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

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of social media has transformed the way people interact and communicate globally. This study investigates the role of social media influencers in shaping foreign tourists' attitudes toward local food and their behavioral intentions, with a particular focus on the mediating role of attitudes toward local food. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaire surveys from 201 international tourists visiting Bali between July and August 2023. The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique, implemented via SmartPLS 4.0, was employed to analyze the proposed causal relationships among social media influencers, attitudes toward local food, and behavioral intentions. The findings reveal that social media influencers positively and significantly impact foreign tourists' behavioral intentions. Additionally, attitudes toward local food have a significant positive effect on behavioral intentions. However, social media influencers does not significantly influence tourists' attitudes toward local food. Furthermore, attitudes toward local food does not mediate the relationship between social media influencers and behavioral intentions. This study offers valuable insights for destination marketers aiming to attract more visitors and enhance destination promotion by strategically leveraging social media influencers.

KEYWORDS

Social media influencer
Attitude toward food
Behavioral intention
Foreign tourists

INTRODUCTION

Food tourism has experienced significant growth in recent decades (Ellis et al, 2018) and plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' overall experiences (Almeida & Garrod, 2017). It has become a vital component of destination attractions (Tsai & Wang, 2017), offering visitors opportunities to explore diverse culinary offerings (Wijaya et al., 2017) and influencing their decision-making behaviors (Prayag et al., 2020). Understanding travelers' attitudes and behaviors toward consuming local food in specific destinations is therefore essential (Cheng & Huang, 2015).

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Social media is recognized as the fastest-growing communication technology, including in tourism marketing (Kang & Schuett, 2013). The rise in social media usage has facilitated the emergence of social media influencers (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020), who play a critical role in shaping tourist attitudes (Lim et al., 2017). Social media influencers are individuals who actively engage with their audiences and maintain a large following on social media platforms (Zorlu & Candan, 2023). They share experiences and stories through photos, captions, and vlogs designed to capture public attention (Abdullah et al., 2022). Influencers with significant popularity, a large number of followers, and engaging content serve as key drivers in creating trends, influencing interest, and shaping tourists' decision-making processes (Jin et al., 2019).

Handayani et al. (2021) highlighted that social media usage can contribute to the phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Social media provides individuals with the ability to observe the activities and experiences of others, which may trigger anxiety or fear of missing significant or enjoyable experiences. Individuals with a high level of FOMO are more likely to engage in "foodstagramming," a practice of uploading food photos to social media platforms. This activity is often motivated by a desire to actively participate in social interactions and share culinary experiences. Sharing food photos on social media is also driven by the expectation of receiving recognition and validation from others for one's culinary choices. In this context, social media influencers play a significant role in shaping travelers' decisions regarding culinary tourism destinations. Consequently, they represent an effective marketing tool for promoting tourism destinations (Soltani et al., 2021).

While studies on food tourism and social media have been conducted, limited research has specifically focused on the role of social media influencers in shaping foreign tourists' attitudes toward local food and their behavioral intentions. Although social media influencers are widely regarded as instrumental in influencing travelers' behavior, this area has not received sufficient academic attention (Canovi & Pucciarelli, 2019). Investigating the determinants of travelers' attitudes and behavioral intentions is essential for destination marketers and tourism organizations to better understand how to attract international visitors and encourage repeat visits. Therefore, the primary aim of this study is to examine the impact of social media influencers on attitudes toward local food and behavioral intentions from the perspective of foreign tourists. The findings are expected to contribute to existing literature on food tourism by exploring the relationships among social media influencers, attitudes toward local food, and behavioral intentions. Ultimately, this research seeks to enrich the body of knowledge on food tourism in international tourist destinations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media influencers

Social media serves as a platform for sharing experiences, such as photos and videos, that can shape individuals' perceptions and act as an effective promotional tool when users share real-time travel experiences (Osman et al., 2021). A critical factor contributing to the success of social media in influencing tourists' behavioral intentions is the role of social media influencers. These influencers can shape consumer preferences, purchasing decisions, and brand perceptions through various strategies, including product introductions, providing reviews, conducting promotions, and leveraging their social influence on social media platforms (Arora, Bansal, Kandpal, Aswani, & Dwivedi, 2019).

