



Douyin food vloggers' impact on visit intention: Taste awareness as a mediator

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How to cite: Guo, R., Gao, H., & Yang, Z. (2024). Douyin food vloggers' impact on visit intention: Taste awareness as a mediator. *Social Behavior and Personality: An international journal*, 52(12), e13792

With the proliferation of social media in modern life, short-video platforms such as Douyin have become an essential venue for consumers to discover new culinary trends and dining locations. This paper explored how the credibility of food exploration short-video bloggers (vloggers) on the Douyin platform influences the audience's willingness to visit food locations by forming their taste awareness. We conducted a survey of 437 Douyin users to investigate the relationships between source credibility, visit intention, and the formation of taste awareness. The results showed a significant positive correlation between source credibility and visit intention, with taste awareness formation partially mediating this relationship. Our findings provide a new perspective on understanding how vloggers influence consumer behavior at the cognitive level. Practical recommendations for food industries include utilizing social media marketing and content creators to build audience trust and influence decision making.

Keywords

food exploration, vlogger, source credibility, visit intention, taste awareness, social media

Article Highlights

- This study explored how the marketing mechanisms of Douyin vloggers affect the cognitive decision making of their viewers regarding visit intention.
- The credibility of food exploration vloggers was found to be positively correlated with the audience's visit intention.
- Taste awareness formation played a partial mediating in the relationship between the credibility of food exploration vloggers and the audience's visit intention.

Social media has become an indispensable part of modern life, and short videos, as an emerging medium, are increasingly becoming an essential venue for information dissemination and cultural exchange. As of June 2023, the number of short video users in China reached 1.03 billion, with a user utilization rate of 95.2% (China Internet Network Information Center, 2023). Short videos demonstrate immense marketing potential with entertainment value, visual appeal, and ease of sharing (Adeola et al., 2020), changing the traditional content-consumption model and bringing innovation to marketing practices. Video bloggers, or vloggers, are key in short-video marketing; they attract a large audience and establish trust and intimacy through creating engaging content (Durmuş Şenyapar, 2024). These vloggers usually have significant influence and can effectively promote products or services, affecting consumers' purchasing decisions (Mainolfi & Vergura, 2022).

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Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) occupies a significant market position due to its innovative content-publishing mechanism and high user engagement among short video platforms. In 2023 Douyin reached 746.5 million monthly active users; thus, its vast user base brings enormous marketing potential to the platform. Further, Douyin has gathered many content creators, among them top influencers who can significantly impact their followers' purchasing behaviors (Dou et al., 2023). In a survey by Statista (2023), 43% of Douyin users indicated that their purchasing decisions are influenced by celebrity or influencer advertisements. Therefore, it is necessary to delve into the marketing potential of Douyin vloggers and explore their mechanisms in influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

The impact that vloggers have on their audience's consumption attitudes and behaviors is attracting increasing research attention (Al Kurdi et al., 2022; Silaban et al., 2022). The influence of vloggers has extended from promoting online shopping behavior to directly affecting consumers' real-life activities and offline consumption behaviors (Ngo et al., 2023). It is particularly evident in relation to food exploration, since vloggers often create videos exploring various cuisines and restaurants. These videos cover aspects like recipes, restaurant ambiance, pricing, and detailed descriptions of the food's appearance and taste, and they sometimes include cooking methods and cultural background stories. Although researchers have explored the impact of food-exploration vloggers on the audience's offline visitation attitudes and behaviors from emotional perspectives like parasocial interaction relationships and emotional attachment (Mainolfi, Lo Presti, et al., 2022; Yousaf, 2022), the cognitive aspects remain poorly understood. Therefore, we investigated food-exploration vloggers on the Douyin platform, analyzing from a cognitive perspective how these vloggers influence their audience's culinary experience decision making and intention to visit, paying particular attention to the role of forming taste expectations.

