

INFLUENCER EXPERTISE, RELATABILITY, AUTHENTICITY, AND PURCHASE INTENTION FOR LOCAL FOOD BRANDS

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Abstract. This study investigated the influence of three critical dimensions of social media influencers—expertise, relatability, and authenticity—on consumers' purchase intention toward local food brands. Employing a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, data were collected from 122 respondents using a structured survey questionnaire. The research instrument demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.783, thereby confirming strong internal consistency across all constructs. Descriptive statistics provided insights into respondents' perceptions of influencer characteristics and purchase intent, while Pearson correlation analysis was utilized to determine the strength of associations among variables. Findings revealed that respondents generally held favorable perceptions of influencer expertise, relatability, and authenticity, alongside positive purchase intentions. Correlation results indicated very strong positive relationships between each influencer attribute and purchase intent: expertise ($r = 0.895$), relatability ($r = 0.823$), and authenticity ($r = 0.903$). Moreover, the interconnected nature of these influencer qualities underscores their collective impact on consumer decision-making. These empirical insights highlight the strategic importance of credible, relatable, and authentic influencer collaborations in shaping consumer behavior. Ultimately, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital marketing by offering practical recommendations for local food businesses to strengthen brand trust, optimize social media campaigns, and systematically drive purchase intentions through influencer engagement.

Keywords: *Influencer authenticity, influencer expertise, influencer relatability, local food brands, purchase intention*

Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed how consumers discover, evaluate, and engage with brands, including small-scale, family-owned, and emerging local food businesses in Cebu, Philippines. In this environment, social media influencers have become highly visible actors whose content can shape consumer perceptions and influence purchase intentions. For local food brands, influencer marketing is particularly relevant because consumers often evaluate not only the promoted product but also the endorser's perceived credibility, familiarity, and genuineness. Accordingly, identifying which influencer characteristics are most strongly

associated with purchase intentions provides local food businesses with a more evidence-based foundation for developing effective social media strategies, emphasizing the importance of influencer expertise, relatability, and authenticity.

The existing empirical studies affirm the importance of influencer credibility and authenticity in shaping consumer behavior. Liu and Zheng (2024) highlighted the persuasive role of influencer content and authenticity in improving brand credibility and purchase intention. Pratiwi et al. (2025) examined influencer credibility, authenticity, and engagement in live shopping contexts, stressing their relevance to consumer decision-making. Similarly, Aurellia and Dewi (2025) demonstrated how authenticity and homophily on TikTok foster parasocial relationships that strengthen purchase intentions. Other scholars, including Gökerik (2024) and Kim et al. (2024), have also examined the relationship between influencer marketing characteristics and consumer responses, supporting the importance of influencer attributes in brand communication and highlighting the need for further research in local food contexts.

Within this body of literature, expertise, relatability, and authenticity represent distinct yet complementary dimensions. Expertise refers to influencers' perceived knowledge or competence regarding endorsed products. Relatability reflects perceived similarity, familiarity, or the influencer's ability to connect with consumers. Authenticity concerns perceptions of sincerity, genuineness, and credibility beyond promotional intent. While prior studies have examined these attributes individually, few have simultaneously analyzed their combined effects in the context of local food brands. Integrating these dimensions into a single empirical model may therefore yield a more thorough understanding of how influencer characteristics collectively shape purchase intentions.

The attributes of expertise, relatability, and authenticity may be particularly salient for local food businesses, where consumer relationships are closely tied to community identity, trust, and perceptions of genuineness. Research on smaller-scale enterprises suggests that credible and authentic brand representatives can generate stronger consumer responses and purchase-related outcomes (Sumba-Nacipucha et al., 2026). However, much of the existing literature has focused on large commercial brands, social commerce platforms, or highly digitalized environments, leaving a contextual gap in understanding how consumers evaluate influencer expertise, relatability, and authenticity specifically within local food markets. Addressing this gap is essential to develop targeted strategies for local food brands in Cebu and similar settings.