Information shared by social media users, including reviews, photos, and culinary recommendations, significantly influences tourists' perceptions of the uniqueness and quality of culinary experiences in a destination. Nugraha et al., (2018) identified several key factors contributing to the impact of social media influencers, such as celebrity appeal, brand alignment, and credibility. Additional factors include the attention-grabbing nature of the content, the trustworthiness and authority of the influencer, social engagement with food-related content, the reputation and branding of the restaurant or food, and alignment with individual values and identity (Soltani et al., 2021). Consequently, social media has the potential to shape tourists' behavioral intentions, such as their desire to try specific dishes, visit restaurants popularized on social media, or share their own food experiences on these platforms.

Attitudes toward food and behavioral intentions

Attitudes toward food encompass individuals' perceptions, feelings, and evaluations of food, shaped by their consumption values (Hussain et al., 2022). These attitudes are measured by the extent to which tourists like or dislike specific foods (Asmoro & Sondakh, 2021), influencing their purchasing decisions and brand preferences. Choe and Kim (2018) explained attitudes toward food as comprehensive evaluations that include preferences, emotional responses, and overall experiences of enjoying local culinary offerings at a destination. Key aspects of these attitudes involve perceptions of food quality, taste, authenticity, uniqueness, and variety, all of which are shaped by personal experiences and information received (Soltani et al., 2021). Additionally, preferences related to food types, presentation styles, and culinary traditions are often influenced by cultural and individual factors. Tourists' willingness to explore and consume food further reflects their desire to engage with local cuisine. Another important dimension is involvement, which represents the degree of tourists' active participation in food-related activities, such as visiting markets, joining culinary tours, or tasting local dishes (Soltani et al., 2021).

On the other hand, behavioral intention refers to an individual's comprehensive cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitude toward adopting, purchasing, or using a particular product or service (Dadwal et al., 2020). In the tourism context, behavioral intention can be defined as tourists' likelihood of revisiting a destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Tourists' satisfaction with the services they receive is a critical factor influencing their decision to return to a specific location. Similarly, appreciation for local food is likely to develop when the destination has a positive image and a strong cultural identity (Thio et al., 2022). Positive experiences and impressions often lead to a greater willingness to try local cuisine and revisit the destination. Beyond positive perceptions and experiences, external recommendations and information also significantly influence the desire to consume local food. According to Soltani et al. (2021), recommendations from external sources, including social media influencers, can heighten tourists' interest in and desire to explore local culinary offerings. Consistent with this, Mabkhot, Isa, and Mabkhot (2022) emphasized that social media influencers play a pivotal role in shaping individuals' behavioral intentions.

This study adopts Social Learning Theory (SLT) to predict tourists' behavioral intentions within the context of food tourism, specifically examining how social media influencers shape tourists' attitudes toward local food and related behaviors. SLT underscores the role of observational learning in influencing decision-making processes and behaviors, emphasizing the impact of social media influencers as intermediaries who engage audiences through digital platforms (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020). According to Bandura (1977), behavior is acquired through observing and imitating the actions of others, particularly when such behaviors yield favorable outcomes. This process involves

modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others within a given social environment.

Consumers' attitudes and behaviors are often shaped and reinforced by their social networks, including peers and family members. When individuals observe positive outcomes from others' behaviors, they are more likely to replicate those actions (Webb & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2014), which can simultaneously enhance their self-esteem (Stets & Burke, 2000). In the realm of food tourism, the involvement of social media influencers (SMIs) in destination marketing has shown significant potential to shape tourists' attitudes, behaviors, and intentions (Lim et al., 2017). Moreover, SMIs contribute to constructing and promoting the destination's food image, influencing tourists' perceptions and engagement with local culinary experiences (Xu & Pratt, 2018).

