

THE EFFECT OF WORD-OF-MOUTH (WOM) AND ATMOSPHERE ON COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AT RUMAH MAKAN RASA LELUHUR, MEDAN CITY

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Abstract

The culinary industry in Medan City is growing rapidly, with over 2,002 restaurants operating as of 2025, creating intense competition. Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur, a traditional restaurant in Medan, faces challenges in maintaining its competitive advantage amid increasing rivalry. This study aims to analyze the effect of Word of Mouth (WOM) and store atmosphere on the competitive advantage of Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur in Medan City, both partially and simultaneously. This research employed a quantitative associative approach. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 100 respondents selected using incidental sampling. The research variables include Word of Mouth (X_1), Store Atmosphere (X_2), and Competitive Advantage (Y). Data analysis was conducted using multiple linear regression, classical assumption tests, t-test, F-test, and coefficient of determination (R^2). The results show that Word of Mouth has a positive and significant partial effect on competitive advantage ($t = 4.695 > t\text{-table} = 1.661$; sig. = 0.001) with a partial contribution of 15.5%. Store Atmosphere also has a positive and significant partial effect ($t = 4.917 > t\text{-table} = 1.661$; sig. = 0.001) with a partial contribution of 17.1%. Simultaneously, both variables significantly influence competitive advantage ($F = 23.487 > F\text{-table} = 3.09$; sig. < 0.001), explaining 32.6% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.326$). These findings suggest that improving positive word of mouth communication and enhancing the physical store atmosphere are key strategies for strengthening the competitive position of Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur.

Keywords: Word of Mouth, Store Atmosphere, Competitive Advantage, Restaurant, Medan

INTRODUCTION

The culinary industry in Indonesia is not merely a lifestyle trend but an important part of the national economy. According to the 2024 Food and Beverage Services Activity Survey by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), there were around 4.85 million culinary business units in 2023 — an increase of 21.13% compared to 2016 — with sales value approaching Rp998.37 trillion and absorbing millions of workers. This growth is driven by the expanding middle class, the shift in consumption patterns toward dining outside the home, and innovation in technology-based delivery services.

In Medan City, competition among culinary businesses is increasingly intense. The latest data records around 2,002 restaurants/eateries operating as of October 2025, with growth of 2.03% compared to the previous year and an average business age of around 4 years — reflecting the high dynamics of businesses entering and exiting the market. Competition occurs not only in food quality and price, but also in service, business concept, and digital marketing through platforms such as GoFood/GrabFood as well as social media.

Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur is one of the culinary businesses in Medan City, located on Jalan Dr. FL. Tobing, Simpang Seikera No. 1A. This restaurant is known for prioritizing local flavor and traditional culinary heritage as its main selling points, targeting consumers who seek authentic taste. In running its business, Rasa Leluhur combines traditional and digital marketing, including through its Instagram account and culinary review platforms, and makes use of cultural storytelling as a differentiator amid the dominance of modern restaurants and large franchises.

Competitive advantage is a condition in which a company has the capability or strategic position that allows it to generate higher value than its competitors on a sustainable basis — whether through cost efficiency, product/service differentiation, innovation, or operational excellence that is difficult to imitate (Jaeger & Höhler, 2021).

A preliminary survey of the competitive advantage of Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur revealed a number of challenges that need attention (data processed by the researcher, 2026). Of 25 respondents, most felt that the prices offered were more expensive than similar competitors, with 15 respondents (60%) answering "yes" and 10 respondents (40%) answering "no." Regarding menu variety, 13 respondents (52%) felt the menu choices were still lacking in variety, while 12 respondents (48%) considered them sufficient. In terms of location, only 9 respondents (36%) considered the location difficult to reach, while the majority (64%) felt the location was quite strategic. The most prominent complaint concerned service speed, where 18 respondents (72%) stated that service was still often slow. In addition, 14 respondents (56%) felt that current promotions were not yet attractive enough to draw consumer interest. This data shows that the main weaknesses of Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur lie in service speed, pricing, and promotional effectiveness — three aspects that could weaken its competitive advantage if not addressed promptly.

One factor that influences the competitiveness of Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur is word of mouth (WoM). Word of Mouth is the oral spread of information from one person to another regarding a product or service. WoM is considered effective because recommendations from trusted people — such as family, friends, or other consumer reviews — are more convincing than conventional advertising, especially in an era of increasingly critical consumers (Michael Gho et al., 2023).