Source Credibility and Intention to Visit

Source credibility refers to the perception of the authenticity of an information source transmitting a message or information (Eisend, 2006). On short video platforms, vloggers are the source transmitting information through content sharing, acting as an essential information channel for the audience. This study adopted the credibility concept model by Munnukka et al. (2016), according to which the credibility of a vlogger is based on their expertise in their professional field, trustworthiness in communication, attractiveness, and similarity to the audience. These factors collectively influence the audience's acceptance of the vlogger's information and their trust in the vlogger's recommendations. Researchers have suggested that the credibility of vloggers is a crucial factor influencing consumer behavior (Palilingan et al., 2021). This influence extends beyond product consumption to location-based consumption, such as destination choices (Mainolfi, Marino, et al., 2022). In this context intention to visit is viewed as a potential decision or tendency of a consumer to participate in, experience, or visit a specific place or activity (Zeithaml et al., 1996). A consumer's intention to visit is a critical factor in measuring their behavioral intentions and is considered a link between actual behavior and psychological attitude (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1969). Laurance et al. (2023) found that the higher the credibility of vloggers, the stronger the audience's intention to visit a travel destination.

On the Douyin platform, food-exploration vloggers, as a significant source of culinary information for the audience, attract numerous viewers and establish influence by sharing their dining experiences, evaluations, and insights. Hence, it can be hypothesized that the credibility of vloggers might influence the audience's choice of food locations, that is, the audience tends to trust those vloggers who provide reliable and accurate information when making choices about food destinations. On the basis of this conjecture, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a positive correlation between the credibility of food-exploration vloggers and the audience's intention to visit.

Mediating Role of Formation of Taste Awareness

The formation of *taste awareness* is defined as acquiring relevant information about food and food locations through the internet and, on the basis of this information, forming a prior understanding of the food and locations that includes dimensions of imagery, knowledge, and guidance (Wang, 2011). Researchers have indicated that audiences who form

taste awareness about food in advance through the internet can enhance their willingness to visit these food locations (Lim et al., 2019; Wang, 2011). However, to date, little research has explored the relationships between source credibility, intention to visit, and the formation of taste awareness.

By sharing comprehensive information about food locations, food-exploration vloggers construct an impression of these places for the audience. Several researchers have indicated that the information source helps form the overall image of a destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Guo & Pesonen, 2022), and there is an increasing need for credible information sources in the era of information overload (Nadlifatin et al., 2022). Source credibility is crucial in forming reliable destination images and providing information that influences the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of tourists (Kani et al., 2017), as well as enhancing the public's positive perception of that destination (Abad & Borbon, 2021). Therefore, we decided to include the credibility of food-exploration vloggers as a mediating factor in our investigation of how vloggers influence their audience's formation of taste awareness.

Several sociological theories have drawn connections between information and behavior. Uncertainty reduction theory emphasizes the importance of information gathering and suggests that increasing information reduces uncertainty, enabling people to plan their behaviors more accurately (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). As consumers obtain more information about food and restaurants, their uncertainty about these options decreases, potentially increasing their willingness to visit and dine. Wang (2011) noted that food blogs can help readers form a clear and comprehensive impression of food locations, thus enhancing their intention to visit those places. The theory of bounded rationality (Simon, 1990) suggests that people face limitations in processing information when making decisions, and clear and practical advice can help alleviate this burden, making decision making more efficient. The food-preparation processes and dining experiences that food-exploration vloggers showcase provide realistic, detailed, and accessible information in video format, which an audience can easily digest. This approach gives viewers a more comprehensive understanding of the food locations, enhancing their intention to visit. Building on these frameworks, it is likely that the ability of the audience to form taste awareness in advance about food and food locations will enhance their intention to visit. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The formation of taste awareness will play a mediating role in the relationship between source credibility and intention to visit.

The research model is shown in Figure 1.

