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The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Attitude toward Local Food and Behavioral Intention: A Study on Foreign Tourists Visiting Bali

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of social media has transformed how people interact and communicate. This study examines the role of social media influencers in shaping foreign tourists' attitudes toward local food and their behavioral intention, with the mediating role of foreign tourists' attitudes towards local food. Self-administered questionnaire surveys with 201 international tourists visiting Bali were collected between July and August 2023. The PLS-SEM using SmartPLS 4.0 was utilized to examine the proposed causal relationships among social media influencers, attitudes toward local food, and behavioral intention. The results reveal a positive and significant influence of social media influencers and attitudes toward local food on the behavioral intentions of foreign visitors. However, social media influencers were found to be insignificant in forming tourists' attitudes. Attitudes toward local food did not mediate the relationship between social media influencers and behavioral intentions. This study provides insights for destination marketing efforts, suggesting that optimizing the use of social media influencers can attract more visitors and promote destinations effectively.

KEYWORDS

Social media influencer
Attitude towards food
Behavioral intention
Foreign tourists

INTRODUCTION

Food tourism has been growing over recent decades (Ellis et al, 2018) and plays an important role in shaping the overall tourists' experiences (Almeida & Garrod, 2017). It becomes an essential element of tourism attraction when visiting a destination (Tsai & Wang, 2017) and provides opportunities for visitors to explore various kinds of food in a destination (Wijaya et al., 2017) and to form visitors' decision-making behaviors (Prayag et al., 2020). Thus, it is fundamental to understand travelers' attitudes and behaviors when they consume food at a particular destination (Cheng & Huang, 2015).

Social media is deemed to be the fastest-growing communication technology including in tourism marketing (Kang & Schuett, 2013). The popularity of social media has driven the emergence of social media influencers (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020) and formed tourist attitudes (Lim et al., 2017). Social media influencers are individuals who regularly interact and have many followers on social media (Zorlu

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& Candan, 2023). Social media influencers will share their experiences and stories through photos, captions, and vlogs that are interesting for the public (Abdullah et al., 2022). Social media influencers with popularity, many followers, and interesting content can become keys in creating trends, influencing interest, and shaping the mindset of tourists in decision-making (Jin et al., 2019).

The study by Handayani et al. (2021) highlighted that social media can contribute to Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Social media offers the opportunity to watch the activities and experiences of others which can trigger anxiety or fear of missing out on interesting or important experiences. Thus, individuals with a high level of FOMO tend to do “foodstagramming”, which is uploading food photos to social media. This activity is carried out with the motivation to engage in social activities and share food experiences. By sharing food photos on social media, it is expected that someone will get recognition and validation from others for their culinary experiences. Thus, social media influencers have played an important role when travelers choose and determine their culinary tourism destination and can be employed as an effective marketing tool to promote the destination (Soltani et al., 2021).

Although studies on food tourism and social media have been conducted, only few have focused on the role of social media influencers relating to foreign tourists' attitudes towards local food and their behavioral intention. Even though social media influencers are considered to be essential in shaping travelers' behavior, it has not received sufficient academic attention (Canovi & Pucciarelli, 2019). Thus, it is expected that investigating the determinants underlying travelers' attitudes and behavioral intention would help destination marketers and tourism organizations create a better understanding of how to attract international visitors to come and return to a destination. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effect of social media influencers on attitudes toward local food and behavioral intention from foreign tourists' perspective. The findings should contribute to existing studies relating to food tourism, which examine the relationships among social media influencers, attitudes toward local food, and behavioral intention. Therefore, it will enrich the body of knowledge relating to food tourism in overseas tourist destinations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media influencer

Social media is a platform where someone can share experiences such as photos and videos which can influence other people's perceptions and can serve as an effective promotional tool when real-time users share travel experiences (Osman et al., 2021). The important factor for the success of social media in influencing tourists' behavioral intention is the presence of social media influencers. These influencers can shape consumer preferences, purchasing decisions, and brand perceptions through various strategies such as product introductions, providing reviews, carrying out promotions, and utilizing the social influence they have through social media platforms (Arora, Bansal, Kandpal, Aswani, & Dwivedi, 2019).

