

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR | RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Social Media Food Influencers and Follower's Local Food Purchase Intention: A Parasocial Relationship Perspective

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### Abstract:

**Background:** The presence of Social Media Food Influencers (SMFIs) has created a new landscape in local food tourism. Despite extensive studies focusing on the crucial role of influencer marketing through the lens of parasocial relationships, how SMFIs can foster these relationships and consequently influence their followers' intentions to purchase local food remains underexplored.

**Purpose:** This research examines how the parasocial relationship between SMFIs and their followers influences the latter's intention to purchase local food.

**Method:** This research employed the quantitative approach. It involved 439 active Instagram users who follow SMFIs as research respondents. They were recruited using the purposive sampling technique. Additionally, using Smart-PLS software, the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) was applied to statistically test the data and the research hypotheses.

**Findings:** This research reveals that influencers' content value (informative value), interaction strategy (interactivity), and credibility (expertise and attractiveness) positively and significantly influence the parasocial relationship between followers and social media food influencers (SMFIs). The results also indicate that this parasocial relationship influences followers' intention to purchase local food.

**Conclusion:** This study highlights the critical role that food influencers play in fostering parasocial relationships, which significantly influence followers' intentions to purchase local food. The findings reveal that the effectiveness of food influencers is largely contingent upon their ability to engage followers through informative content, interactive communication, and the establishment of perceived expertise.

**Research implication:** The research findings offer significant implications for tourism marketers and local food business managers. Social media food influencers can be regarded as influential promoters of local food, enhancing tourists' interest and purchase intentions through the parasocial relationships facilitated by social media.

**Keywords:** local food tourism, parasocial relationship, social media food influencers, social media marketing

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### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This research investigates the influential role of Social Media Food Influencers (SMFIs) in shaping tourists' intentions to engage with local culinary experiences, an area that has been largely overlooked in existing literature. Conducted in Indonesia, a nation celebrated for its rich culinary heritage yet underrepresented in tourism studies, this work aims to provide critical insights for tourism marketers and local food producers. By exploring the dynamics of parasocial relationships between SMFIs and their followers, the study reveals how these connections can significantly impact consumer behaviour and decision-making processes. The findings offer practical recommendations for leveraging SMFIs to enhance local food tourism, encouraging sustainable practices that benefit both the economy and cultural preservation. This research not only contributes to the academic discourse on influencer marketing and tourism but also supports the development of effective strategies that promote local food consumption, ultimately fostering a more sustainable and vibrant tourism industry in emerging markets.



## 1. Introduction

Local food plays a crucial role in the tourism sector. Previous studies have explained that 40% of tourists' expenditures during their trip are allocated for local food, making it a critical determinant in tourists' decisions regarding their destination (Choi et al., 2021; Dedeoğlu et al., 2022; Okumus et al., 2018; Piramanayagam et al., 2020; Stone et al., 2018). In the context of Indonesia, thousands of local foods, shaped by natural conditions, culture, and history, can be a significant factor in attracting tourists to choose Indonesia as a tourism destination (Djalal et al., 2022; Wijaya, 2019). Given the significant impact of food tourism on economic and local businesses (Linnes et al., 2023; Zain et al., 2023), understanding the factors that drive tourists' intentions to buy and consume local food is critical.

Social media is a powerful promotional tool that enables social media influencers (SMIs) to play a significant role due to their ability to influence their followers (Freberg et al., 2011; Masoetsa et al., 2023; Meliawati et al., 2023). Social media influencers (SMIs) are not only able to set particular trends publicly, but they can also influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Tran, 2023). In the context of tourism, social media influencers (SMIs) play a critical role in influencing tourists' decision-making processes, including their intention to visit (Meng et al., 2025; Rajput & Gandhi, 2024). Specifically, in the context of food tourism, social media food influencers (SMFIs) can serve as primary references for recipes, restaurants, and food choices for their followers. This phenomenon enables SMFIs to influence food purchase intentions (Ingrassia et al., 2022; Ismarizal & Kusumah, 2023; Lim et al., 2017). Considering the growing popularity of SMFIs in influencing consumers' decision (Dam et al., 2024; Drew et al., 2022). It is important to elaborate on how SMFIs can play an important role in promoting local food by examining their influence on followers' intentions to buy local food.

Although extensive studies have explored how SMIs can influence tourists' decision-making (Chilembwe & Gondwe, 2020; Khadka & Khadka, 2023; Meng et al., 2025; Omeish et al., 2024; Osei & Abenyin, 2016; Yasin et al., 2023) and the strong influence of SMFIs' on consumers' food purchase intention (Alwafi et al., 2022; Ingrassia et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2017; Soltani et al., 2020). It is still under-researched how SMFIs can impact consumers' intention to buy local food, which can affect local food tourism. This study fills this gap by employing the lens of parasocial relationships.

The parasocial relationship, as defined by parasocial theory, refers to one-sided, emotionally charged connections that individuals form with media personalities, including social media influencers (SMIs), despite the absence of reciprocal interaction (Stever, 2017). Originating from the concept of parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956), parasocial relationships (PSRs) mimic real-life relationships, wherein followers perceive intimacy and connection with influencers through their content. These relationships are driven by factors such as perceived similarity, attractiveness, and the expertise of the influencer. PSRs play a significant role in shaping consumer behavior, as followers often trust and emulate the actions of influencers, making them powerful tools in marketing and decision-making processes (Stever, 2017).