Local food

Local food is often considered a vital element of a destination, symbolizing its unique culture and heritage (Choe & Kim, 2019), while playing a pivotal role in creating memorable tourism experiences (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2017). Positive encounters with local cuisine at a tourist destination can significantly influence tourists' future behavioral intentions, such as their willingness to revisit the destination or recommend its local food to others (Kim, Choe & Kim, 2022). Moreover, the authenticity and distinctiveness of local cuisine can be decisive factors in shaping tourists' preferences when selecting holiday destinations (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010).

In the context of food tourism, consuming local cuisine while traveling abroad serves as a means to deeply engage with the destination's culture (Kim et al., 2013). The uniqueness of local food in a given destination, characterized by distinctive ingredients and culinary techniques, can significantly 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 potential to enhance a destination's reputation, as it reflects and conveys personal, national, regional, and local identities.

Bali culinary tourism

Bali, known as the Island of the Gods, is a popular holiday destination for both local and foreign tourists. The term "Island of the Gods" reflects its natural beauty and diverse cultures that harmoniously coexist (Soeprapto & Yohana, 2021). With unique customs and traditions, the lifestyle of the Balinese people is deeply rooted in the teachings of Hinduism, which is predominantly practiced by the island's residents (Suriani & Ariani, 2020). In addition to its natural beauty and distinctive culture, culinary tourism in Bali plays a significant role in attracting tourists. Bali's culinary offerings contribute to the development of national culinary tourism, providing memorable experiences for visitors who seek to enjoy local culinary delights during their holiday on the island (Nadra et al., 2022).

The diverse range of Balinese culinary offerings, including various types of food, unique cooking ingredients, and distinctive flavors, contributes to tourist satisfaction and creates lasting memories of culinary tourism in Bali (Sukerti & Marsiti, 2020). Balinese gastronomy is represented by local specialties such as *jaje* (traditional snacks) and traditional dishes like *lawar*, *babi guling* (suckling pig), *ayam betutu* (spiced chicken), *pepes* (steamed food wrapped in banana leaves), and satay (Nadra et al., 2022). The authenticity and uniqueness of traditional Balinese cuisine are difficult to replicate elsewhere due to its deep connection with religious rituals and the devout Balinese-Hindu beliefs that underpin its preparation (Kruger, 2014). This distinctive culinary heritage enhances

Bali's appeal as a tourist destination, with its food serving as both a regional hallmark and a key attraction for visitors (Nadra et al., 2022).

Social media influencers and behavioral intentions

Gupta and Mahajan (2019) examined the role of micro-influencers on Instagram in shaping behavioral intentions, emphasizing that influencer credibility significantly contributes to the virality of content—defined as actions such as liking, commenting, and sharing influencer-generated content. This virality, in turn, positively influences purchase intentions. Similarly, Lim et al., (2017) highlighted the positive impact of social media influencers on individuals' behavioral intentions, noting that influencers are often perceived as role models. The high level of social interaction between influencers and their followers fosters social pressure to remain aligned with prevailing trends (Gunawan & Huarng, 2015). Moreover, Chatzigeorgiou (2017) identified a positive relationship between social media influencers and behavioral intentions, particularly in motivating individuals to revisit destinations. Till and Busler (2000) further substantiated these findings, demonstrating that trusted sources of information, such as social media influencers, significantly enhance behavioral intentions. Based on these insights from prior research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_1: Social media influencers positively affect tourists' behavioral intentions.

Social media influencers and attitudes toward local food

Social media influencers have been shown to play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward local food (Soltani et al., 2021). Through social media platforms, influencers share information, reviews, recommendations, and visually appealing content about local cuisine with their followers. This engagement has the potential to shape attitudes and influence individual perceptions of local food. Information from trusted sources, such as social media influencers, significantly impacts individuals' beliefs, opinions, and attitudes (Wang, Kao & Ngamsiriudom, 2017). When prominent influencers recommend or express appreciation for local food, it can enhance individuals' positive attitudes and broaden their understanding of local culinary offerings (Goldsmith, Lafferty & Newell, 2000). Consequently, social media influencers serve as crucial agents in shaping tourists' attitudes toward local food by leveraging their influence and reach. Based on this rationale, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_2: Social media influencers positively affect tourists' attitudes toward local food.