Information shared by social media users, including reviews, photos, and culinary recommendations, can influence tourists' perceptions about the uniqueness and quality of culinary delights in that destination. According to Nugraha et al. (2018), several factors generally contribute to the influence of social media influencers, namely celebrity appeal, brand suitability, and credibility. Factors such as attention-grabbing content, the influencer's trustworthiness and authority, social interactions with food content, the reputation and branding of the restaurant or food, and alignment with individual values and identity are crucial for social media influencers in shaping public interest (Soltani et al., 2021). Consequently, the influence of social media can impact tourists' behavioral

intention, such as the desire to try the food, visit restaurants that are popular on social media, or share food experiences on these platforms.

Attitudes towards food and behavioral intention

Attitudes toward food refer to the way individuals perceive and feel about food, as well as how perceptions are influenced by consumption values (Hussain et al., 2022). The attitudes toward food are the evaluations of the extent to which tourists like or dislike the food (Asmoro & Sondakh, 2021). Thus, it influences purchasing decisions and usage of certain brands. Choe and Kim (2018) explained attitudes toward food as overall evaluations, preferences, emotional responses, and experiences when enjoying local culinary delights in a destination. Attitudes toward food involve several important aspects such as perceptions of quality, taste, authenticity, uniqueness, and variety of food which are influenced by experience and information received (Soltani et al., 2021). Apart from that, there are aspects of preference, regarding the type of food, presentation method, and culinary style, which are influenced by culture and individual preferences. In addition, willingness to explore and consume new foods plays a significant role in reflecting tourists' desires. The involvement element also shows the extent to which tourists are involved in searching for, tasting, and learning about food through activities such as visiting markets or culinary tours (Soltani et al., 2021).

Behavioral intention is a person's total cognitive, affective and behavioral attitude towards the adoption, purchase, and use of a particular product, or service (Dadwal et al., 2020). In the tourism field, behavioral intention can be defined as the tourists' assessment to revisit a tourist destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Satisfaction with the service received is an important consideration for tourists when deciding to turn to a certain place. Meanwhile, tourists' appreciation for local food will emerge if there is a positive image and strong identity of a tourist attraction (Thio et al., 2022). Therefore, positive encounters and impressions will lead to a willingness to try local food and return to the destination. Apart from the need for positive experience and perception, information/recommendations from someone can also increase someone's desire to consume local food. According to Soltani et al. (2021), information or recommendations obtained from external parties such as social media influencers, can raise tourists' interest and desire to try local food. This is aligned with the study from Mabkhot, Isa, and Mabkhot (2022) that the existence of social media influencers plays an important role in generating someone's behavioral intention.

In this study, we adopted social learning theory (SLT) to predict tourists' behavioral intention in the context of food tourism, examining the influence of social media influencers in forming tourists' attitudes toward local food and behaviors. Using SLT, the importance of social media influencers is highlighted to drive food tourists' decision-making and behaviors as a way to engage with audiences through social media (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020). Behavior is learned by observing the surrounding environment. Individuals frequently exhibit similar behaviors to others to achieve desirable results (Bandura, 1977). Bandura emphasizes the importance of observing, imitating, and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Consumers' attitudes and behaviors are shaped and strengthened by their social circle, including friends. When individuals witness favorable outcomes resulting from the behaviors of their friends and family, they are inclined to adopt similar behaviors (Webb & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2014) and increase their self-esteem (Stets & Burke, 2000). The involvement of social media influencers (SMIs) in destination marketing efforts has the potential to influence the attitudes, behaviors, and intentions of food tourists (Lim et al., 2017) as well as the destination's food image (Xu & Pratt, 2018).

Local food

Local food can be viewed as a significant characteristic of a destination that symbolizes the local culture (Choe & Kim, 2019) to create unforgettable tourism experiences (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2017). A positive experience of trying local food in a tourist destination is likely to influence tourists' future intentions, such as returning to the country or making positive recommendations about the local food to others (Kim, Choe & Kim, 2022). Authentic and intriguing local cuisine has the power to sway a tourist's decision when selecting their holiday destination (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010).

In the context of food tourism, consuming local food while traveling abroad is a way to immerse oneself in the culture of the destination country (Kim et al., 2013). The distinctiveness of local food in a particular destination is especially intriguing, considering the unique ingredients and culinary techniques, which potentially influence a tourist's decision to visit or revisit the destination (Ting et al., 2019). As highlighted by Mak et al., (2012), food has the ability to elevate a destination's reputation as it embodies and communicates personal, national, regional, and local identities.