The Philippine context is particularly relevant for this inquiry. Local food businesses increasingly rely on social media as an accessible channel for product discovery, brand communication, and consumer engagement. Philippine-based influencers often interact with audiences through perceived familiarity and community-oriented ties, which may amplify relatability and authenticity. Despite the growing adoption of influencer marketing, empirical research examining the combined effects of expertise, relatability, and authenticity on purchase intention in the Philippine local food sector remains limited. Addressing this gap can generate context-specific evidence that enriches the global literature on influencer marketing and consumer behavior.

Against this background, the present study examines how influencer expertise, relatability, and authenticity shape consumers' purchase intentions toward local food brands. Rather than relying on a single formal theoretical framework, the study draws on empirical literature to

examine these attributes both individually and collectively. Specifically, it explores the relationships between each characteristic and purchase intention, identifies which dimension exerts the strongest influence when considered simultaneously, and assesses their combined predictive contribution. This integrated framework furnishes a robust empirical basis for understanding how influencer qualities drive consumer responses in local food markets.

Research Questions:

Although local food businesses increasingly use social media influencers to promote products, empirical evidence on how specific influencer characteristics—expertise, relatability, and authenticity—collectively shape consumers’ purchase intentions remains limited.

Existing studies often examine these attributes separately or in broader commercial contexts, leaving a gap in understanding their combined effects within local food markets, particularly in the Philippine setting. This lack of integrated evidence makes it difficult for local food brands to determine how strongly consumers agree with these constructs, identify the strength of their relationships with purchase intention, and translate findings into actionable marketing strategies.

With that in mind, this study is directed towards the following research questions:

1. To what extent do respondents demonstrate agreement with the constructs of influencer expertise, relatability, authenticity, and purchase intention?
2. What significant relationships can be identified between:
 - 2.1. influencer expertise and purchase intention;
 - 2.2. relatability and purchase intention; and
 - 2.3. authenticity and purchase intention?
3. Based on the empirical findings, what strategic recommendations can be formulated to strengthen the marketing approaches of local food brands through influencer collaborations?

Methodology

Design

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design to examine how influencer expertise, relatability, and authenticity influence purchase intention for local food brands. A structured survey questionnaire served as the primary data-gathering tool, ensuring systematic collection and statistical analysis of the variables under investigation. The instrument's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a high reliability coefficient of 0.907, indicating consistent measurement. Descriptive statistics summarized respondents' perceptions of influencer characteristics and purchase intent. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to assess the strength and direction of the relationships among influencer expertise, relatability, authenticity, and purchase intent.

Locale

This research was conducted in two different settings in the province of Cebu. The initial test phase took place at St. Cecilia's College - Cebu, Inc., an academic institution in Poblacion Ward II, Minglanilla, Cebu. The researchers used this venue to assess the questionnaire's clarity,

validity, and internal consistency among a specific group of college students before full implementation.

The researchers then conducted the primary survey through digital platforms, targeting local customers throughout Cebu, Philippines. By using an online platform, the researchers effectively connected with local customers who actively use social media and follow local food labels. This location offers insight into how influencers in the Philippines influence consumers' buying choices and brand perceptions in Cebu's local food sector.

Respondents

The study focused on local consumers in Cebu, Philippines, who are active on social media and make purchasing decisions about local food products. To ensure data accuracy and reliability, the research was conducted in two stages with 122 participants. The initial phase included a pilot test with 20 students from St. Cecilia's College, Cebu, Inc., to assess the questionnaire's clarity, readability, validity, and reliability before the full study. After validating the survey instrument, the researchers conducted the main data collection online with 102 local participants from Cebu to obtain primary empirical evidence. To select respondents, the researchers used quota sampling, which allowed them to include participants across predetermined categories and ensure balanced representation in the sample.

Instrument

The main tool used to gather information for this research was a structured, self-developed survey questionnaire that respondents completed themselves. This survey was specifically created to assess how consumers perceive and intend to behave towards local food brands. The questionnaire included four main components: (a) Expertise of Influencers, (b) Relatability, (c) Authenticity, and (d) Intent to Purchase. To ensure detailed feedback and reduce bias toward neutral responses, each question was rated on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 4 ("Strongly Agree"). Moreover, the four-point Likert scale was intentionally used to minimize central tendency bias and ensure that respondents expressed clearer agreement or disagreement with each item.