Attitudes toward local food and behavioral intentions

Soltani et al. (2021) identified a significant relationship between attitudes toward local food and behavioral intention. According to Choe and Kim (2018), a positive attitude toward a particular type of food fosters the intention to purchase and recommend it to others. Customers' feelings of satisfaction and memorable experiences with local food significantly influence their intention to revisit a destination or recommend it to others (Paramita, Chairy & Syahrivar, 2021). Several studies support the role of local food in encouraging individuals to revisit destinations. For example, Chi, Chua, Othman, and Karim (2013) demonstrated that tourists visiting Malaysia who are satisfied with the unique taste and experience of local food report higher levels of customer satisfaction, which

indirectly influences their behavioral intentions, including the decision to try the food again. Similarly, Jung, Ineson, Kim, and Yap (2015) found a positive relationship between satisfaction with local food and the intention to make a return visit. Furthermore, Crotts, Pan, and Raschid (2008) emphasized that positive perceptions of satisfaction derived from local food evoke unforgettable memories, which, in turn, strengthen the intention to revisit. Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_3: Attitudes toward local food positively affect tourists' behavioral intentions.
H_4: Attitudes toward local food mediate the effect of social media influencers and tourists' behavioral intentions.

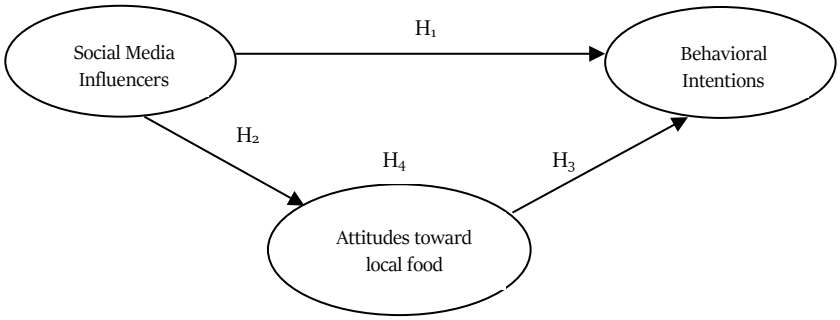


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

RESEARCH METHOD

The indicators employed to measure social media influencers, attitudes toward local food, and behavioral intentions were adapted from prior studies and tailored to the specific context of this research. Constructs for measuring the influence of social media influencers were based on Soltani et al. (2021) and focused on examining foreign tourists' perceptions of the role of social media influencers in shaping their dining decisions (4 items). For measuring attitudes toward local food, 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. The behavioral intention was assessed using items derived from Choe and Kim (2018), Soltani et al (2021), and Thio et al. (2022). These items aimed to evaluate foreign tourists' willingness to share and recommend their culinary experiences in Bali to family, relatives, and friends, as well as their intention to revisit Bali (6 items). All indicators were rated using a five-point Likert scale to measure respondents' levels of agreement or disagreement, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

A pilot study involving 30 undergraduate students majoring in Hotel Management was conducted to evaluate the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Based on the pilot study findings, necessary modifications were made to enhance the questionnaire's clarity and accuracy. Subsequently, the revised questionnaire was distributed onsite to foreign tourists visiting Bali between July and August 2023, with the support of two research assistants. Using a quantitative approach, a total of 201 completed questionnaires were collected from various locations in Bali, including restaurants, cafés, malls, airports, railway stations, hotels, and popular tourist attractions.