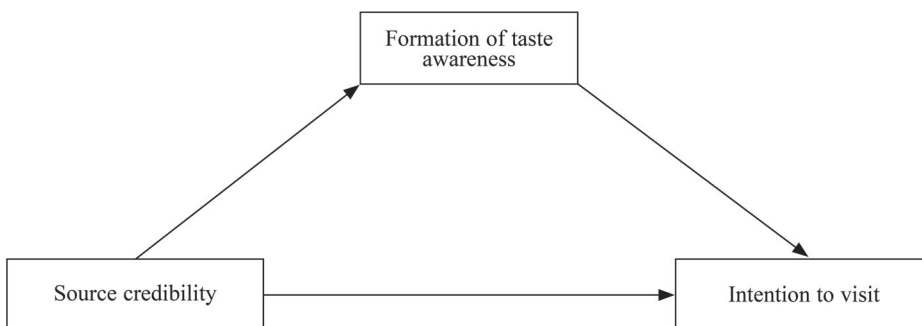


Figure 1. *Hypothesized Model*

Method

Participants and Procedure

We conducted a cross-sectional online survey from October to November 2023 using convenience sampling and the professional online data collection platform Tencent Questionnaire. This platform has an extensive sample database of

over 3 million potential respondents, covering people of different ages, occupational backgrounds, and educational levels across most regions of China. Prior to administering the questionnaire, the research purpose and variables of interest were explained to the participants. Afterward, the participants evaluated food-exploration videos from the Douyin platform. The questionnaire included demographic information, scales for source credibility and the formation of taste awareness, and an assessment of intention to visit. Although we paid a questionnaire distribution fee of RMB 2,500, participation was voluntary and limited to those with experience watching food-exploration videos on Douyin. This research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Academic Ethics Committee of Guangxi International Business Vocational College. Out of the 500 forms initially distributed for this survey, respondents returned 437 valid questionnaires, resulting in an effective recovery rate of 87.40%. Among the respondents, there were 314 women (71.9%) and 123 men (28.1%). The age range of participants was between 18 and 45 years ($M = 24.13$, $SD = 5.11$). In terms of educational level, the majority had a bachelor's degree ($n = 222$, 50.8%), followed by associate degree holders ($n = 111$, 25.4%), high school/vocational/technical school graduates ($n = 61$, 14.0%), master's degree or higher ($n = 25$, 5.7%), and elementary school education ($n = 18$, 4.1%).

Measures

Source Credibility

To measure source credibility, we translated the scale used by Munnukka et al. (2016) into Chinese and made necessary localization adjustments to ensure its applicability and accuracy within the research context. The scale has four dimensions: trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and similarity. Each dimension contained three to four items, which participants rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A sample item for the trustworthiness dimension is "I think the food-exploration vlogger is honest." A sample item for the expertise dimension is "I believe the food-exploration vlogger has a deep understanding of the food/food locations they share." A sample item for the attractiveness dimension is "I think the food-exploration vlogger is good-looking." A sample item for the similarity dimension is "I have much in common with the food-exploration vlogger." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .94.

Formation of Taste Awareness

To measure the variable of formation of taste awareness, we translated the scale created by Wang (2011) into Chinese. This scale includes three dimensions: providing imagination, imparting knowledge, and providing guidance. After adjustments for the Chinese linguistic context, the final scale included 12 items. A sample item for the providing imagination dimension is "I think food-exploration videos allow me to know in advance that the food location offers fresh and healthy food." A sample item for the imparting knowledge dimension is "I believe food-exploration videos allow me to understand local traditions and customs of local cuisines in advance." A sample item for the providing guidance dimension is "I think food-exploration videos offer suggestions on menu choices at food locations." All items are rated using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .95.

Intention to Visit

To measure intention to visit, we also referenced the scale developed by Wang (2011), which contains three items measuring participants' perceived attitudes regarding planning, deciding, and tendency. The items are rated using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .89.