This study aims to address the following research questions: 1) What are the antecedents of the parasocial relationship between social media food influencers (SMFIs) and their followers? and 2) Does the parasocial relationship influence followers' intentions to purchase local food during their tourism experiences? By answering these research questions, the current study will enhance the understanding of SMFIs' roles in promoting tourism, particularly local food tourism.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Parasocial Relationship and Its Antecedents**

Parasocial relationship, initially conceptualized from the concept of parasocial interaction, refers to the pseudo-relationship between audiences and public figures through specific media (Brown, 2015; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Social media, with its interactive features such as comments and likes, facilitates the development of parasocial relationships between influencers and their followers (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Su et al., 2021). This plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behaviour, fostering brand awareness, and influencing purchase decision (Nor Azazi & Shaed, 2020; Rani et al., 2019; Tanković et al., 2022).

In the context of tourism, social media significantly impacts tourist decision-making, from planning to post-trip evaluations (Ramos & Hassan, 2021). Social media influencers (SMIs) sharing tourism-related content can elicit reactions from followers, thereby strengthening parasocial relationships (Choi et al., 2019; Kim & Kim, 2017). Frequent interactions with such content deepen the bond between followers and influencers, thereby increasing the influence of social media influencers' (SMIs) content on tourists' decisions (Meng et al., 2024; Tsotsou, 2016).

Some studies have explained the antecedents of parasocial relationships in social media. Firstly, Liu and Zheng (2024) as well as Lou and Kim (2019) elaborate that the advertising value (informativeness and entertainment) of SMIs' content can form the parasocial relationship. Parasocial relationships can also be formed by the social media influencers' interaction strategies, including interactivity and self-disclosure (Aw et al., 2023). Lastly, as explained by Dewantara et al. (2023) and Zheng et al. (2022) Influencers' credibility, including attractiveness and expertise, can also be a prerequisite for parasocial relationships.

### **2.2 Content Values and Parasocial Relationship**

Lou and Kim (2019) elaborates content values as two key attributes, informativeness and entertainment. Informative value refers to how well influencers provide valuable information related to products and services, making their content a primary source for consumers (Ki & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019). In social media, this is crucial as by providing essential product or service information, influencers can enhance their role as a trusted source of information (Liu & Zheng, 2024). On the other hand, entertainment value reflects the extent to which influencers' content is engaging, which aids influencers in establishing and maintaining relationships with their followers (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019).

Lou and Yuan (2019) explain that due to the content informativeness, influencer can form the followers' trust. Ki et al. (2020) also assert that informative content is proven to have the ability to form perceived emotional bonds with followers. Importantly, it has been found that informative content, in the context of general social media influencers (SMIs), enhances the parasocial relationship between SMIs and their followers, which subsequently impacts followers' attitudes and purchase intentions (Balaban et al., 2022).

Additionally, consumers' thoughts, attitudes, and behavior are also found to be impacted by entertainment values in influencers' content (Hamouda, 2018). Wu et al. (2019) explain that, due to its nature in fulfilling fans' hedonic needs, entertaining content can provide excitement and pleasure for followers, which in turn influences their behavior (Misra et al., 2024). Through entertaining content, followers perceive influencers as

attractive figures, which strengthens parasocial relationships (Yuan & Lou, 2020). Therefore, this current study hypothesizes that:

- H1: The informative value of social media food influencers' (SMFIs) content significantly and positively influences the parasocial relationship.
- H2: The entertainment value of social media food influencers' (SMFIs) content significantly and positively influences the parasocial relationship.

### 2.3 Interaction Strategies and Parasocial Relationship

To strengthen their bond with followers, influencers employ interaction strategies, including interactivity and self-disclosure (Aw et al., 2023). Interactivity, as explained Jun and Yi (2020), involves bidirectional communication through real-time interactions on social media. Self-disclosure is rooted in communication theory and reflects an individual's willingness to share thoughts and values (Jourard & Lasakow, 1958; Wheelles & Grots, 1977). Importantly, social media provides users with an instant way to disclose themselves to their followers (Walsh et al., 2020). Through self-disclosure, influencers can reveal private information, thereby enhancing followers' sense of friendliness (Kim, 2022; Sprecher et al., 2013).

Some studies have elaborated on how influencer interactivity can influence followers. As revealed by Jun and Yi (2020), Liu et al. (2020) and Paul et al. (2024), influencer interactivity significantly affects followers' intentions to purchase and their loyalty by fostering brand awareness and trust. Additionally, frequent interaction on social media has been identified as a prerequisite for a strong relationship between influencers and followers (Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Jun, 2020; Yuan & Lou, 2020). Through the personal reply feature, influencers' interactivity can not only become more intense but can also enhance followers' engagement (Lou, 2022).

Research also reveals that influencers' willingness to disclose personal information can influence followers' attitudes. Given the nature of influencers, who consistently share their ideas, emotions, and various aspects of their lives, self-disclosure can enhance followers' perceived intimacy (Aw & Chuah, 2021; Feng et al., 2020; Lou, 2022). Through self-disclosure, influencers can foster feelings of friendliness, relationship proximity, intimacy, and perceived credibility among their followers (Aw & Chuah, 2021; Kim, 2022; Leite et al., 2024; Leite & Baptista, 2022; Lin & Utz, 2017). Therefore, this current study hypothesis that:

- H3: The SMFIs' interactivity significantly and positively influences the parasocial relationship.
- H4: The SMFIs' self-disclosure significantly and positively influences the parasocial relationship.