The collected data were analyzed using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method. To test the proposed hypotheses, SmartPLS 4.0, specialized software for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), was employed. This software facilitated a comprehensive analysis of

the causal relationships among social media influencers, attitudes toward local food, and behavioral intentions. The PLS-SEM approach was deemed appropriate for this study as it focuses on maximizing the explained variance of the dependent variables, while not requiring the data to meet the assumption of normal distribution (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019). The method has been widely adopted in tourism and hospitality studies and social science research (Henseler, 2017), further supporting its relevance for this study. Significance testing was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure with 5000 resamples to evaluate and either confirm or reject the hypotheses.

RESULTS

Respondents' profile

The respondents for this study were foreign tourists who had traveled to Bali. The majority were female (62.2%), with 34.8% aged between 24 and 30 years, and 29.4% aged between 31 and 40 years. Regarding occupation, most respondents were entrepreneurs or business owners (46.3%), followed by students (20.4%), professionals (18.4%), and retired or unemployed individuals (11%). In terms of regional representation, European tourists constituted the largest group (37.8%), followed by Asian tourists (26.9%), Oceanian tourists (25.4%), and American tourists (7.5%). The sample group was predominantly educated, with 72.1% holding either an undergraduate degree (35.8%) or a postgraduate degree (36.3%).

Measurement Model

Convergent validity was assessed using factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and Cronbach's alpha, following the guidelines provided by Hair et al. (2017). As shown in Table 1, all indicator factor loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.5, ranging from 0.529 to 0.910. The AVE values range between 0.510 and 0.712, while the CR values are between 0.814 and 0.953. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.799 to 0.875. These findings confirm the constructs' convergent validity and internal consistency reliability, as all measures satisfied the established thresholds of AVE (>0.50), CR (>0.70), and Cronbach's alpha (>0.70) (Hair et al., 2017). Thus, the measurement model demonstrates an adequate fit for evaluating each construct. The results of the internal reliability and convergent validity assessments are presented in Table 1 and Figure 2.

Table 1. Convergent validity measure

Measurement item	Loading	AVE	Composite reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Social Media Influencers (SMI)				
SMI1. A social media influencer introduced me to local cuisine in Bali.	0.895			
SMI2. I was encouraged to eat Balinese food by watching photos and videos about Balinese cuisine posted by social media influencers.	0.910	0.712	0.953	0.875
SMI3. I believe in social media influencers who have the experience of eating local culinary in Bali.	0.879			
SMI4. Social media influencers who travel to Bali are the most useful source of information about local cuisine in Bali.	0.667			

Table 1. Convergent validity measure (continued)

Measurement item	Loading	AVE	Composite reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Attitudes Toward Local Food (ATLF)				
ATF1. I like the food in Indonesia.	0.853			
ATF2. The food can satisfy my needs.	0.714	0.625	0.814	0.799
ATF3. The food is enjoyable.	0.808			
ATF4. The food is appetizing.	0.781			
Behavioral Intentions (BI)				
BI1. I will say positive things about the local cuisine to others.	0.788			
BI2. I will recommend the local cuisine to family/ relatives/ friends.	0.803			
BI3. I am willing to recommend the local culinary when other people ask for suggestions.	0.765			
BI4. I would like to revisit Bali to explore the diverse local cuisine.	0.787	0.510	0.836	0.807
BI5. I would like to go to other regions in Indonesia for culinary tourism.	0.529			
BI6. I plan to return to other regions in Indonesia for culinary tourism.	0.558			



Figure 2. PLS path diagram

Discriminant validity was assessed by examining the cross-loading matrix of the reflective items. As presented in Table 2, all measurement items demonstrate higher loadings on their respective constructs compared to any other construct. Additionally, the square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than the inter-construct correlations, confirming a satisfactory level of discriminant validity. These results indicate that the structural model is suitable for further evaluation.

Structural Equation Modeling Results

After validating the measurement model, the next step was to examine the latent constructs within the structural model. The proposed structural model was assessed to investigate causal relationships and test the hypotheses. According to Hair et al. (2014), key metrics such as R-square (R^2), beta values (β), and predictive relevance (Q^2) should be evaluated using a bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples. The R-square values for attitudes toward food (ATF) and behavioral intentions (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 influencers do not exert any significant impact on tourists' attitudes toward foods in Bali. However, 58.8% of the variance in behavioral intentions can be

explained by social media influencers and attitudes toward local food. Furthermore, according to Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2012), a predictive relevance (Q^2) value greater than 0.25 indicates substantial predictive accuracy of the exogenous construct on the endogenous construct. In this study, the Q^2 value for the predictive model was 0.588, indicating the high predictive relevance of the path model.