The instrument underwent thorough validation and internal consistency assessment. Three (3) experts assessed the tool for face validity, and a preliminary testing phase refined the language and ensured item clarity. The overall tool showed strong internal consistency, with a total Cronbach's alpha of 0.905 across all 20 items (5 items per category). These findings confirmed the tool's high reliability and suitability for collecting reliable empirical data for statistical evaluation.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data-gathering process followed two systematic phases to ensure accurate tools, consistent procedures, and high-quality responses. First, the team conducted a pilot test in which 20 students from St. Cecilia's College - Cebu, Inc. completed online surveys to assess the clarity, readability, and reliability of the questions. The team carefully examined feedback and reliability scores from this initial phase to confirm that the research tool had been adjusted correctly and was ready for larger-scale implementation. After confirmation, the team rolled out the primary survey

through online platforms, targeting 102 local consumers in Cebu, Philippines, who are actively engaged with social media content and local food labels.

Data Analysis

The gathered data were screened, coded, and assessed for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. Descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation, summarized influencer expertise, relatability, authenticity, and purchase intention. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to assess the direction, strength, and statistical significance of relationships between each influencer characteristic and purchase intention. Before the correlation analysis, the assumptions of Pearson's r , including approximate normality, linearity, the absence of influential outliers, and independence of observations, were assessed and found to be satisfied.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to established ethical guidelines for academic research to protect the rights, dignity, and confidentiality of all participants. Before conducting the survey, each respondent was provided informed consent, ensuring they understood the study's goals, objectives, and voluntary nature. Participants were clearly informed that they could refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequences. To ensure complete anonymity and data protection, no personally identifiable details, such as names, contact information, or IP addresses, were gathered. All electronic data collected were anonymized, stored in encrypted, password-protected files, and accessed only by the research team for statistical analysis in accordance with relevant data protection rules. Lastly, the researchers upheld the highest standards of intellectual honesty by reporting all research findings truthfully, without distortion, prejudice, or selective reporting.

Results and Discussions

Table 1.

Reliability and descriptive statistics of the study constructs, including Influencer Expertise, Relatability, Authenticity, and Purchase Intention

Construct Instruments	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Influencer Expertise	0.804	3.15	0.693	Agree
Relatability	0.718	3.25	0.556	Agree
Authenticity	0.809	3.05	0.671	Agree
Purchase Intention	0.802	3.04	0.629	Agree
Overall Mean	0.783	3.12	0.637	Agree

Legend: 4.0-3.25 Strongly Agree; 3.24-2.50 Agree; 2.49-1.75 Disagree; 1.74-1.0 Strong Disagree

Table 1 presents the reliability and descriptive statistics, showing that all constructs—Influencer Expertise, Relatability, Authenticity, and Purchase Intention—exhibited strong internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.718 to 0.809 and an overall reliability coefficient of 0.783. These values surpass the accepted threshold of 0.70, confirming that the measurement instruments are dependable and that the items within each construct consistently capture the intended dimensions.

In terms of central tendency, the mean scores ranged narrowly from 3.04 to 3.25, with Relatability emerging as the highest-rated construct ($M = 3.25$) and Purchase Intention as the lowest ($M = 3.04$). This pattern suggests that respondents perceived influencers as moderately relatable, while their intention to purchase was comparatively less pronounced. Influencer Expertise ($M = 3.15$) and Authenticity ($M = 3.05$) also received moderate ratings, indicating that while respondents acknowledged these qualities, they may not emphasize them as strongly as relatability. The relatively low standard deviation values (0.556–0.693) further highlight the consistency of responses, implying limited variability in perceptions across the sample.

Previous studies contributed to the study’s findings, as shown in Table 1. Firstly, relatability-like constructs such as homophily, similarity, and parasocial relationship usually support purchase intention indirectly or less consistently than authenticity and credibility (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Masuda et al., 2022; Shoenberger & Kim, 2022). Second, studies show that when followers evaluate product recommendations from knowledgeable creators, they tend to consider them, as this directly increases their likelihood of making a purchase (Gomes et al., 2022; Koay et al., 2021; Weismueller et al., 2020). Lastly, multiple papers indicated that authenticity captures the degree to which an influencer is perceived as genuinely communicating their true stance rather than acting solely out of commercial interest (Coutinho et al., 2023; Roth-Cohen et al., 2024; Zniva et al., 2023)

Taken together, these findings suggest that the constructs of influencer attributes were viewed positively, suggesting that it potentially helps people intend to buy products or services if these influencers manifest expertise in their content material, easily connect to their followers by sharing similar experiences, and are authentic by providing their objective comments with their sponsored content.