Bali culinary tourism

Bali is known as the Island of the Gods which is one of the popular holiday destinations for both local and foreign tourists. The name Island of the Gods emerged because of its natural beauty and diverse cultures that complement each other (Soeprapto & Yohana, 2021). With unique customs and culture, the way of life of the Balinese people originates from the teachings of the Hindu religion which is mostly adhered to by the residents of the island of Bali (Suriani & Ariani, 2020). In addition to its natural beauty and unique culture, culinary tourism in Bali is also one of the considerations for tourists visiting Bali. Bali culinary tourism can contribute significantly to the development of national culinary delights which can provide enjoyment to tourists who consume culinary tourism while spending time on holiday on the island of Bali (Nadra et al., 2022).

The existence of various types of food, types of cooking ingredients, and the unique flavors found in Balinese culinary delights provide a sense of satisfaction and create special memories of culinary tourism in Bali (Sukerti & Marsiti, 2020). Various local specialties, such as snacks of *jaje*, and some traditionally prepared foods such as *lawar*, *babi guling*, *ayam betutu*, *pepes*, and *satay* are regarded as the gastronomy of Bali (Nadra et al., 2022). The authenticity and uniqueness of traditional Balinese food are very difficult to find in other places because of the secret of the island's cuisine, along with the preparation of the food itself which is steeped in religious ritual and devout Balinese-Hindu beliefs (Kruger, 2014). As a result, Balinese cuisine can become a special attraction for tourists because Balinese cuisine has the characteristics of a region and becomes a tourist attraction (Nadra et al., 2022).

Social media influencer and behavioral intention

Gupta and Mahajan (2019) who examined the role of micro-influencers on Instagram in influencing behavioral intention, showed that the credibility of the influencers played an important factor in making the content viral (in this case, viral defined as the act of liking, commenting and also disseminating content from the influencer) which can increase intention to buy. Research conducted by Lim et al. (2017) also showed that the presence of social media influencers had a positive impact on a person's behavioral intention. People tend to consider social media influencers as role models. The existence of high social interaction between social media influencers and their followers will create social pressure on their followers to stay up to date with existing trends (Gunawan & Huarng, 2015). Chatzigeorgiou's study (2017) showed that there was a positive relationship between social media influencers and a person's behavioral intention when returning to a place. Further, Till and

Busler (2000) confirmed prior research that the presence of trusted sources of information from social media influencers had a significant positive relationship with a person's behavioral intention. Based on the previous studies, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Social media influencer positively affects tourists' behavioral intention.

1
Social media influencers and attitude towards local food

There is a relationship between social media influencers and attitudes towards local food (Soltani et al., 2021). Through social media platforms, influencers share information, reviews, recommendations, and interesting visual content about local food with their followers. This can shape attitudes and influence individual perceptions of local food. Information obtained from trusted sources (such as information from social media influencers) can influence a person's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes (Wang, Kao & Ngamsiriudom, 2017). When popular influencers recommend or show appreciation for local food, this can increase an individual's positive attitude and broaden a person's understanding of local food (Goldsmith, Lafferty & Newell, 2000). Therefore, social media influencers have an important role in shaping individual attitudes toward local food through influence on social media. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

3
H2: Social media influencer positively affects tourists' attitudes towards local food.

Attitude toward local food and behavioral intention

Soltani et al. (2021) in their research found that there is a significant relationship between attitudes toward local food and behavioral intention. According to Choe and Kim (2018), a positive attitude toward a particular food lead to the intention to buy that food and recommend it to others. A customer's feeling of satisfaction and an unforgettable feeling toward food will direct a person's intention to have a return visit or recommend to others to try the food (Paramita, Chairy & Syahrivar, 2021). Several studies showed that local food was one of the reasons for an individual to revisit a destination. Research conducted by Chi, Chua, Othman, and Karim (2013) stated that people who came to Malaysia and felt satisfied with the experience of local food (uniqueness of taste) would lead to customer satisfaction, which would indirectly influence a person's behavioral intention including the decision to try again. Furthermore, research conducted by Jung, Ineson, Kim, and Yap (2015) also stated that a person's satisfaction with local food was positively related to a person's behavioral intention to make a return visit. Meanwhile, Crofts, Pan, and Raschid (2008) showed that a person's positive perception of satisfaction from local food would evoke unforgettable memories which in turn increase the intention to revisit. Hence, the proposed hypotheses are as follows:

H3: **4** attitude toward local food positively affects tourists' behavioral intention.