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

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

Table 3. The results of the path coefficient

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Value	Decision
H_1: SMI → BI	.197	3.195	.001**	Supported
H_2: SMI → ATF	-.012	.097	.461	Rejected
H_3: ATF → BI	.744	17.778	.000**	Supported
H_4: SMI→ATF→BI	-.009	.096	.462	Rejected

Notes: $^{**}p<0.01$

Hypothesis 1 was tested by examining the path coefficient between "social media influencers" and "behavioral intentions" (ß=0.197, p < .001). The result indicates a positive and significant effect of social media influencers on foreign tourists' behavioral intention, supporting H1. Trust in social media influencers is more likely to encourage tourists to share and recommend local food to others, as well as to drive their return to the destination.

Hypothesis 2 was tested by examining the path coefficient between "social media influencers" and "attitudes toward local food" (ß=-0.012, p>0.01). The result shows that social media influencers have no statistically significant effect on shaping the attitudes of foreign tourists toward local food,

thereby rejecting H2. Tourists' attitudes toward food in Bali are not significantly influenced by social media influencers' marketing.

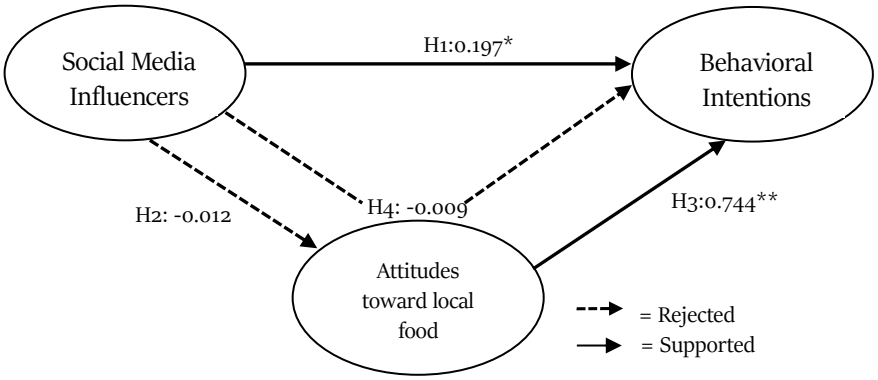


Figure 3. The structural model (n=201)

Hypothesis 3 was tested by examining the path coefficient between "attitudes toward local food" and "behavioral intentions" (ß=0.744, p<0.000). The result reveals that tourists with a positive attitude toward local food in Bali are more likely to return to the destination and engage in positive word-of-mouth, supporting H3. Foreign visitors who enjoy local food and perceive it as appetizing, enjoyable, and satisfying are more likely to share positive experiences and recommend the destination to others.

Finally, hypothesis 4 was tested by examining the indirect effect of "social media influencers" on "behavioral intentions" (ß=-0.009, p>0.01). The result shows that tourists' attitudes toward local food do not mediate the relationship between social media influencers and behavioral intentions, thus rejecting H4. Social media influencers directly influence tourists' intentions to share positive feedback regarding local cuisine. Tourists' attitudes toward local food are found to have an insignificant mediating role in the relationship between social media influencers and behavioral intentions.

DISCUSSION

This study develops a conceptual model within the context of local culinary tourism in Bali, focusing on foreign tourists' perspectives. The research seeks to answer how social media influencer marketing influences the attitudes of foreign tourists toward local food and their behavioral intentions, as well as the mediating effect of tourists' attitudes toward local food.