Table 2.

Correlational Analysis Between Influencer Expertise and Purchase Intention

IV	DV	Pearson’s r	P-value	Interpretation
Influencer Expertise	Purchase Intention	0.895	< 0.01	Very Strong Correlation

Legend: 0-.199 Very Weak; 0.20-0.399 Weak; 0.40-0.599 Moderate; 0.60-0.799 Strong; 0.80-1.000 Very Strong Correlation

Based on the table above, a significant positive correlation was found between influencer expertise and purchase intention, with $r = 0.895$ ($p < 0.05$). This implies that when consumers believe social media influencers have deep product knowledge, industry expertise, and mastery of a particular subject, their likelihood of buying local food brands endorsed by these influencers rises notably. In local food promotion, expertise serves as a key indicator of credibility, reducing

the perceived risks and uncertainties consumers face when evaluating new or small-scale food items.

These results correspond with Liu and Zheng (2024), who found that influencer trustworthiness, particularly knowledge and the provision of useful information, directly and positively affects followers' purchase decisions. Weismueller et al. (2020) also emphasized that practical trustworthiness characteristics, such as perceived expertise, are more likely to predict consumer reactions than surface-level measures such as follower count. When local food brands partner with influencers who demonstrate authentic culinary expertise, clear product evaluation skills, and engaging storytelling, consumers interpret these recommendations as reliable signs of quality, reinforcing their purchase intentions.

Table 3.

Correlational Analysis Between Relatability and Purchase Intention

IV	DV	Pearson's r	P-value	Interpretation
Relatability	Purchase Intention	0.823	< 0.01	Very Strong Correlation

Legend: 0-.199 Very Weak; 0.20-0.399 Weak; 0.40-0.599 Moderate; 0.60-0.799 Strong; 0.80-1.000 Very Strong Correlation

The findings showed a strong positive correlation between consumers' perception of influencers as relatable and their intention to buy products ($r = 0.823$, $p < 0.01$). This result indicates that when consumers view influencers as more relatable and share similar values and lifestyle choices, their interest in purchasing local food brands promoted by these influencers increases significantly. When followers see an influencer as approachable or relatable, the promotion comes across as a genuine peer recommendation rather than a typical advertisement.

This finding is consistent with literature suggesting that perceived relatability may be associated with stronger consumer engagement and purchase intention. In fact, Liu and Zheng (2024), Masuda et al. (2022), and Sokolva and Kefi (2020) shared the same sentiment that relatable social media influencers significantly increase consumers' likelihood of buying products through fostering parasocial relationships and perceived similarity, which serve as the primary psychological mechanisms linking influencer characteristics to purchase intention. Additionally, Syarif et al. (2025) found that food-focused social media influencers can increase followers' interest in buying local food products through fostering one-sided relationships based on emotional bonding and perceived likeness. Wahyudi et al. (2025) also verified that relatability and trust indicators considerably influence consumer buying choices, especially in communities and emerging markets. Using relatable influencers can help local food brands boost visibility and local pride, turning emotional connection directly into purchasing actions.

Table 4.

Correlational Analysis Between Authenticity and Purchase Intention

IV	DV	Pearson's r	P-value	Interpretation
Authenticity	Purchase Intention	0.903	<0.05	Very Strong Correlation

Legend: 0-.199 Very Weak; 0.20-0.399 Weak; 0.40-0.599 Moderate; 0.60-0.799 Strong; 0.80-1.000 Very Strong Correlation

The results showed a very strong positive connection between influencer authenticity and respondents' purchase intention ($r = 0.903$, $p < 0.05$). The finding suggests that perceived influencer authenticity may be particularly relevant to consumers' purchase intentions toward local food brands. Among the three qualities examined, authenticity showed the highest correlation, emphasizing its significant impact. In the digital food industry, authenticity plays a crucial role in building trust and reducing consumer doubt about marketing campaigns. By showing spontaneous reactions, honest taste tests, and clear disclosures, influencers appear genuine, increasing consumers' willingness to purchase.