H4: Attitude toward local food mediates the effect of social media influencer and tourists' behavioral intention

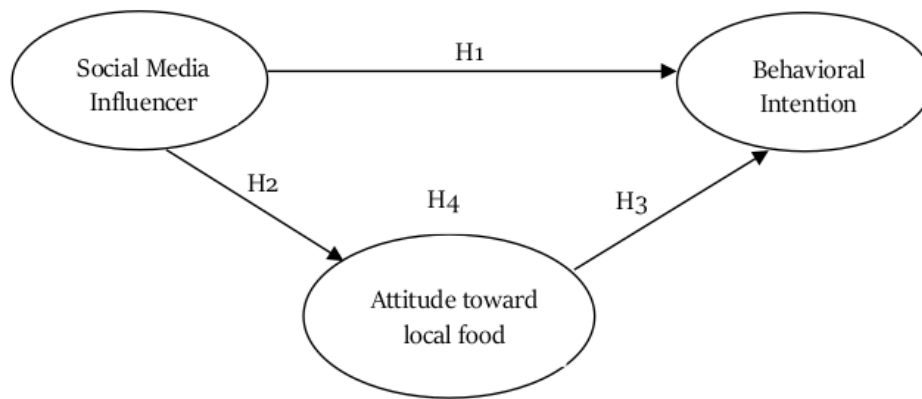


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

The indicators employed to measure ¹ social media influencers, attitudes toward local food, and behavioral intention were developed from prior studies and modified to fit the context of this study. To measure social media influencer, constructs were adapted from Soltani et al. (2021) to examine foreign tourists' perception of social media influencers in influencing their dining decisions (4 items). For attitude toward food, the items were adapted from Soltani et al. (2021) and Hussain et al. (2022) to investigate foreign tourists' feelings and positive sentiments when consuming food in Bali. Behavioral intention items were derived from Choe and Kim (2018), Soltani et al. (2021), and Thio et al. (2022) to evaluate foreign tourists' willingness to share and recommend their culinary experiences in Bali to family/relatives, and friends as well as to examine their ⁹ desire to return to Bali (6 items). Further, all indicators were measured to indicate the respondents' level of agreement and disagreement using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

A pilot study with a total of 30 undergraduate students majoring in Hotel Management was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Then, the questionnaire was modified and distributed onsite to foreign tourists who visited Bali between July and August 2023 with the assistance of two research assistants. Utilizing a quantitative approach, a total of 201 questionnaires were collected from some places in Bali such as restaurants, cafes, malls, airports, rail stations, hotels, and some tourist spots.

The collected data were then analyzed using the ¹⁰ Partial Least Square (PLS) method. To test the proposed hypotheses, SmartPLS 4.0, specialized software for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (¹¹ PLS-SEM), was utilized to enable a thorough examination of proposed causal relationships among social media influencers, attitudes toward local food, and behavioral intention. The PLS-SEM method was suitable as it predicts the parameters by optimizing the explained variance of the indicators and the assumption of normal sampling distribution is not mandatory (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019). Significance testing using a 5000-subsample method was employed in the process of bootstrapping to support or reject the hypotheses. The PLS-SEM was employed as it has been popularly applied in many tourism and hospitality-related studies (Müller et al., 2018) as well as in the field of social science (Henseler, 2017).

RESULTS

2 Respondents' profile

The respondents of this study were foreign tourists who had traveled to Bali. The majority of respondents were female (62.2%) with the ages between 24 and 30 (34.8%), while 29.4% were between the ages of 31 and 40. Most of the respondents were entrepreneurs/business owners (46.3%), and the others were students (20.4%), professionals (18.4%), and retired/unemployed (11%). European tourists made up 37.8% of the sample, followed by Asians (26.9%), Oceanians (25.4%), and Americans (7.5%). The sample group was categorized as being educated, noting that 72.1% of the respondents had an undergraduate (35.8%) and post-graduate degree (36.3%).