Data Analysis

We used SPSS 27.0 software to analyze the collected data. The initial steps included descriptive statistical analysis and bivariate correlation analysis of the main variables to understand the primary distribution of the data and the preliminary relationships between variables. Then, we assessed the mediating effects of the hypotheses using Model 4 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) to explore the interactions and influence pathways between variables.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

First, we conducted a descriptive statistical analysis of source credibility, formation of taste awareness, and intention to visit (see Table 1). Then, we tested the relationships between the variables using a Pearson correlation analysis, with the coefficients representing the strength of linear relationships between the variables (see Table 1). The results showed significant positive correlations between source credibility and the formation of taste awareness, between source credibility and intention to visit, and between the formation of taste awareness and intention to visit.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Main Study Variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Source credibility	4.65	0.99	1		
2. Formation of taste awareness	5.30	1.02	.70**	1	
3. Intention to visit	5.21	1.17	.67**	.76**	1

Note. *N* = 437.

** *p* < .01.

Mediating Effect of Formation of Taste Awareness on Source Credibility and Intention to Visit

We constructed three models using hierarchical linear regression analysis to explore the mediating effect of the formation of taste awareness between source credibility and intention to visit. In this analysis, source credibility was the independent variable, intention to visit was the dependent variable, and the formation of taste awareness was the mediating variable. The results of the data analysis are presented in Table 2.

In Model 1, after considering the control variables, we found that source credibility had a significant positive predictive effect on intention to visit. In Model 2, after considering control variables, we found that source credibility also had a significant positive predictive effect on formation of taste awareness. Further, in Model 3, when both the formation of taste awareness and source credibility were included simultaneously, the predictive effect of the formation of taste awareness on intention to visit remained significant. This indicates that the formation of taste awareness played a mediating role between source credibility and intention to visit. In addition, although the direct effect of source credibility on intention to visit was reduced, it remained statistically significant, suggesting that the formation of taste awareness partially mediated the relationship between the two.

Last, we utilized Model 4 of the PROCESS macro to examine mediation effects, incorporating source credibility, the formation of taste awareness, and intention to visit as variables. The sample size was set to 5,000 bootstrapped resamples to ensure accuracy and reliability, and we calculated 95% confidence intervals. The results (see Table 3) show that on the one hand, source credibility directly influenced intention to visit; on the other hand, the formation of taste awareness served as an essential mediating pathway through which source credibility affected intention to visit. In particular, the indirect effect of source credibility on intention to visit through the formation of taste awareness exceeded that of the direct effect on intention to visit. These results indicate that the formation of taste awareness partially mediated the relationship between source credibility and intention to visit.

Table 2. Regression Analysis of the Mediating Effect of Formation of Taste Awareness on the Relationship Between Source Credibility and Intention to Visit

Variable	Model 1: Intention to visit				Model 2: Formation of taste awareness				Model 3: Intention to visit	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Control variable										
Age	.09*	0.01	.03	0.01	.11*	0.01	.05	0.01	.01	0.01
Gender	.04	0.12	.06	0.09	-.01	0.11	.01	0.08	.05	0.08
Education background	.11*	0.06	.09*	0.04	.09	0.05	.06	0.04	.05	0.04
Frequency of dining out	.18***	0.06	.07	0.04	.10*	0.05	-.00	0.04	.07*	0.04
Duration of browsing Douyin	-.01	0.07	.01	0.05	-.06	0.06	-.04	0.04	.04	0.05
Active search	-.16***	0.15	-.10**	0.12	-.10*	0.14	-.03	0.10	-.08**	0.10
Independent variable										
Source credibility			.64***	0.04			.69***	0.03	.26***	0.05
Mediating variable										
Formation of taste awareness									.55***	0.05
R^2	.08		.47		.45		.61		.92.28***	
F	6.93***		57.04***		356.22***		338.75***		92.28***	

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Mediating Effect of Formation of Taste Awareness in the Relationship Between Source Credibility and Intention to Visit

	Effect	SE	95% CI	
			LL	UL
Direct effect				
Source credibility → Intention to visit	0.32	0.05	0.23	0.42
Indirect effect				
Source credibility → Formation of taste awareness → Intention to visit	0.46	0.05	0.37	0.56

Note. $N = 437$. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.

On the basis of the above results, we constructed the mediation model shown in Figure 2.