Based on reviews collected from Google Review (2026), the picture of word of mouth toward Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur shows varied sentiment across different aspects. In terms of service, consumers acknowledge the restaurant's great potential, but want improvements in staff friendliness and menu-customization flexibility, as well as a faster serving pace so that the dining experience feels more memorable. In terms of food quality, its legendary flavor is the main strength that customers always remember, although consistency of taste and rice quality still need attention; one signature menu item that received praise is the Traditional Khek Noodles, which is considered to excel with its varied menu options. Regarding price, customers feel the concept offered is already very premium, but hope for larger portions and sharper flavor to match the price paid. In terms of facilities, the restaurant atmosphere is considered comfortable for relaxing, but the cleanliness of the dining area — particularly regarding insect disturbances — needs more attention. Meanwhile, in terms of location, the food is considered delicious and satisfactory, but the layout and comfort of the dining area could still be improved to make it a more ideal culinary destination.

These reviews reflect that Word of Mouth (WoM) toward Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur tends to be positive in terms of taste and brand identity. However, a number of weaknesses are still visible in the dimensions of service quality and physical evidence (environmental comfort). Although the main product — its authentic flavor — has built loyalty, there is still a satisfaction gap triggered by staff friendliness, serving speed, and facility cleanliness. For customers' perceived value to remain aligned with the price paid, there needs to be synchronization between flavor consistency and improved service standards.

Another factor that plays an important role in competitive advantage is business atmosphere. Atmosphere does not only cover the physical layout of the store, but also elements such as air conditioning, spatial arrangement, paint color, carpet type, and shelf shape — which together determine the image and impression of luxury of a business venue (Sutisna & Susan, 2022).

Based on a survey of 30 respondents who have visited Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur, the most frequent atmosphere-related complaints include: (1) the room feels noisy due to visitor and kitchen sounds; (2) air circulation is not optimal during busy hours, making the room feel stuffy; (3) tables arranged too closely restrict movement space; and (4) lighting is not evenly distributed across the entire area. In general, the restaurant's atmosphere still reflects a traditional concept, but noise, temperature, and seating density are real complaints that need to be addressed.

From a literature review perspective, word of mouth (WOM) has been shown to play a strategic role in shaping competitive advantage, although its influence is contextual. Ningsih & Prayoga (2025) showed that WOM has a positive and significant effect on the competitive advantage of cafés. Jaeger & Höhler (2021) added that WOM data on social media reflects an asymmetric competition pattern, in which consumers compare businesses based on price, quality, and product diversity. Conversely, Nugroho et al. (2023) found that electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) does not always have a significant effect, depending on market characteristics and information credibility. Thus, WOM can drive competitive advantage if it is able to build trust and a consistent positive perception.

Meanwhile, business atmosphere has consistently been shown to contribute significantly to competitive advantage. Nugroho et al. (2023) and Mohammad Alif Fazrin et

al. (2024) showed that store atmosphere has a positive effect because it creates a shopping experience that is comfortable and different from competitors. Nash et al. (2025) confirmed that atmosphere — as part of gastronomic value and sense of place — can strengthen restaurant competitiveness through sensory experience and cultural identity. Usiña-B & Celi-Pinza (2024) also explained that physical atmosphere triggers hedonic and utilitarian value that increases consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, atmosphere is a source of sustainable competitive advantage because it is difficult to imitate.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Keunggulan Bersaing (Kompetitif)

Competitive advantage is a company's ability to appear superior to its competitors through the optimal management of its characteristics and resources (Hardiyono et al., 2023). This ability also reflects a company's capacity to create greater value for customers compared with others (Mumu et al., 2025), as well as the process of identifying the factors that make a company superior in the products or services it offers (Fajri, 2024). In the context of MSMEs, competitive advantage is a set of characteristics that distinguishes a business from its competitors and gives it a unique and superior position in the market (Muharam, 2025), making it an essential requirement for a company's long-term success and survival (Kuncoro, 2020).

Based on these various definitions, competitive advantage is essentially a company's ability to manage resources and capabilities optimally so that it can offer something unique, perform activities better, or deliver products and services that are not easily imitated by competitors. This advantage provides real benefits for the company, including strengthening the internal team, building reputation and financial stability, improving work-process efficiency, and expanding the company's opportunities across other markets so that it becomes more advanced and superior to its competitors (Hardiyono et al., 2023).

Competitive advantage does not appear automatically but is influenced by several interrelated factors (Rusdiana et al., 2025). The first factor is location advantage, namely a company's ability to choose a location that is easily accessible and has good access to various sectors. The second factor is value advantage, which includes the quality of human resources, product or service superiority, adequate infrastructure, and the ability to establish mutually beneficial partnerships. The third factor is meeting community needs, namely a company's ability to meet consumer expectations, including providing assurance of the benefits to be obtained from its products or services.

