it doesn't necessarily create a fear of being left behind that is strong enough to influence purchasing decisions.

The Role of Fear of Missing Out in Mediating the Influence of E-WOM on Purchase Decisions

The test results showed that the indirect influence of E-WOM on purchase decisions through FoMO had a coefficient value of 0.087 with *a t-statistic* value of 2.183 and *a p-value* of 0.029. This value shows that FoMO is able to mediate positively and significantly the influence of E-WOM on purchase decisions so that H9 is accepted. These results show that E-WOM does not directly influence purchase decisions, but is able to increase FoMO which then encourages consumers to make a purchase. Thus, FoMO acts as a psychological mechanism that bridges the influence of E-WOM processed through the individual's internal conditions in the form of FoMO before producing a behavioral response in the form of a purchase decision.

The Role of Fear of Missing Out in Mediating the Influence of Social Influence on Purchase Decisions

The test results showed that the indirect influence of *social influence* on purchase decisions through FoMO had a coefficient value of 0.137 with *a t-statistic* value of 3.384 and *a p-value* of 0.001. This value shows that FoMO is able to mediate positively and significantly the influence of *social influence* on purchase decisions so that H10 is accepted. These results suggest that the social influence of the surrounding environment can increase FoMO in individuals which in turn drives viral food purchase decisions. The greater the social pressure that consumers receive, the greater the fear of being left behind the trend so that consumers are encouraged to follow the consumption behavior of their social groups. These findings reinforce the S-O-R theory that explains that social stimuli do not necessarily affect behavior directly, but are first processed through internal psychological conditions in the form of FoMO before producing a purchase decision.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the decision to buy viral food in Generation Z in Jayapura City is more influenced by social and psychological factors than direct exposure to social media. Social influence has proven to be the most dominant factor in driving purchase decisions, both directly and through an increase in Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). In addition, FoMO has a positive effect on purchasing decisions, which shows that the stronger the fear of being left behind, the greater the tendency of consumers to buy viral foods. Meanwhile, electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) does not have a direct effect on purchase decisions, but is able to increase purchase decisions through FoMO as a mediating variable. In contrast, social media exposure did not show a significant influence on FoMO or purchase decisions.

These findings strengthen the application of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) theory in the context of digital consumption behavior, where social stimuli in the form of E-WOM and social influence first form the psychological condition of consumers in the form of FoMO before producing behavioral responses in the form of purchasing decisions. Thus, this study provides a theoretical contribution by showing that FoMO plays a role as a psychological mechanism that bridges social influence on viral food purchase decisions in Generation Z. Practically, the results of the study indicate that culinary business actors and MSMEs need to prioritize social influence-based marketing strategies, such as collaboration with influencers, strengthening digital communities, and utilizing user-generated content. compared to just increasing the intensity of promotions on social media. In addition, the creation of a unique, exclusive, and easy-to-share consumption experience online can increase consumer FoMO, driving purchasing decisions more effectively.

This study has several limitations, including the coverage of respondents that are only limited to Generation Z in Jayapura City, the use of variables that do not fully reflect the complexity of digital consumer behavior, and a cross-sectional approach that is not yet able to

describe changes in consumer behavior in the long term. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the research area, use longitudinal design, and add other variables such as trust, brand image, perceived value, consumer engagement, and impulsive buying in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of viral food buying behavior in the digital era.

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