Social media influencers have a strong relationship with tourists' behavioral intentions. Visitors who engage with photos and videos about Balinese food posted by social media influencers and are introduced to local cuisine are more likely to develop a positive image of the destination and are inclined to share and recommend it to others. The findings are consistent with previous studies that highlight the significant role social media influencers play in shaping tourists' behavior (Soltani et al., 2012). This suggests that social media influencers can effectively increase awareness and interest among their followers, potentially leading to higher visit and revisit intentions. The study contributes to the concept of Social Learning Theory (SLT) from the perspective of consumer behavior, where consumers' attitudes and behaviors are influenced and reinforced by their social networks. In the context of food tourism, when travelers observe social media posts from friends, relatives, or family

documenting their dining experiences, they are likely to imitate and exhibit similar behaviors ((Webb & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2014). The ability of social networks to inspire, engage, and build trust ultimately shapes and influences followers' travel decisions.

The popularity of social media has driven the rise of influencer marketing, serving as a strategic tool to enhance sales across various industries (Childers, Lemon, & Hoy, 2019). The food industry, in particular, relies heavily on visual appeal; platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have developed diverse strategies to engage with prospective customers through trusted, authentic, and well-known spokespeople (Mathew, 2018). Research has demonstrated that food images endorsed by social media can lead to an increased consumption of foods (Hawkins et al., 2021). The impact of social media influencers in shaping consumers' purchasing behavior is substantial, often surpassing the influence of traditional marketing channels (Masuda, Han, & Lee, 2022). Consequently, the use of social media influencers in the context of culinary tourism is essential to shaping tourists' behavioral intentions, fostering positive word-of-mouth, and encouraging repeat visits to destinations.

Social media influencers fail to significantly impact tourists' attitudes toward local food. The findings contrast with studies conducted by Soltani et al. (2012) and Lim et al. (2017), which suggested a positive and significant relationship between social media influencers and attitudes toward local food. The results of this study differ from previous research, potentially due to the primary aim of foreign visitors to Bali, which is to experience the natural scenery rather than culinary tourism. As a result, influencers who promote local food do not capture the attention of international visitors. This insignificance may further contribute to the understanding of Social Learning Theory (SLT), suggesting that influencers' content does not effectively convey the appeal of local cuisine in Bali, or that tourists are not receptive to the messages delivered by influencers. Additionally, preconceived notions about local food may not easily be altered by influencer marketing. Furthermore, the genuineness and trustworthiness of influencers may be questioned, reducing their ability to influence tourists' attitudes. It is important to note that the impact of marketing varies based on cultural traits (Pentina, Zhang & Basmanova, 2013). Tourists from diverse backgrounds, including Asian, European, and American, hold different perspectives on local cuisine (Santos, Santos, Pereira, Richards, & Caiado, 2020). Thus, destination marketers should consider these cultural differences when developing marketing strategies to address varying preferences and attitudes.

Attitudes toward local food significantly influence tourists' behavioral intentions. Foreign tourists who have a positive attitude toward local food are more likely to share positive word-of-mouth regarding their food experiences and to return to the destination (Soltani et al., 2012; Thio et al., 2022). The findings support the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and align with prior studies that empirically confirm a strong relationship between attitude and tourists' behavioral intention in the context of food tourism (Choe & Kim, 2018; Hsu et al., 2018; Ting et al., 2016; Hussain et al., 2023). A favorable perception of the destination's local food is closely associated with tourists' intention to engage with local cuisine and explore other attractions within the destination. Overseas visitors who perceive Balinese local food as enjoyable and appealing are more likely to return to the destination for food tourism experiences. For food business operators and owners, providing high-quality and appealing food is essential in creating memorable dining experiences, which contribute to positive impressions and encourage repeat visits.