Competitive advantage is formed from three main elements that serve as the company's strategic foundation (Rangkuti, 2019). The first element is competitive advantage potential, namely the basic capability derived from resources, expertise, technology, or innovation that has the potential to provide greater value than competitors. The second element is competitive advantage position, which describes how strong a company's position is in the market, for example in terms of price, quality, brand, or market share. The third element is performance outcomes, namely tangible results such as increased profit, customer loyalty, efficiency, and company growth.

To measure competitive advantage, there are three main indicators that can be used (Arianty, 2023). The first indicator is product uniqueness, namely the distinguishing characteristics that set a product apart from competitors so that it is more easily recognized

and attracts consumer interest. The second indicator is product quality, namely a product's ability to provide benefits and performance that meet or exceed consumer expectations, thereby increasing satisfaction and loyalty. The third indicator is competitive pricing, namely a price that matches the value and quality of the product and is able to compete in the market without reducing the company's profit.

Word of Mouth

Word of mouth is a form of promotion in which information about a product or company is conveyed or spread from one consumer to another (Bancin, 2021). Consciously or not, we often experience this strategy when receiving recommendations from family, relatives, or close friends (Hertita, 2023). Furthermore, word of mouth is one of the marketing strategies based on providing information about a product or service from a consumer to other people — such as friends, neighbors, and family — in a non-commercial manner (A. N. N. Putri et al., 2025).

Word of Mouth Communication refers to the process of sharing recommendations for a product or service after it has been consumed, with the aim of providing information that is personal in nature (Situmorang & Chelsya; Tiffany, 2025). Word of mouth includes both positive and negative statements made by customers and made available to many people via the internet (Gunawan et al., 2022), and also refers to the activity of spreading information orally between individuals regarding the experience of purchasing or using a product (Tusri et al., 2025).

Based on these various views, it can be concluded that word of mouth is a form of communication and promotion that occurs naturally through the conveying of information, experience, and recommendations from one consumer to another — either directly or via the internet — and is non-commercial and personal in nature. Word of mouth plays an important role in marketing strategy because it is able to influence consumer perceptions, trust, and decisions through social relationships such as family, friends, and the surrounding environment.

In the context of MSMEs, word of mouth has a number of strategic benefits (Mayasari et al., 2023). First, WoM does not require large advertising costs because the information is conveyed independently and honestly by consumers. Second, WoM provides prospective buyers with strong answers through testimonials and direct experience. Third, WoM can function as an informal advertising medium because information about the product is spread voluntarily without any promotional cost to the company.

There are several factors that influence word of mouth (Bancin, 2021), namely: (1) involvement — WoM occurs when someone who is engaged with a product communicates their experience to others; (2) knowledge possessed — knowledge of a product becomes a topic of conversation that demonstrates a certain expertise; (3) desire possessed — the urge to help others avoid making the wrong decision; (4) uncertainty reduction — information from friends or family is considered more trustworthy; and (5) critical ability — critical consumers will provide in-depth analysis, from both positive and negative angles.

According to N. T. Putri (2018), word of mouth consists of three main dimensions: (1) positive stories, namely the consumer's desire to tell others positive things about a product; (2) recommendations, namely the consumer's desire to recommend a quality product to people who need the information; and (3) invitations, namely the consumer's willingness to invite others to use a product they have consumed.

The indicators of word of mouth according to Tusri et al. (2025) cover three aspects, namely: (1) talking — the consumer's willingness to talk about positive aspects of service quality and products to others; (2) recommendation — recommending the company's products and services to friends and family; and (3) encouragement — encouraging friends or acquaintances to make a purchase by persuading or inviting family members.

Atmosfer

Store atmosphere is the overall ambience deliberately created through the management of the physical and non-physical environment to shape a pleasant shopping experience for consumers. Atmosphere includes the ambience that a business wants to build, such as relaxed and comfortable, elegant and luxurious, or energetic and dynamic (Nasution et al., 2024). Store atmosphere is defined as a stimulus that affects consumers' cognitive and emotional states, thereby encouraging behavioral responses, with indicators including the store's exterior appearance, interior appearance, layout, decoration, and the human element within it (Mamuaya, 2021). A store's physical environment, including all its facilities, infrastructure, and staff, helps shape an ambience that can make visitors feel comfortable or otherwise (Arianty, 2023). A deliberately designed atmosphere is able to produce a specific emotional effect that encourages consumers to make a purchase (Rosadi et al., 2023), so that creating a store ambience that is unique and suited to the target market becomes a key factor in driving customers to buy (Reicha Artha Maudia et al., 2025).