### 2.4 Credibility and Parasocial Relationship

The delivery of information to followers is strongly determined by influencers' credibility, which includes expertise and attractiveness (Dewantara et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2022). Choi et al. (2019) and Xiao et al. (2018) explain that the knowledge shared by influencers demonstrates their area of expertise, which can influence the parasocial relationship and reinforce followers' intentions to comply with influencers' suggestions (Sakib et al., 2020). It has been found that influencers' expertise positively impacts the parasocial relationship and affects consumers' willingness to purchase (Farivar et al., 2021; Luarn et al., 2024; Patrício et al., 2024; Taher et al., 2022).

On social media, attractiveness has a strong influence on followers' behavior regarding specific products promoted by social media influencers (SMIs) (Gong & Li, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020). This current research specifically defines attractiveness as the aesthetic appeal of SMIs' posts on social media, extending the traditional view of attractiveness associated with the physical dimension. Aw and Chuah (2021), as well as Aw et al. (2023) elaborate that attractiveness should encompass both physical and visual appeal in social media content. Ki et al. (2020) discover that followers prefer to follow SMIs who post aesthetically pleasing content as a means to satisfy their psychological needs, which in turn influences their perceived emotional ties and fosters the parasocial relationship (Farivar et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023). Therefore, this current study hypothesizes that:

H5: The SMFIs' expertise significantly and positively influences the parasocial relationship.

H6: The SMFI's content attractiveness significantly and positively influences the parasocial relationship.

## **2.5 Parasocial Relationship and Local Food Purchase Intention**

Social media marketing efforts might lead to purchase intention. Based on Taher et al. (2022) when collaborating with social media influencers (SMIs), purchase intention serves as a useful indicator for measuring social media marketing performance. The repetitive interactions between SMIs and their followers, such as liking, commenting, or sharing posts, can establish and strengthen parasocial relationships, which can consequently influence consumers' behavioral intentions (Breves et al., 2021; Leite & Baptista, 2022). Through Instagram, users can recognize SMIs' credibility, and their purchase intentions are likely to be influenced (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Similarly, it has been found that adults' purchase intentions are significantly correlated with parasocial relationships (Lou & Kim, 2019). Hwang and Zhang (2018) also state that the parasocial relationship between social media users and digital celebrities positively influences users' intentions to purchase. Therefore, this current study hypothesizes that:

H7: The parasocial relationship between SMFIs and followers will significantly and positively influence the tourists' intention to purchase local food.

## **3. Conceptual Framework**

The empirical studies elaborated to support the hypotheses that SMFIs' informative value, entertainment value, interactivity, self-disclosure, expertise, and attractiveness influence the parasocial relationship, and the parasocial relationship itself can influence the local food purchase intention of SMFIs' followers. The conceptual framework is pictured in Figure 1.

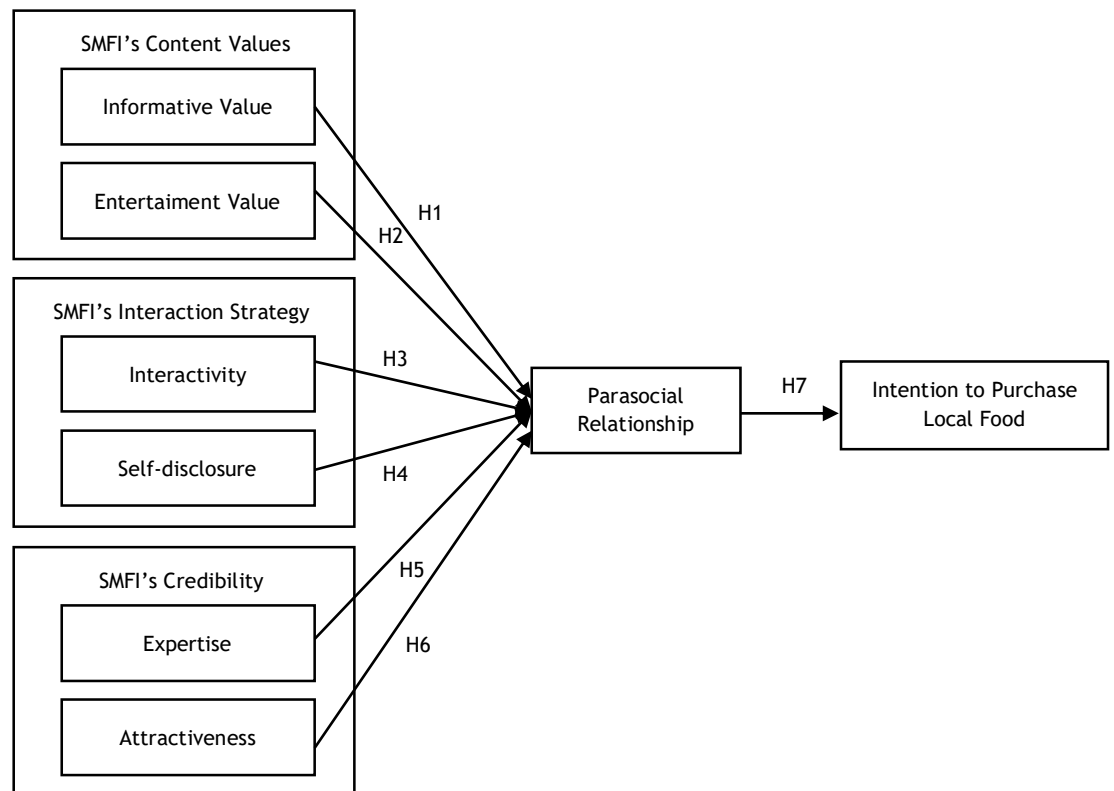


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of intention to purchase local food impacted by parasocial relationship influenced by informative value, entertainment value, interactivity, self-disclosure, expertise and attractiveness