2 Measurement Model

The convergent validity using factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and Cronbach's alpha were employed to assess the reliability and validity of the construct (Hair et al, 2017). In Table 1, it can be seen that the factor loading of all indicators is over 0.5 (ranging between 0.529 to 0.910). The AVE values range from 0.510 to 0.712 and composite reliability is from 0.82 to 0.953. The Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.799 to 0.875. These findings confirmed the convergence validity and internal consistency reliability of each construct in the respective cut-off values of AVE (>0.50), CR (> 0.70), and Cronbach's alpha (>0.70) (Hair et al., 2017) indicating measurement fit under evaluation for each construct. The results of internal reliability and convergent validity are presented in Table 1 and Figure 2.

Table 1. Convergent Validity Measure

Measurement item	Loading	AVE	Composite reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Social Media Influencer (SMI)				
SMI1. A social media influencer introduced me to local culinary in Bali.	.895			
SMI2. I was encouraged to eat Balinese food by watching photos and videos about Balinese cuisine posted by social media influencers.	.910			
SMI3. I believe in social media influencers who have experience of eating local culinary in Bali.	.879	.712	.953	.875
SMI4. Social Media Influencers who travel to Bali are the most useful source of information about local culinary in Bali.	.667			
Attitude Toward Local Food (ATLF)				
ATF1. I like the food in Indonesia.	.853			
ATF2. The food can satisfy my needs.	.714	.625	.814	.799
ATF3. The food is enjoyable.	.808			
ATF4. The food is appetizing.	.781			
Behavioral Intention (BI)				
BI1. I will say positive things about the local culinary to others.	.788			
BI2. I will recommend the local culinary to family/relatives/friends.	.803	.510	.836	.807
BI3. I am willing to recommend the local culinary when other people ask for suggestions.	.765			

BI4. I would like to revisit Bali to explore diverse local culinary.	.787
BI5. I would like to go to other regions in Indonesia for culinary tourism.	.529
BI6. I plan to return to other regions in Indonesia for culinary tourism.	.558

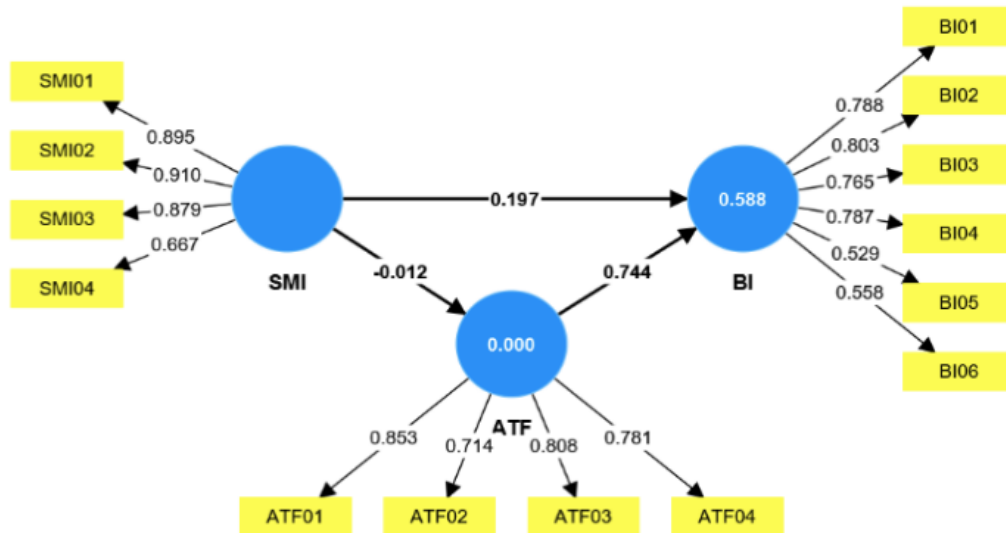


Figure 2. PLS Path Diagram

In this study, discriminant validity was validated by examining the cross-loading matrix for the reflective items. From Table 2, it can be seen that all measurement items load higher on the construct than on any other construct and the square root of the AVE is greater than the correlations between the constructs, indicating a satisfactory level of discriminant validity. Thus, the structural model could be evaluated further.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity with Cross Loading

Indicators	SMI	ATF	BI
SMI1	.895	-.035	.194
SMI2	.910	.032	.190
SMI3	.879	-.006	.121
SMI4	.667	-.123	.026
ATF1	.017	.853	.677
ATF2	-.019	.714	.473
ATF3	-.010	.808	.587
ATF4	-.031	.781	.584
BI1	.125	.617	.788
BI2	.111	.631	.803