The lack of mediation by attitudes toward local food in the relationship between social media influencers and the behavioral intentions of foreign tourists could be attributed to various factors. These may include the influence of other variables such as the destination's appeal, overall travel experience, and the specific content shared by influencers. Additionally, individual

preferences, prior experiences, and exposure to diverse types of content may play a significant role in shaping tourists' attitudes and their behavioral intentions. Cultural differences and personal preferences can influence how tourists perceive and engage with influencer content, impacting their behavioral intention independently of their attitude toward local food (Pentina et al., 2013). It is also possible that the effect of social media influencers on behavioral intention is influenced by factors beyond attitudes toward local food, such as cultural attractions, the credibility of the influencer, and their level of engagement. Furthermore, social media influencers may focus more on general travel recommendations and experiences rather than solely shaping specific attitudes toward local food.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the behavioral intentions of foreign tourists visiting Bali within the context of food tourism, highlighting how social media influencers and tourists' attitudes toward local food can influence their behavioral intentions. Emphasizing the significance of social media influencers and the positive perceptions tourists hold toward local food, the findings suggest that a favorable attitude toward local food can motivate tourists to recommend destination-specific cuisine to family, relatives, and friends, as well as encourage them to return to the destination for future food tourism.

Additionally, individual preferences, previous experiences, and exposure to diverse types of content on social media platforms play a critical role in shaping tourists' attitudes toward local food and their behavioral intentions. Cultural differences also impact how tourists perceive and engage with influencer content, influencing their behavioral intentions independently of their attitude toward local food.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

Given the increasing popularity of social media, the results of this study provide valuable insights for destination marketers to enhance their social media marketing strategies by leveraging influencers to attract more tourists, especially international travelers. It is crucial to identify social media influencers who can positively impact tourists' attitudes and behavior. Influencers' credibility has been shown to significantly influence outcomes (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Therefore, in the context of food tourism, culinary entrepreneurs are advised to optimize the use of influencers to develop more effective social media marketing strategies tailored to their target audience. 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, ensuring 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 serve as a valuable source of information for destination marketing planning. From the perspective of an influencer marketing agency, featuring enjoyable destinations with appetizing food in social media content can effectively capture travelers' attention and encourage them to try local cuisine. When influencers endorse foods and beverages in a particular destination, it can result in more impactful marketing campaigns. Given the substantial volume of photos, stories, and images shared on social media platforms daily, understanding the factors that enhance the evaluation of these contents is crucial for businesses,

individual users, and influencers. Additionally, cultural background and differences should be considered to create content that is both suitable and appealing to travelers.

Finally, the findings also have implications for the Indonesian government and tourism regulators. They play a crucial role in fostering food tourism in Bali by implementing policies and initiatives to support the culinary sector. The government may offer financial incentives or grants to local businesses for enhancing facilities, maintaining high standards of food safety and hygiene, and preserving traditional cuisine. Improving transportation access to food tourism destinations can also be addressed, along with promoting Bali's unique culinary heritage through international marketing campaigns. By creating a conducive environment for the growth of food tourism, the government and tourism board can contribute to the overall economic development of Bali's tourism industry. Furthermore, tourism regulators should take proactive steps to attract more tourists by collaborating with local communities, restaurants, street food vendors, and other stakeholders to organize food festivals, culinary events, culinary tours, and cooking classes that highlight unique Balinese dishes. These initiatives can be further supported by partnerships with social media influencers to create engaging and visually appealing content showcasing Bali's culinary delights. Through effective promotion and enhancement of the food tourism experience, Bali can continue to attract more tourists to the island and other destinations in Indonesia.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has two limitations. First, the focus is on foreign tourists visiting Bali, meaning its findings may not be applicable to other destinations within Indonesia. Therefore, future research is recommended to collect data from international tourists visiting various food destinations across Indonesia, such as Surabaya, Malang, Yogyakarta, Solo, and Bandung, to gain a more comprehensive understanding and insights into the relationships between social media influencers, attitudes toward local food, and behavioral intention.

Second, this research did not consider the moderating effects of cultural background or socio-demographic factors (e.g., gender, age, and educational background), which may significantly impact the optimization of social media content to influence attitudes and behavioral intention. Future studies should explore whether cultural background or demographic variables can act as moderating factors to enhance the relationship between social media influencers and attitudes toward local food, as well as between attitudes toward local food and behavioral intention.

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