In building an effective atmosphere, there are several factors that need attention, namely employee characteristics such as neat appearance and service orientation, the type and density of merchandise along with how it is displayed, and the type of fixtures, which must be consistent with the overall ambience one wants to create (A. N. N. Putri et al., 2025). Store atmosphere can be measured through four main indicators according to Sutisna & Susan (2022), namely: (1) exterior, which covers the store's physical outward appearance such as signage, façade, parking area, and lighting that shape consumers' first impression; (2) general interior, covering the in-store ambience such as scent, lighting, temperature, music, and cleanliness that determine customer comfort; (3) store layout, namely the arrangement of space and movement paths, including the position of shelves, aisles, and cashiers, that makes it easier for customers to navigate; and (4) interior display, namely the way products are displayed through showcases, special shelves, signage, or themed decoration that can increase customers' purchase interest.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that store atmosphere is a strategic element designed comprehensively to influence consumer perception, emotion, and behavior. Proper atmosphere management, from the exterior appearance to the in-store ambience, is an important factor in creating appeal and driving consumer purchasing decisions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a quantitative associative approach, namely research that analyzes the relationships between variables based on numerical data from questionnaires distributed to respondents at Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur. The data sources consist of primary data obtained directly from respondents, as well as secondary data sourced from literature, books, and scientific journals (Sugiyono, 2019).

The study population consists of all customers of Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur in Medan City, the number of which is unknown. According to Sugiyono (2019), a population is a collection of elements with certain characteristics that form the basis for generalizing research results. The sample size was determined based on the rule of a minimum of 5–10 times the number of indicators (Hair et al., 2019), so that with 10 indicators, 100 respondents were set as the sample. Sampling was carried out using a nonprobability sampling technique, specifically incidental sampling, in which anyone who happens to meet the researcher can be used as a respondent.

Data collection was carried out through a questionnaire filled in voluntarily by respondents and measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Before being used, the instrument's validity and reliability were tested. The validity test aims to ensure the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure, with an item considered valid if $r\text{-calculated} > r\text{-table}$ (Sugiyono, 2019). The reliability test uses Cronbach's Alpha coefficient: a value < 0.6 is considered poor; $0.6\text{--}0.79$ is acceptable; and ≥ 0.8 is considered good (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data analysis was carried out quantitatively through several stages. First, the classical assumption test to ensure the model is free from problems of normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity (Ghozali, 2018). Second, multiple linear regression analysis using the equation $Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + e$, to measure the effect of word of mouth (X_1) and store atmosphere (X_2) on competitive advantage (Y) (Ghozali, 2018). Third, hypothesis testing, which includes the t-test (partial) and F-test (simultaneous) at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ (Sugiyono, 2018). Finally, the coefficient of determination (R^2) test to measure how well the independent variables explain the variation in the dependent variable, where an R^2 value closer to 1 indicates a stronger effect (Muin, 2023; Sugiyono, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before hypothesis testing was carried out, all research instruments were first tested for validity and reliability. The validity test results show that all items in the three variables (Word of Mouth, Store Atmosphere, and Competitive Advantage) produced corrected item-total correlation values above the $r\text{-table}$ value (0.361), so all items were declared valid. A summary of the validity test results is presented in the table below.

Table 1.
Validity Test Recapitulation

Variable	r-calculated (Min – Max)	r-table	Description
Word of Mouth (X_1)	0,783 – 0,983	0,3610	All items valid
Store Atmosphere (X_2)	0,763 – 0,895	0,3610	All items valid
Competitive Advantage (Y)	0,778 – 0,929	0,3610	All items valid

Source: Researcher's data processing

The reliability test results using Cronbach's Alpha show that all variables obtained values above 0.8, and are therefore classified as having good reliability.

Table 2.
Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach Alpha	Item	Description
Word of Mouth (X_1)	0,968	9	Good reliability
Store Atmosphere (X_2)	0,958	12	Good reliability
Competitive Advantage (Y)	0,960	9	Good reliability