BI3	.091	.606	.765
BI4	.073	.609	.787
BI5	.239	.301	.529
BI6	.309	.263	.558

Notes: SMI=Social media influencer; ATF=Attitude toward food; BI=Behavioral intention

Structural Equation Modeling Results

After the measurement model was validated, the next step was to examine the latent constructs in the structural model. The proposed structural model was validated to investigate the causal relationship to test the hypotheses. Hair et al. (2014) suggested assessing the value of R square (R²), the beta value (β), and the predictive relevance (Q²) using a bootstrapping method with 5000 resamples. The R-square values associated with Attitude toward food (ATF) and behavioral intention (BI) as endogenous variables are 0.000 and 0.588, respectively. The R-square value for the ATF variable is 0.00, indicating that social media influencer (SMI) do not exert any influence on the ATF among foreign visitors in Bali. While 58.8% of the variance of BI can be explained by SMI and ATF. Further, according to Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2012), the value of predictive relevance (Q²) higher than 0.25 indicates that the exogenous construct has high predictive accuracy on the endogenous construct. In the current study, the value of Q² for the predictive model is 0.588, indicating a substantial predictive relevance of the path model.

As shown in Table 3, two out of four hypotheses are accepted. Figure 3 visualizes the direct and indirect path within the structural model.

Table 3. The Path Coefficient result

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Value	Decision
H1: SMI → BI	.197	3.195	.001**	Supported
H2: SMI → ATF	-.012	.097	.461	Rejected
H3: ATF → BI	.744	17.778	.000**	Supported
H4: SMI→ATF→BI	-.009	.096	.462	Rejected

Notes: **p<0.01

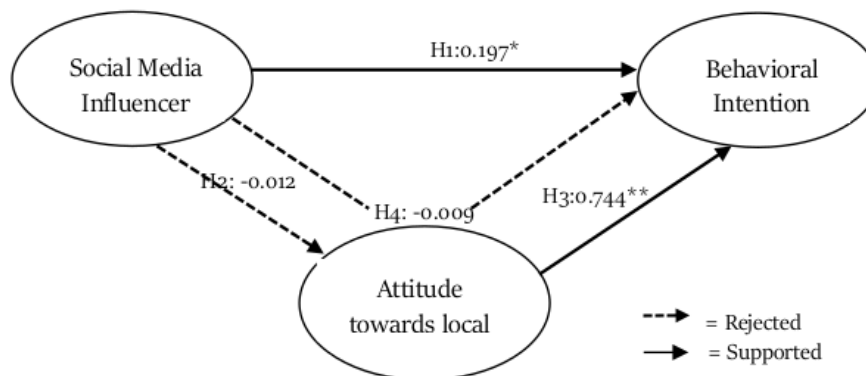


Figure 3. The structural model (n=201)

Hypothesis 1 was tested by examining the path coefficient between SMI and BI ($\beta = 0.197, p < .001$). The results showed that there was a positive and significant effect of SMI on foreign tourists' BI, supporting H1. This indicates that the foreign tourists' trust on social media influencers is more likely to encourage them to share and recommend the local food they consume to others as well as to drive them to return to a destination.

In addition, Hypothesis 2 was tested by examining the path coefficient between SMI and ATF ($\beta = -0.012, p > 0.01$). The results show that SMI was statistically insignificant in shaping ATF, rejecting H2. In other words, the tourists' attitude when enjoying food in Bali is not significantly influenced by social media influencers' marketing.

Hypothesis 3 was tested by examining the path coefficient between ATF and BI ($\beta = 0.744, p < 0.000$). The results reveal that tourists who had a positive attitude toward local food in Bali were more likely to return to the destination and create positive word-of-mouth to others, thereby supporting H3. This means that foreign visitors who have a positive attitude toward local food and perceive cuisine in Bali as appetizing, enjoyable, and satisfying tend to say positive word-of-mouth regarding their food experiences and to suggest others to visit the destination.

Finally, hypothesis 4 was tested by examining the indirect effect of SMI on BI ($\beta = -0.009, p > 0.01$). The results show that foreign tourists' attitudes toward local food did not mediate the relationship between SMI and BI, thus rejecting H4. Hence, social media influencers have a direct association with tourists' intention to say a positive thing about the local cuisine. Tourists' attitudes toward local food is considered to be insignificant in mediating the effect of social media influencers and behavioral intention.