The research hypotheses are as follows:

- H1: The SMFIs' content informative value significantly and positively influences the parasocial relationship.
- H2: The SMFIs' content entertainment value significantly and positively influences the parasocial relationship.
- H3: The SMFIs' interactivity significantly and positively influences the parasocial relationship.
- H4: The SMFIs' self-disclosure significantly and positively influences the parasocial relationship.
- H5: The SMFIs' expertise significantly and positively influences the parasocial relationship.
- H6: The SMFI's content attractiveness significantly and positively influences the parasocial relationship.
- H7: The parasocial relationship between SMFIs and followers significantly and positively influences the tourists' intention to purchase local food.

## 4. Methods

### 4.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach to test all stated hypotheses. To fulfill the research objective, five major cities in Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Jakarta, and Makassar, were selected for the study. The cities have cultural and culinary diversity. They represent Java Island and Sulawesi. Most importantly, the accessibility for data collection in these five major cities is significant for the researchers. A total of 439 social media users participated as respondents, and the data were analyzed using the Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Model (SEM-PLS) to



evaluate the complexity of the proposed model with a comparatively small sample size, in contrast to Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-CB) (Ahmed et al., 2024; Guenther et al., 2023).

#### 4.2 Sampling

Using a purposive sampling technique, this study recruited 439 respondents who filled out the research questionnaire. The respondents are Indonesians who 1) are active Instagram users, 2) follow social media food influencers (SMFIs) promoting local food, and 3) have consumed or intend to consume Indonesian local food during their travel occasions. Importantly, the adequacy of the number of respondents is validated using "The 10-times rule." This approach stipulates that the minimum number of respondents must be ten times greater than the number of indicators involved in the construct (Barclay et al., 1995). Since 42 indicators have been included in the research construct, 439 respondents are therefore deemed adequate.

#### 4.3 Measurement

The research measurements are developed based on existing literature. Respondents are asked to answer questions regarding influencers' informative value and entertainment value (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Yuan & Lou, 2020), interactivity (Jun & Yi, 2020), self-disclosure (Leite & Baptista, 2022), attractiveness, and expertise (Aw et al., 2023; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020), parasocial relationship (Liu & Zheng, 2024) and local food purchase intention (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020; Ki & Kim, 2019). All measurements are assessed using a five-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The operational definitions and measurement indicators can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Operational definition and indicators of an intention to purchase local food impacted by parasocial relationship influenced by informative value, entertainment value, interactivity, self-disclosure, expertise, and attractiveness

Variables	Operational Definition	Indicators
Informative Value (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Yuan & Lou, 2020)	The content's ability to deliver information related to the products or services	I personally think that SMFIs' contents I am following are: 1) Effective 2) Necessary 3) Helpful 4) Practical 5) Functional
Entertainment Value (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Yuan & Lou, 2020)	The content's ability to entertain consumers	I personally think that SMFIs' contents I am following are: 1) Fun 2) Exciting 3) Delightful 4) Thrilling 5) Enjoyable

Table 1. Operational definition and indicators of an intention to purchase local food impacted by parasocial relationship influenced by informative value, entertainment value, interactivity, self-disclosure, expertise, and attractiveness (Continue)

Variables	Operational Definition	Indicators
Interactivity (Jun & Yi, 2020)	The two-way activity occurring between influencers and followers (i.e., comments or feedback)	1) Interacting with SMFIs is like having a real conversation 2) I perceive SMFIs to be sensitive to my needs for information 3) SMFIs would respond to me quickly and efficiently 4) SMFIs allow me to communicate directly with her or him 5) SMFIs will talk back to me if I post a message
Self-Disclosure (Leite & Baptista, 2022)	The influencers' eagerness to disclose their thought, emotion, or personal opinion	1) SMFIs share information about their self 2) SMFIs talk about their behaviours 3) SMFIs share their feelings 4) SMFIs share their emotions 5) SMFIs share their desire 6) SMFIs share their thoughts 7) SMFIs share their opinions 8) SMFIs share their beliefs
Attractiveness (Aw et al., 2023; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020)	The visual appeal of social media influencers' content	1) I find SMFIs' contents I am following are good looking 2) I find SMFIs' contents I am following are attractive 3) I find SMFIs' contents I am following are visually appealing 4) I find SMFIs' contents I am following are charismatic 5) I find SMFIs' contents I am following are admirable 6) I find SMFIs' contents I am following are beautiful/handsome
Expertise (Aw et al., 2023; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020)	A social media influencer's content attribute reflects their greater knowledge in a particular area	1) When looking at SMFIs' contents, I find they are experienced 2) When looking SMFIs' contents, I find they are an expert 3) When looking at SMFIs' contents, I find they are qualified 4) When looking at SMFIs' contents, I find they have a good understanding of local food



Table 1. Operational definition and indicators of an intention to purchase local food impacted by parasocial relationship influenced by informative value, entertainment value, interactivity, self-disclosure, expertise, and attractiveness (Continue)