These findings align with Gohil et al. (2025), who found that perceived influencer authenticity significantly boosts purchase intentions by building interpersonal trust and credibility, especially among younger age groups. Additionally, Moreno-Quispe & Hernandez-Rojas (2026) noted that authenticity in food-related advertising improves the value of the experience and customer satisfaction, directly reinforcing future actions and purchasing plans. Additionally, Aurellia and Dewi (2025) found that genuine influencer content fosters parasocial connections that reduce skepticism and influence product choices. In essence, for local food brands, partnering with honest, genuine content creators is the most effective strategy for building lasting consumer trust and increasing sales conversions.

Conclusion

The study examined the relationships between influencer expertise, relatability, authenticity, and consumers' purchase intention toward local food brands in Cebu, Philippines. The findings revealed significant positive relationships between each influencer characteristic and purchase intention. Influencer authenticity demonstrated the strongest bivariate relationship with purchase intention ($r = .903$), followed by influencer expertise ($r = .895$) and relatability ($r = .823$). These findings indicate that consumers who reported higher perceptions of influencer authenticity, expertise, and relatability also tended to report higher purchase intention toward local food brands.

Among the three characteristics, authenticity showed the highest correlation coefficient; however, this finding reflects the strongest observed bivariate association rather than evidence that authenticity causes or uniquely predicts purchase intention. The findings therefore suggest that perceived genuineness, knowledge, and relatability of influencers are relevant considerations in understanding consumers' purchase intentions toward local food brands.

The study contributes context-specific empirical evidence to the influencer marketing literature by examining these three characteristics among local food brands and Filipino consumers. For practitioners, the findings suggest prioritizing perceived authenticity and expertise

over follower count, as these qualities more directly shape purchase intentions. In particular, selecting influencers who are perceived as authentic, knowledgeable, and relatable may be relevant to consumer-oriented promotional efforts.

Nevertheless, because the study employed a correlational design, the findings should not be interpreted as demonstrating causal effects on actual purchasing behavior, sales, or profits. This limitation is critical: while strong associations were observed, they indicate relationships rather than direct cause and effect. Future research using experimental or longitudinal designs is necessary to establish whether influencer authenticity, expertise, and relatability truly drive consumer purchases over time.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study proposes several recommendations for future research and practice. First, local food businesses may consider evaluating influencers not only by audience size but also by perceived authenticity, expertise, and relatability when developing endorsement strategies. These characteristics demonstrated strong positive relationships with consumers' purchase intention in the present study. However, businesses should avoid assuming that these characteristics directly cause purchases, as the present findings are correlational.

In addition to the first recommendation, local food businesses may implement influencer evaluation frameworks that assess authenticity through content transparency, expertise through demonstrated product knowledge, and relatability through shared cultural or community ties.

Second, future studies may use larger, more diverse samples across Philippine regions and demographic groups to determine whether the observed relationships remain consistent across populations and local market contexts. Replication studies involving consumers from different geographical areas may also strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

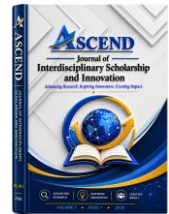
Third, future researchers may examine other influencer characteristics, such as attractiveness, engagement style, credibility, or emotional appeal, to better understand the factors associated with consumers' purchase intentions. Researchers may also investigate whether the relationships observed in the present study vary across different product categories, including fashion, technology, personal care, or other consumer products.

Fourth, future studies may examine variables that could help explain the relationships between influencer characteristics and purchase intention. Potential variables include consumer trust, brand attitude, perceived value, brand loyalty, or parasocial relationships. When theoretically and methodologically justified, such studies could use mediation or moderation analyses.

Finally, future research may employ longitudinal or experimental designs to provide stronger evidence regarding temporal relationships and potential causal mechanisms. For example, experimental studies could compare consumer responses to endorsements featuring different levels of perceived expertise, relatability, or authenticity. Such approaches would complement the present correlational findings and provide stronger evidence concerning whether and how influencer characteristics contribute to changes in consumer purchase intention.

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