DISCUSSION

The current study develops a conceptual model in the context of local culinary tourism in Bali from the perspective of foreign visitors. It is aimed to answer what social media influencers marketing drive the attitude of foreign tourists toward local food and their behavioral intention as well as the mediating effect of tourists' attitudes toward local food.

Social media influencers have a strong relationship with tourists' behavioral intention. Visitors who watch photos and videos about Balinese food posted by social media influencers and are introduced to local cuisine are most likely to have a positive image of the destination and are willing to share and recommend the destination to others. This finding is consistent with prior studies which indicate that social media influencers played a significant role in shaping tourists' behavior (Soltani et al., 2012). This shows that social media influencers can increase awareness and interest among their followers, leading to a potential increase in travelers' intention to visit and revisit. This finding contributes to the concept of SLT from the perspective of consumer behaviors that consumers' attitudes and behavior are influenced and strengthened by their social circle. In the food tourism context, when travelers watch social media of their friends, relatives/family posting their dining experiences during their trips, they will imitate and exhibit similar behavior (Webb & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2014). The ability of their social circle to inspire, engage, and create a sense of trust and authenticity, ultimately influences their followers' travel decisions. The popularity of social media has driven the rise of influencer marketing and is used as a strategic tool to boost selling across various industries (Childers, Meemon, & Hoy, 2019). The food industry relies heavily on visual appeal, thus social media such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube are developing diverse strategies to connect with prospective customers using trusted, authentic, and well-known spokespeople

(Mathew, 2018). Research has demonstrated that food images endorsed by social media can lead to an increase in the consumption of foods (Hawkins et al., 2021). The impact of social media influencers on shaping consumers' purchasing behavior is crucial and surpasses the impact of traditional marketing channels (Masuda, Han, & Lee, 2022). Thus, the use of social media influencers in the context of culinary tourism is highly required to shape tourists' behavioral intention in generating positive word-of-mouth and encourage them to return to a destination.

Social media influencers failed to impact tourists' attitudes toward local food. This finding does not align with the studies by Soltani et al. (2012) and Lim et al. (2017), who argued that there was a positive and significant relationship between social media influencers or source attractiveness and attitude toward local food. This might be due to the respondents who are foreign visitors to Bali having the main aim of enjoying the natural scenery in Bali and not for culinary tourism. Thereby, influencers who post and promote food in Bali do not get attention from international visitors. This might also contribute to our understanding of the theory of SLT that the influencers' content does not effectively convey the appeal of local cuisine in Bali, or that tourists are not receptive to the messages delivered by the influencers. Furthermore, tourists may have had preconceived notions about local food that were not easily swayed by influencer marketing. Additionally, the genuineness and trustworthiness of the influencers may have been doubted, resulting in a diminished ability to shape tourists' attitudes. Furthermore, the impact of marketing differs based on the cultural traits of the consumer (Pentina, Zhang & Basmanova, 2013). Tourists with various personalities and backgrounds have different perspectives on local cuisine (Santos, Santos, Pereira, Richards, & Caiado, 2020). Thus, destination marketers need to investigate the variations in marketing impact arising from disparities between the cultural backgrounds of influencers and consumers, such as those with Asian, European, and American backgrounds.

Attitudes toward local food significantly explain tourists' behavioral intention, so foreign tourists who have a positive attitude toward local food lead their intention to share positive word-of-mouth regarding their food experiences and return to the destination (Soltani et al., 2012; Thio et al., 2022). This finding supports the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as well as prior studies that empirically confirmed a close relationship between attitude and tourists' behavioral intention in the context of food tourism (Choe & Kim, 2018; Hsueh et al., 2018; Ting et al., 2016; Hussain et al., 2023). A favorable perception toward the destination's local food has a strong association with tourists' intention to try local food and to visit other places within the destination. Overseas visitors who perceive local food in Bali as enjoyable and appealing are most likely to return to the destination for food tourism in the future. This is crucial for food business operators and owners to offer nice and appealing food that will create a memorable dining experience for tourists, it ultimately forms a positive impression and encourages them to return to a food destination.