Variables	Operational Definition	Indicators
Expertise (Aw et al., 2023; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020)	A social media influencer's content attribute reflects their greater knowledge in a particular area	5) When looking at SMFIs' contents, I find they have experience in local food 6) When looking at SMFIs' contents, I find they are knowledgeable in local food
Parasocial Relationship (Liu & Zheng, 2024)	The one-sided relationships that followers form with social media influencers	1) I feel comfortable about the SMFIs' contents 2) I can rely on the information I get from the SMFIs 3) I will feel pity if something happens to the SMFIs 4) I think that the SMFIs are helpful for my interests
Purchase Intention (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020; Ki & Kim, 2019)	The likelihood of consumers to buy a particular product/service	1) I intend to consume local food when traveling 2) I am willing to consume local food when traveling 3) In the future, I am likely to try one of the same local foods as endorsed by the SMFIs

#### 4.4 Data Collection

The online survey method is utilised to collect data. The online survey platform (Google Form) was used to distribute the online questionnaire. The online questionnaire poster was posted on Instagram and also distributed through a chatting application (WhatsApp) to reach eligible respondents. As mentioned earlier, 439 respondents were involved due to this data collection process.

#### 4.5 Data Analysis

The PLS-SEM model was implemented using Smart-PLS 4.0 software to evaluate construct reliability and validity and to test the research hypotheses. The four-step process outlined (Hair et al., 2019) includes measuring indicator reliability and internal consistency reliability through the values of outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability, as well as assessing convergent validity and discriminant validity by evaluating the values of average variance extracted (AVE) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. These steps were conducted to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measurements. The research hypotheses were tested by measuring the path coefficients and R-squared (coefficient of determination) through the bootstrapping process.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Respondent Characteristics

Regarding gender distribution, the most significant proportion of respondents are female, comprising 69.9% (n=263), while males represent 30.1% (n=176). The age distribution reveals that 85.6% of respondents are between 18 and 29, 12.3% are aged 30 to 39, 1.4% are aged 40 to 49, and 0.7% are aged 50 to 59. Additionally, the majority of respondents are students (34.6%), followed by those employed in the private sector (17.8%), in state-owned enterprises, as civil servants, or in the military or police (15.5%), as entrepreneurs or self-employed individuals (13.2%), and academicians (7.5%). A detailed overview of respondents' characteristics is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Respondent characteristics

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	176	40.1
Female	263	59.9
<b>Age</b>		
18-29 yo	376	85.6
30-39 yo	54	12.3
40-49 yo	6	1.4
50-59 yo	3	0.7
<b>Domicile (Cities)</b>		
Makassar	151	34.4
Bandung	82	18.7
Yogyakarta	96	21.9
Jakarta	77	17.5
Surabaya	33	7.5
<b>Occupation</b>		
Students	152	34.6
Private Sector	78	17.8
Academicians (Lecturer, Teacher, etc)	33	7.5
Entrepreneurship / Self-Employed	58	13.2
State-owned Enterprise/Civil Servant/Military/ Police	68	15.5
Others	50	11.4
<b>Monthly Income</b>		
<IDR 3,500,000	201	45.8
IDR 3,500,001 - IDR. 5,500,000	142	32.3
IDR 5,000,001 - IDR. 7,500,000	34	7.7
IDR 7,500,001 - IDR. 10,000,000	22	5.0
>IDR 10,000,000	40	9.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>100</b>

## 5.2 Reliability and Validity Test

The four-step process begins with the measurement of outer loadings (0.708 or higher) to evaluate indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Table 3 presents the outer loadings for the measurements used, all of which exceed 0.708. In the second step, internal consistency reliability is assessed by measuring Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability. The standard value for Cronbach’s alpha is not less than 0.70, while composite reliability must be higher than 0.60 (Hair et al., 2022). Table 3 indicates that Cronbach’s alpha values for each instrument are higher than 0.70, and the composite reliability also exceeds the established threshold, concluding that the variable measurements possess internal consistency reliability. The third step involves evaluating convergent validity by measuring the average variance extracted (AVE), with a minimum AVE value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019). Table 3 shows that the AVE values for Informative Value (IFV), Entertainment Value (ETV), Interactivity (INTY), Self-Disclosure (SDR), Attractiveness (ATTS), Expertise (EXPS), Parasocial Relationship (PRS), and Purchase Intention (INTN) are 0.706, 0.752, 0.658, 0.614, 0.690, 0.683, 0.657, and 0.702, respectively.

Table 3. Outer loadings, AVE, Cronbach alpha, composite reliability

Variables Measurement	Outer Loadings	AVE	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability
<b>Informative Value</b>				
IFV.1	0.843			
IFV.2	0.854			
IFV.3	0.809	0.706	0.896	0.923
IFV.4	0.883			
IFV.5	0.810			
<b>Entertainment Value</b>				
ETV.1	0.814			
ETV.2	0.890			
ETV.3	0.892	0.752	0.917	0.938
ETV.4	0.854			
ETV.5	0.884			
<b>Interactivity</b>				
INTY.1	0.816			
INTY.2	0.813			
INTY.3	0.849	0.658	0.872	0.906
INTY.4	0.793			
INTY.5	0.785			
<b>Self-Disclosure</b>				
SDR.1	0.756			
SDR.2	0.738			
SDR.3	0.857			
SDR.4	0.809	0.614	0.910	0.927
SDR.5	0.795			
SDR.6	0.807			
SDR.7	0.724			
SDR.8	0.774			

Table 3. Outer loadings, AVE, Cronbach alpha, composite reliability (Continue)