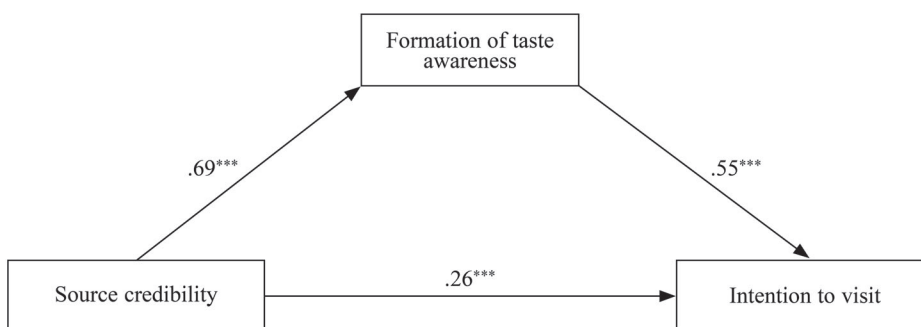


Figure 2. Mediation Model

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

This paper explored how the credibility of food-exploration vloggers on the Douyin platform shapes the audience's taste awareness and, in turn, affects their intention to visit food locations. Our approach emphasized understanding the consumer decision-making process from a cognitive perspective, expanding the knowledge of the complex relationship between information dissemination and consumer behavior.

We found a significant relationship between source credibility and intention to visit, in line with our first hypothesis and previous research findings. Similar to the observations by Lawrence et al. (2023) and Palilingan et al. (2021), our findings demonstrate that consumers were inclined to trust credible sources, which translated into greater intention to visit and purchasing behavior. Information provided by highly credible vloggers is perceived as more reliable and thus is more likely to encourage the audience's intention to visit the recommended food locations.

We also found that taste awareness mediated the relationship between source credibility and intention to visit, which is in line with our second hypothesis and previous research findings (Lim et al., 2019; Wang, 2011) as well as the frameworks of several theories. Aligning with Ajzen and Fishbein's (1969) theory of planned behavior, our results demonstrate how food vloggers' detailed reviews shape consumer decisions and expectations, influence their preferences, and link attitudes to behaviors, thus enhancing their willingness to visit specific eateries. Furthermore, our results also support Simon's (1990) theory of bounded rationality by showing how vloggers' practical information boosts audience confidence. Last, the results also fit the framework of uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), illustrating the role of information in reducing decision-making uncertainty. The applications of our findings to multiple theoretical frameworks fill a gap in academic studies regarding specific platforms and themes, and provide a new theoretical perspective for marketing via short videos.

Practical Implications

This study has practical implications. First, this study provides references for restaurateurs and marketers, guiding them on how to use the power of social media influencers to attract and retain customers. Food vloggers help demystify China's diverse culinary culture and regional foods and reduce uncertainties in dining etiquette and food-preparation methods, providing an opportunity for restaurateurs to reach new customers. Second, by revealing the role of source credibility in promoting audience intention to visit, our findings offer strategies for content creators to more effectively establish connections and trust with their audience. Last, this study provides a new perspective for understanding consumer behavior in the digital media environment, highlighting the importance of information quality and vlogger characteristics in influencing consumer decisions.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has limitations. All participants were Douyin users; thus, due to potential differences in behavior and preferences among users of different social media platforms, these findings may not apply to users of other social media platforms. Furthermore, considering the uniqueness and richness of Chinese culinary culture, our results may vary in different cultural settings. Therefore, future research could explore the applicability of the findings across various social media platforms and diverse cultural backgrounds. Next, we used a single quantitative research method. Although quantitative research provides objectivity in data analysis, it does not allow for in-depth examination of the deeper psychological motivations behind consumer behavior. Moreover, the study did not cover other potential influencing factors in the online environment, such as the role of online reviews. Future research could consider using mixed methods to comprehensively explore consumer decision-making processes by combining quantitative and qualitative research. Last, studying other factors in the online environment, such as how online reviews influence consumer behavior and their interactions with source credibility and taste awareness, is an essential area for further research.

Acknowledgments

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest.

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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