The lack of mediation by attitude toward local food in the relationship between social media influencers and the behavioral intention of foreign tourists could be due to various factors. These might include the influence of other variables such as the appeal of the destination, the overall travel experience, or the specific content shared by influencers. In addition, individual preferences and prior experiences as well as exposure to different types of content may also play a role in shaping tourists' attitudes and their behavioral intention. Cultural differences and individual preferences may influence how tourists perceive and respond to the influencers' content, impacting their behavioral intention independently of their attitude toward local food (Pentina et al., 2013). It is also possible that the impact of social media influencers on behavioral intention is not mainly influenced by attitudes toward local food, but is shaped by other factors such as cultural attractions and the credibility and engagement of the influencers. Furthermore, the impact of social media influencers

may be more focused on general travel recommendations and experiences rather than specific attitudes toward local food.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the behavioral intention of foreign tourists visiting Bali and its stimulants within the food tourism context, suggesting that social media influencer and foreign tourists' attitude toward local food can influence their behavioral intention. Recognizing the importance of social media influencers and the positive attitude of tourists visiting Bali, the findings indicate that attitude toward local food can encourage tourists to suggest destination-specific food to family/relatives/friends and revisit destination for food tourism in the future.

Individual preferences, previous experience and exposure to various content types of social media platforms may also contribute to shaping tourists' attitudes toward food and their behavioral intention. Cultural differences can also influence how tourists perceive and react to influencer content, affecting their behavioral intention regardless of their attitude toward local food.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

Given the growing popularity of social media, the results of the study provide valuable insights that can help destination marketers optimize their social media marketing strategies using influencers to attract more tourists to visit the destination, particularly for international travelers. It is essential to identify social media influencers that can positively influence tourists' attitudes and behavior. Influencers' credibility has been proven to create a greater impact on outcomes (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Thus, in the context of food tourism, culinary entrepreneurs are highly encouraged to optimize influencers to develop more effective social media marketing tactics which fit with their visitors' target. In addition, to boost the number of tourists on culinary tourism in Bali, food business operators and managers should be capable of crafting enticing and delicious dishes complemented by delightful scenery and atmosphere, resulting in an unforgettable dining experience that encourages repeat visits.

For social media marketing practitioners, this study highlights the effectiveness of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter to powerfully influence tourists' perceptions toward specific destinations. These platforms act as a valuable source of information for destination marketing planning. From the perspective of influencer marketing agencies, featuring enjoyable destinations with appetizing food in social media content could be beneficial for boosting traveler's attention to try the food. When influencers endorse foods and beverages in a particular destination, it may lead to more effective campaigns. With the substantial volume of pictures, stories, and images posted on social media platforms daily, understanding the factors that improve the assessment of these contents holds significant implications for companies, individual users, and influencers. Cultural background and differences should also be taken into account to create and design content that is suitable and appealing for travelers. Finally, the findings also have implications for the Indonesian government and tourism regulators. They play a crucial role in developing food tourism in Bali by implementing policies and initiatives to support the culinary sector. The government may provide financial incentives or grants to local businesses for improving their facilities, maintaining the standard of food safety and hygiene, and preserving traditional cuisine. Improving transportation access to food tourism destinations can also be undertaken as well as promoting Bali's unique culinary heritage through international marketing campaigns. By creating a conducive environment for the growth of food tourism, the government and the tourism board can contribute to the overall economic development of Bali's tourism industry. In addition, tourism regulators should take various initiatives to attract more tourists by collaborating with local

communities, local restaurants, street food vendors, and other stakeholders to organize food festivals, culinary events, ¹ culinary tours, and cooking classes that highlight unique Balinese dishes. They can collaborate with **social media influencers** to support **the development of food tourism** by creating engaging and visually appealing content of Bali's culinary delights. By effectively promoting and improving the overall food tourism experience, Bali can further entice more tourists to visit the island and also other places in Indonesia.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has two limitations. First, it focuses on foreign tourists visiting Bali so the findings may not apply to other destinations within Indonesia. Thus, future research is expected to collect data from international tourists visiting other food destinations in Indonesia such as Surabaya, Malang, Jogjakarta, Solo, and ¹ Bandung to provide a comprehended understanding and insights regarding the relationships among **social media influencers, attitudes toward local food** and their **behavioral intention**.

⁴ Second, this study did not include **the moderating effect of the cultural background of the** visitors as well as their socio-demographic profile (such as gender, age, and educational background) which might be meaningful to optimize the content of the social media to influence attitude and their intention to revisit. Future studies should explore whether cultural background or demographic profile can act ³ moderating variables to strengthen the relationship between social media influencers and **attitudes toward local food** or between attitudes **toward local food and behavioral intention**.

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