Variables Measurement	Outer Loadings	AVE	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability
<b>Attractiveness</b>				
ATTS.1	0.816			
ATTS.2	0.768			
ATTS.3	0.846	0.690	0.910	0.930
ATTS.4	0.862			
ATTS.5	0.841			
ATTS.6	0.847			
<b>Expertise</b>				
EXPS.1	0.823			
EXPS.2	0.836			
EXPS.3	0.872	0.683	0.907	0.928
EXPS.4	0.822			
EXPS.5	0.855			
EXPS.6	0.747			
<b>Parasocial Relationship</b>				
PRS.1	0.841			
PRS.2	0.827	0.657	0.827	0.884
PRS.3	0.749			
PRS.4	0.822			
<b>Purchase Intention</b>				
INTN.1	0.840			
INTN.2	0.805	0.702	0.788	0.876
INTN.4	0.868			

Note: IFV: Informative Value, ETV: Entertainment Value, INTY: Interactivity, ATTS: Attractiveness, EXPS: Expertise, PRS: Parasocial Relationship, INTN: Purchase Intention, AVE: Average Varianced Extracted.

The final step in evaluating construct validity is evaluating discriminant validity through the Fornier-Larcker Criterion values. Table 4 shows the satisfactory values for each measurement as they are higher than their correlation with other instruments (Hair et al., 2019, 2022). Based on the four-step process, the research measurements show adequate reliability and validity values.

Table 4. Fornier-larcker criterion

Variable	IFV	ETV	INTY	SDR	EXPS	ATTS	PRS	INTN
IFV	<b>0.840</b>							
ETV	0.825	<b>0.867</b>						
INTY	0.540	0.469	<b>0.811</b>					
SDR	0.520	0.527	0.538	<b>0.783</b>				
EXPS	0.750	0.761	0.544	0.597	<b>0.827</b>			
ATTS	0.608	0.555	0.543	0.600	0.725	<b>0.830</b>		
PRS	0.677	0.638	0.551	0.576	0.751	0.678	<b>0.810</b>	
INTN	0.489	0.554	0.351	0.370	0.556	0.480	0.519	<b>0.838</b>

Note: IFV: Informative Value, ETV: Entertainment Value, INTY: Interactivity, ATTS: Attractiveness, EXPS: Expertise, PRS: Parasocial Relationship, INTN: Purchase Intention

### 5.3 Hypothesis Testing

As exhibited in Table 5 and Figure 2, the research findings from the bootstrapping process indicate that the influencers' informative value ( $\beta = 0.174$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), interactivity ( $\beta = 0.099$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), expertise ( $\beta = 0.354$ ;  $p > 0.01$ ), and attractiveness ( $\beta = 0.196$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ) have a positive and significant influence on the parasocial relationship. However, entertainment value and self-disclosure did not influence the parasocial relationship. In other words, the research findings support hypotheses H1, H3, H5, and H6. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is 0.637 (moderate), indicating that 63.7% of the included variables can explain the variance in the parasocial relationship. The findings also show that the parasocial relationship ( $\beta = 0.519$ ;  $p > 0.01$ ) positively and significantly influences followers' local food purchase intention, supporting hypothesis H7. Additionally, the  $R^2$  for this relationship is 0.289.

Table 5. Hypotheses testing results intention to purchase local food impacted by parasocial relationship influenced by informative value, entertainment value, interactivity, self-disclosure, expertise, and attractiveness

	Hypotheses	Path Coeff	R <sup>2</sup>	P Values	Result
H1	Informative Value → Parasocial Relationship	0.174	0.637	0.011**	Supported
H2	Entertainment Value → Parasocial Relationship	0.021		0.761	Not Supported
H3	Interactivity → Parasocial Relationship	0.099		0.019**	Supported
H4	Self-Disclosure → Parasocial Relationship	0.092		0.088	Not Supported
H5	Expertise → Parasocial Relationship	0.354		0.000***	Supported
H6	Attractiveness → Parasocial Relationship	0.196		0.020**	Supported
H7	Parasocial Relationship → Intention to Purchase	0.519	0.289	0.000***	Supported