Source: Researcher's data processing

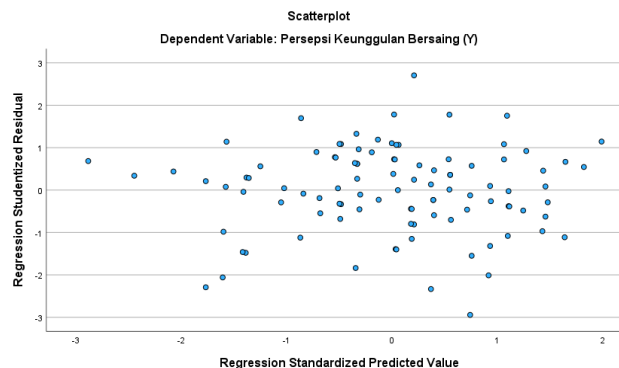
The classical assumption test was carried out to ensure the regression model is free from assumption violations. The normality test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov produced an Asymp. Sig. value of 0.200 (> 0.05), reinforced by a bell-shaped histogram and points on the normal probability plot located around the diagonal line, so the data is declared normally distributed. The multicollinearity test showed Tolerance and VIF values of 1.000 each for both independent variables, meaning no multicollinearity occurs. The heteroscedasticity test via scatterplot showed points scattered without a pattern, so the assumption of homoscedasticity is met.

Table 3.
Classical Assumption Test Recapitulation

Test	Statistic / Value	Conclusion
Normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)	Asymp. Sig. = 0,200 ($> 0,05$)	Data is normal
Multicollinearity – X_1	VIF = 1,000 ; Tolerance = 1,000	No multicollinearity occurs
Multicollinearity – X_2	VIF = 1,000 ; Tolerance = 1,000	No multicollinearity occurs

Source: Researcher's data processing

Figure 1.
Heteroscedasticity Scatterplot



Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of Word of Mouth (X_1) and Store Atmosphere (X_2) on Competitive Advantage (Y). The resulting regression equation is:

$$Y = 7.157 + 0.359X_1 + 0.345X_2$$

The constant of 7.157 indicates the value of Competitive Advantage when both variables equal zero. The coefficient of X_1 of 0.359 and X_2 of 0.345 indicate a positive relationship, meaning that any increase in each variable will increase competitive advantage.

Table 4.
Multiple Linear Regression Test

Model	B (Unstandardized)	Beta (Standardized)
(Constant)	7,157	—
Word of Mouth (X_1)	0,359	0,391
Store Atmosphere (X_2)	0,345	0,410

Source: Researcher's data processing

Hypothesis testing was carried out partially (t-test) and simultaneously (F-test). All test results are presented in the table below.

Table 5.
Results of the t-test and F-test

Variable / Test	t / F calculated	t / F table	Sig.	Note
Word of Mouth (X_1) – t-test	4,695	1,661	0,001	H ₁ accepted
Store Atmosphere (X_2) – t-test	4,917	1,661	0,001	H ₂ accepted
X_1 & X_2 Simultaneous – F-test	23,487	3,09	< 0,001	H ₃ accepted

Source: Researcher's data processing

The R Square value of 0.326 indicates that Word of Mouth and Store Atmosphere together explain 32.6% of the variation in Competitive Advantage, while the remaining 67.4% is influenced by other variables outside the model.

Table 6.
Coefficient of Determination

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
0.571	0.326	0.312	2.860

Source: Researcher's data processing

Table 7.
Partial and Simultaneous Contribution

Variable	Beta	r	Contribution
Word of Mouth (X_1)	0,391	0,398	15.5%
Store Atmosphere (X_2)	0,410	0,416	17.1%
Simultaneous	—	—	32.6%

Source: Researcher's data processing

Based on the t-test results, Word of Mouth has a positive and significant effect on the Competitive Advantage of Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur (t-calculated 4.695 > t-table 1.661; sig. 0.001), with a partial contribution of 15.5%. This is in line with Ningsih & Prayoga (2025), who confirmed that recommendations among consumers can strengthen perceived value and business differentiation. The more positive the word of mouth communication, the

higher the trust of prospective consumers, thereby increasing the restaurant's competitiveness.

Store Atmosphere is also shown to have a positive and significant effect (t -calculated $4.917 > t$ -table 1.661 ; sig. 0.001), with a partial contribution of 17.1% . This finding is consistent with Nugroho et al. (2023) and Nash et al. (2025), who stated that a comfortable and aesthetic physical ambience creates a unique experience that is difficult for competitors to imitate, thereby becoming a source of sustainable competitive advantage.

Simultaneously, both variables have a significant effect (F -calculated $23.487 > F$ -table 3.09 ; sig. < 0.05), indicating that the combination of positive consumer recommendations and an attractive store atmosphere together increases the competitive advantage of Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur in Medan City.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research conducted by the researcher, the following are the conclusions drawn in this study:

1. The t -test results show that word of mouth has a positive and significant effect on the competitive advantage of Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur, Medan City.
2. The t -test results show that store atmosphere has a positive and significant effect on the competitive advantage of Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur, Medan City.
3. The F -test results show that word of mouth and store atmosphere have a positive and significant effect on the competitive advantage of Rumah Makan Rasa Leluhur, Medan City.

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