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$

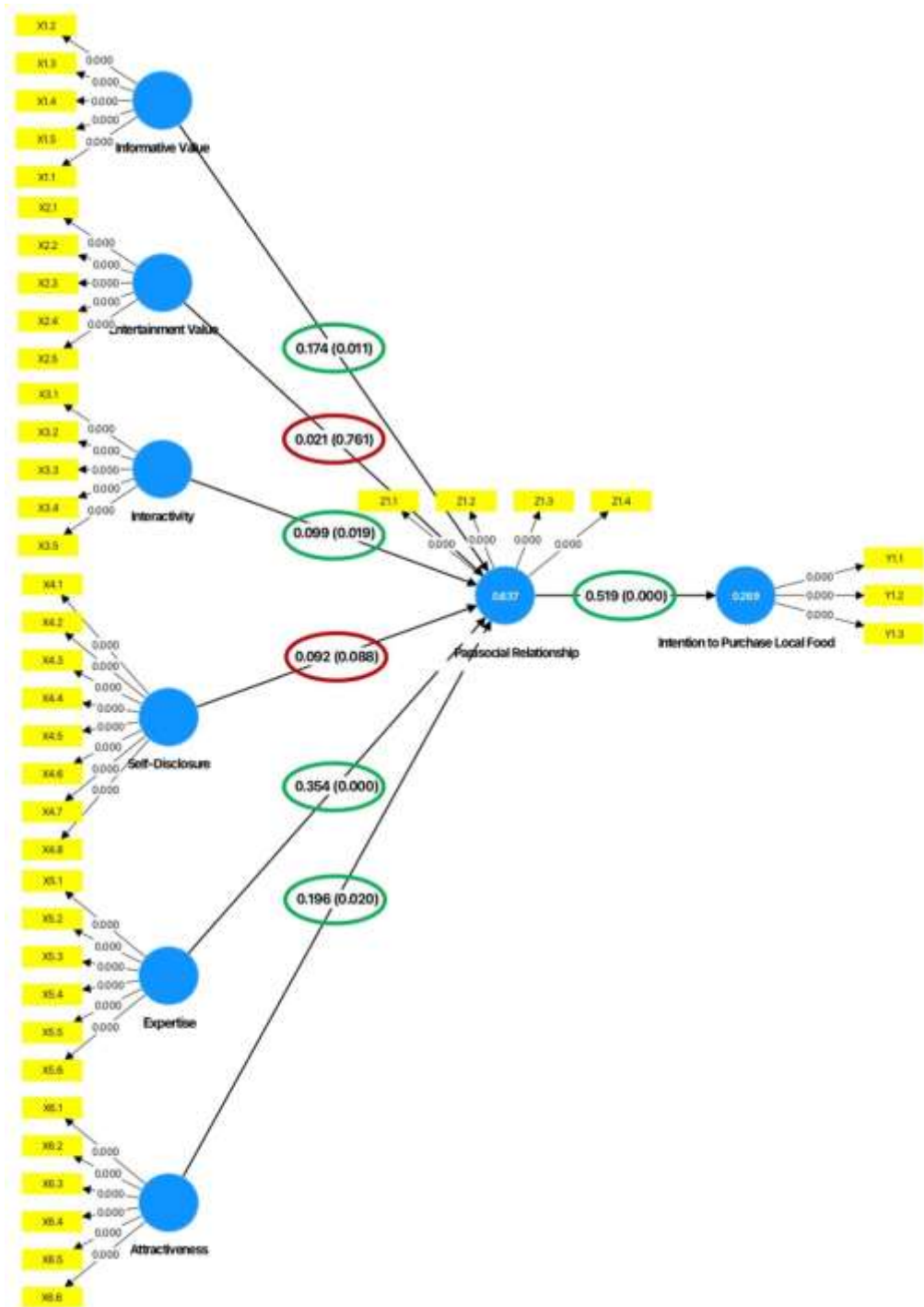


Figure 2. The SEM test results intention to purchase local food impacted by parasocial relationship influenced by informative value, entertainment value, interactivity, self-disclosure, expertise and attractiveness

## 6. Discussion

This study examines the role of parasocial relationships in shaping followers' local food purchase intentions, with a focus on the antecedents of parasocial relationships in the context of social media food influencers (SMFIs). The findings reveal that informative value (H1), interactivity (H3), expertise (H5), and attractiveness (H6) significantly and positively influence parasocial relationships, while entertainment value (H2) and self-disclosure (H4) do not. Furthermore, parasocial relationships (H7) significantly and positively influence followers' local food purchase intentions. Below, we elaborate on each hypothesis, linking the findings to previous research.



### **6.1 The Effect of Informative and Entertainment Value on Parasocial Relationship**

The research findings indicate that informative value positively influences parasocial relationships (H1). When social media food influencers (SMFIs) provide valuable, practical, and authentic information about local food, followers perceive them as credible and trustworthy sources, thereby enhancing the perceived parasocial relationship (Lou & Yuan, 2019). High-quality informative content has also been found to enhance followers' engagement and trust, which consequently fosters the parasocial relationship (Breves et al., 2024). Consistent with our findings, previous studies also support the notion that the SMI's informative content can strengthen the parasocial relationship between influencers and their followers (Liu & Zheng, 2024). This finding underscores the importance of informative value in building parasocial relationships, particularly in the context of food tourism, where practical insights are highly valued.

Contrary to expectations, this research reveals that the entertainment value of influencers' content did not influence the parasocial relationships (H2) between influencers and followers. Previous research explains why entertainment value in social media influencers' content fails to impact parasocial relationships. Although social media food-related content can be utilitarian (informative) or hedonic (entertainment), studies indicate that informative content is more likely to resonate with users and encourage interaction, which may foster the parasocial relationship among followers, as mentioned previously (Avelino et al., 2024). Additionally, research elaborates that followers of social media influencers often prioritize practical and informative content over entertainment content, thereby weakening the latter's effect on parasocial relationships (Liu & Zheng, 2024). While entertainment value may enhance initial engagement, informative content fosters deeper emotional bonds and trust, making it a more significant driver of parasocial relationships in the context of social media food influencers.

### **6.2 The Effect of Interactivity and Self-Disclosure on Parasocial Relationship**

Additionally, this research shows that interactivity significantly influences the parasocial relationship (H3). Social media food influencers (SMFIs) who actively engage with their followers through various social media features, including comments, likes, or direct messages, can foster stronger parasocial relationships, as interactivity makes followers feel more connected and valued, thereby enhancing the perceived quality of the relationship (Aw et al., 2023; Aw & Chuah, 2021; Yuan & Lou, 2020). This finding reinforces the importance of SMFI interactivity as a key driver of parasocial relationships in the context of social media food marketing.

However, the self-disclosure of social media influencers (SMIs) has been found not to influence parasocial relationships, which contrasts with previous research findings (Leite & Baptista, 2022; Zhang, 2024). This may be attributed to a lack of congruence between the SMI and followers or the type of influencer self-disclosure (personal or professional) not aligning with the followers' personas (Koay et al., 2023; Zhang, 2024). Thus, the effectiveness of self-disclosure in fostering parasocial relationships may depend on the alignment between the influencer's type of disclosure (personal or professional) and the followers' expectations, highlighting the importance of congruence in building meaningful connections.

### **6.3 The Effect of Expertise and Attractiveness on Parasocial Relationship**

Further, this research demonstrates the importance of expertise (H5) in shaping the parasocial relationship between social media influencers (SMIs) and their followers. This

finding is consistent with previous studies that explain how expertise enhances the perceived trustworthiness and credibility of influencers, which are crucial for developing strong parasocial relationships (Ashraf et al., 2023; Dewantara et al., 2023; Lawrence & Meivitananli, 2023). Attractiveness (H6) also emerges as a significant antecedent of the parasocial relationship, expanding the traditional understanding of physical appeal to encompass content aesthetics, which are critical in culinary tourism (Aw & Chuah, 2021). These findings highlight that both expertise and attractiveness are pivotal in fostering parasocial relationships, as they enhance the perceived credibility and aesthetic appeal of influencers, making them more influential in shaping followers' perceptions and behaviors.

#### **6.4 The Effect of Parasocial Relationship and Purchase Intention**

The research findings reveal that parasocial relationships have a positive and significant influence on followers' purchase intentions (H7). This supports previous studies that elaborate on the direct correlation between parasocial relationships and consumer purchase intentions (Awawdeh et al., 2024; Hanief et al., 2019; Hermanda et al., 2019). Additionally, this study corroborates findings indicating that, through parasocial relationships, followers' emotional bonds with influencers can be shaped, consequently affecting consumer behavior (Breves et al., 2021; Lou & Kim, 2019). These findings underscore the pivotal role of parasocial relationships in shaping consumer behavior, as the emotional bonds formed between followers and influencers significantly enhance trust and the willingness to act on recommendations, ultimately driving purchase intentions.

#### **6.5 Managerial Implications**

Practically, the research findings offer significant implications for tourism marketers and local food business managers. Social media food influencers (SMFIs) can be considered influential promoters of local food, enhancing tourists' interest and purchase intentions through the parasocial relationships facilitated by social media. Local food industry stakeholders should prioritize collaboration with SMFIs to create informative content that provides practical insights about local food and focus on actively engaging with followers through comments, likes, direct messages, or live streaming. Additionally, partnering with influencers who demonstrate expertise in local cuisine and possess appealing content aesthetics is crucial, as this combination enhances credibility and attracts more followers, ultimately driving purchase intentions. By implementing these strategies, local food businesses can cultivate stronger connections with consumers, leading to increased sales and a more robust economic impact within the community.

#### **6.6 Theoretical Implications**

Theoretically, this study expands the scope of parasocial relationship theory by applying it to the local food tourism context, which remains underexplored. Consistent with various studies, this research highlights the importance of social media food influencers' (SMFIs) informative content, interactivity, expertise, and attractiveness in developing a strong bond between influencers and followers. Consequently, these factors foster the parasocial relationship, which has been found to have a significant positive influence on followers' intentions to purchase local food during their tourism experiences. Through the lens of parasocial relationship theory, this research emphasizes the strong potential of SMFIs in promoting local food tourism.

## 6.7 Limitations

Some limitations may impact the generalizability and applicability of the findings. Firstly, the R-squared values fall within the moderate and weak categories, indicating limited explanatory power. Additionally, the survey only covers five major cities in Indonesia, which may not comprehensively capture the diverse perspectives of social media users in other regions. Furthermore, the respondents consist solely of Instagram users, which restricts the applicability of the findings to other social media platforms. The focus on a single social media platform may also limit understanding how parasocial relationships manifest in a more diverse social media landscape.

## 7. Conclusions

In summary, this study highlights the critical role that social media food influencers (SMFIs) play in fostering parasocial relationships, which significantly influence followers' intentions to purchase local food. The findings address the research questions by demonstrating that, in the context of local food, SMFIs' informative content, interactive communication, perceived expertise, and attractiveness serve as antecedents of parasocial relationships. Consequently, a stronger perceived relationship among followers enhances the likelihood of purchasing local food. This research contributes valuable insights into the dynamics of social media influencer marketing in the context of local food consumption and tourism. As social media continues to evolve, understanding the nature of this interaction will be crucial for local food stakeholders seeking to connect with consumers in meaningful ways.

## 8. Recommendations

The current study proposes several recommendations for future research. Firstly, it is essential for future studies to extend the geographical distribution of respondents to include a more diverse range of regions. This approach will facilitate a deeper understanding of the varying impacts of social media food influencers (SMFIs) across different cultural contexts. Additionally, researchers should explore the dynamics of parasocial relationships across various social media platforms, such as TikTok and YouTube, to gain a comprehensive understanding of influencer marketing in a multi-platform environment. Furthermore, differentiating between micro and macro influencers in future studies could provide insights into how varying levels of reach and engagement affect followers' purchase intentions and the strength of parasocial relationships. Lastly, conducting longitudinal studies would be beneficial for understanding how parasocial relationships evolve over time and their long-term effects on consumer behavior and brand loyalty. By addressing these recommendations, future research can significantly contribute to the understanding of how SMFIs can foster parasocial relationships and consequently influence followers' behavior.

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